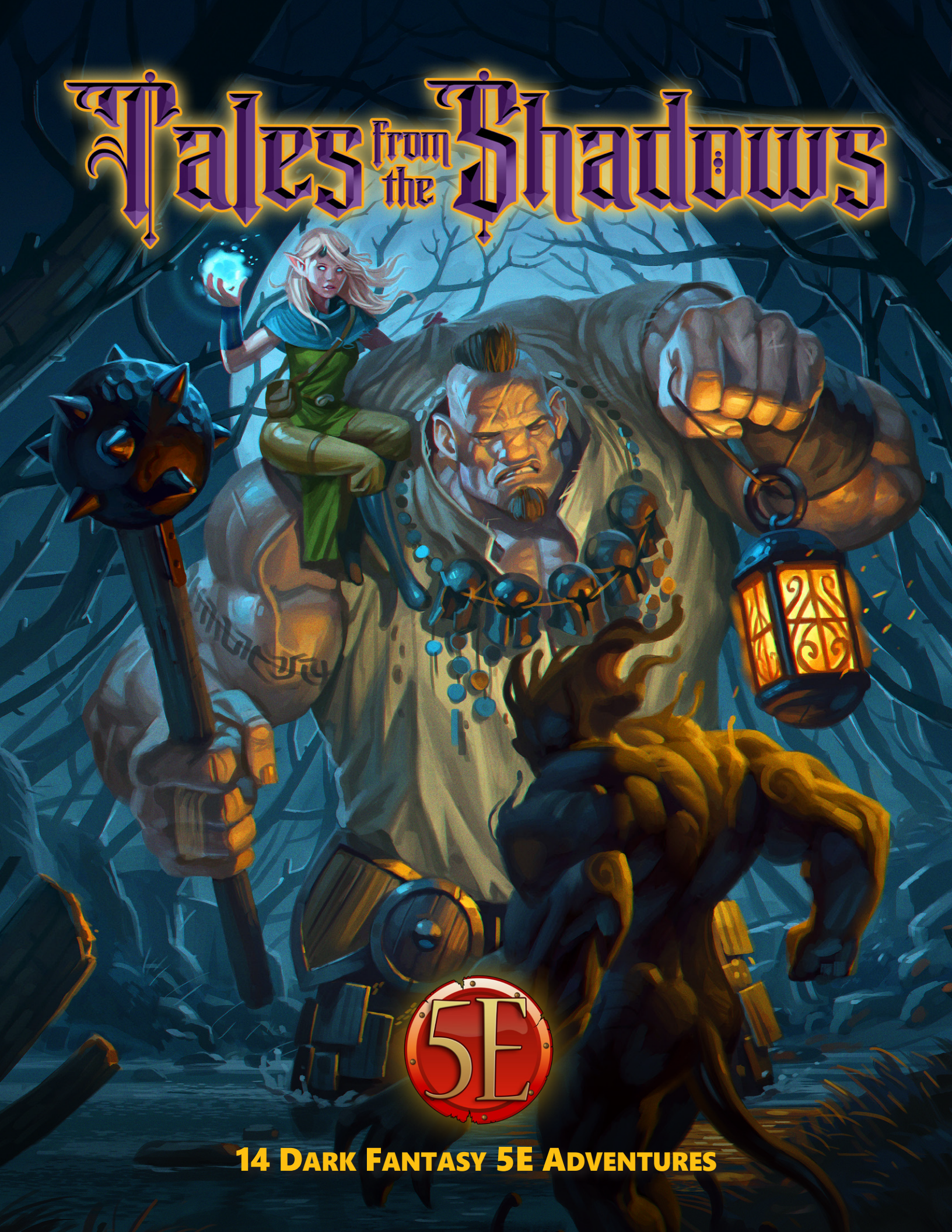
Tales from the Shadows



5E

14 Dark Fantasy 5E Adventures

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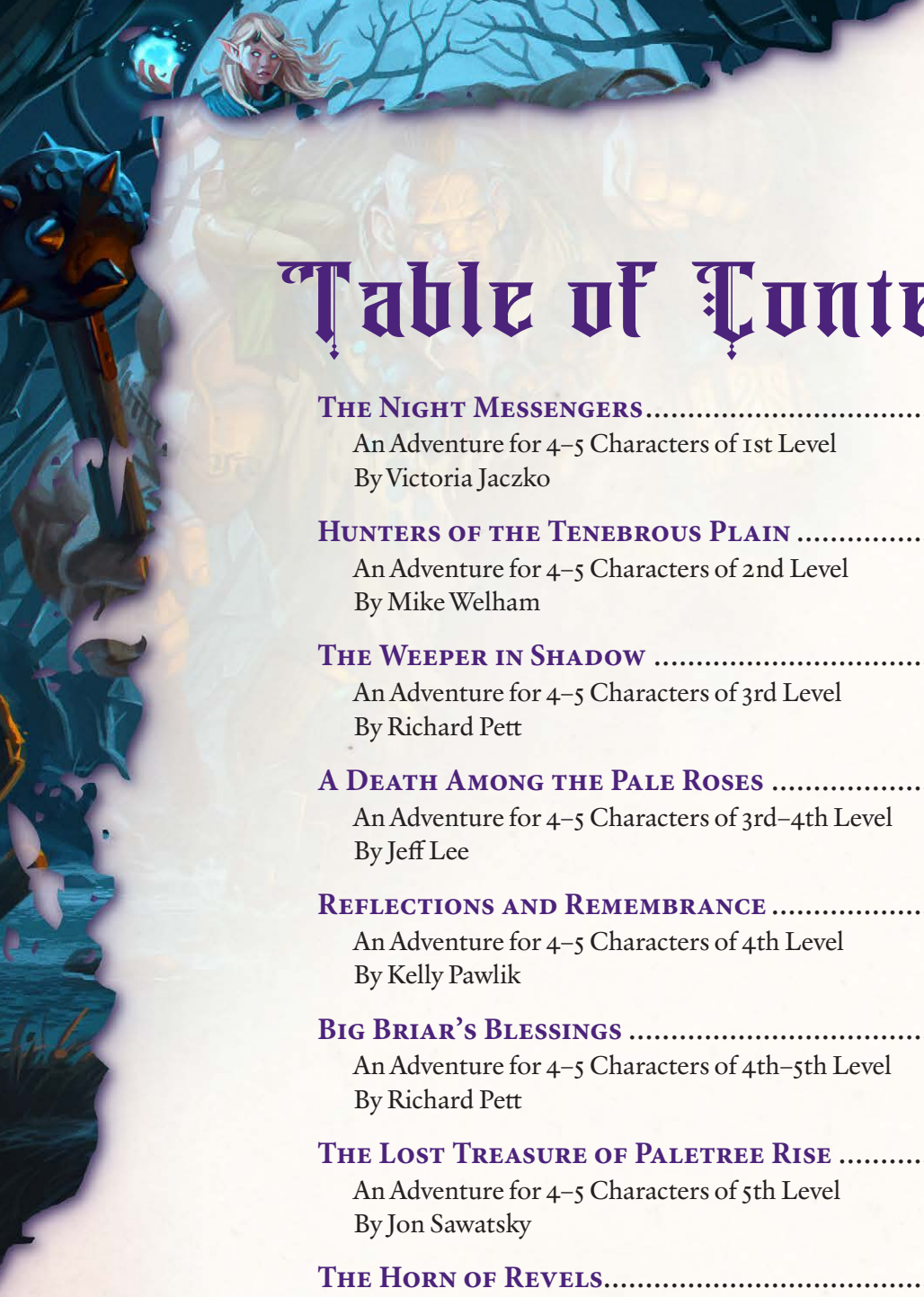


Table of Contents

The Night Messengers 4
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 1st Level
By Victoria Jaczko

Hunters of the Tenebrous Plain 15
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 2nd Level
By Mike Welham

The Weeper in Shadow 26
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 3rd Level
By Richard Pett

A Death Among the Pale Roses 39
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 3rd–4th Level
By Jeff Lee

Reflections and Remembrance 52
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 4th Level
By Kelly Pawlik

Big Briar's Blessings 64
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 4th–5th Level
By Richard Pett

The Lost Treasure of Paletree Rise 75
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 5th Level
By Jon Sawatsky

The Horn of Revels 85
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 5th–6th Level
By Jeff Lee

The Sodality of Silent Rites 96
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 6th Level
By Carlos Ovalle & Holly Ovalle

The House of Reciprocities 109
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 6th–7th Level
By Tim Hitchcock

Among the Shades and Shadows 124
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 7th Level
By Sarah Madsen



The Time-Twister'sDaughter 134
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 7th Level
By Kelly Pawlik

Radiance Lost 147
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 7th–8th Level
By Celeste Conowitch

Shadows of the Dusk Queen 162
An Adventure for 4–5 Characters of 8th Level
By Marc Radle

Appendix 175

Creature Names in Tales from the Shadows

Creatures whose names appear in **bold** without a book reference can be found in the *System Reference Document 5.1* or the core rule books. Similarly, spell and magic item names that appear in ***italics*** without a page or book reference can be found in those sources.

Creatures listed as "shadow-touched" are typical of that species but with the Shadow-Touched trait from *Book of Ebon Tides* applied. Numerous creatures included in these adventures can be found in *Creature Codex*, *Tome of Beasts*, or *Tome of Beasts 2*. There is a table in the appendix that lists appropriate substitutions from the core rules.



The Night Messengers

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 1ST LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In the Shadow Realm, the roads and the politics are equally treacherous. Navigating the gray areas of both are The Night Messengers, a loose organization of daring couriers. Comprised of all manner of backgrounds and alignments, the Messengers take one cause as sacred: When they have a contract to deliver a message or package somewhere in the Realms, they fulfill it. Identifiable by their distinctive coats—from which they can summon shadowy mounts that let them traverse the trails left by the mysterious witchlights—Messengers live a life of danger, but it's one that affords them a certain amount of prestige and neutrality even in the coldest of courts.

The cadre of Night Messengers led by the bearfolk ranger Bhorhan Svorsson took a contract to deliver a package from Wormwood to Corremel. The client, a frazzled scholar named Lyrio Felanthos, emphasized repeatedly that the package must only reach his trusted colleague, a scholar of the shadow fey named Alluna. He has already sent ahead word to her about its impending arrival, as he fears this culmination of his life's research has drawn attention from something in the shadows.

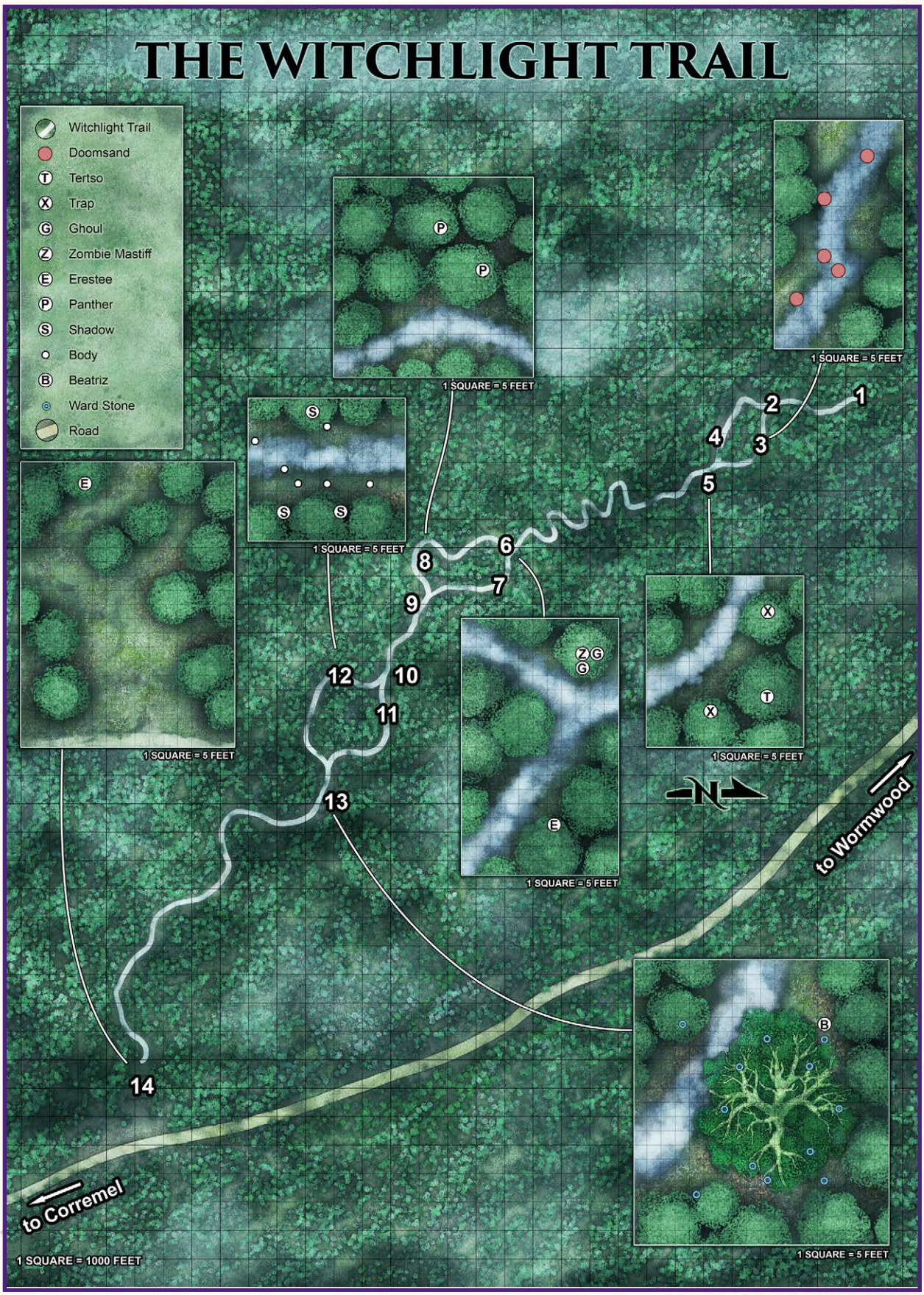
Lyrio wasn't wrong. Within a day of giving the parcel to The Night Messengers, he was found dead—poisoned—his study ransacked, and the killer left no trace behind.

His killer was Erestee Loff, a shadow goblin assassin in the employ of the Court of Night and Magic. The Court had sent her to Wormwood to monitor Lyrio, discover the extent of his research into the legendary, long-vanished artifact known as the *Shadow Grimoire*, and bring back his findings.

During her investigation, Erestee learned that Lyrio believed the *Shadow Grimoire* was an intelligent tome driven to push its owner to become a master of shadow magic. Realizing the extent of Lyrio's work, Erestee's plans changed. Although she was working as a shadow enforcer, Erestee had discovered recently that she had a talent for magic and wished to gain greater mastery of it herself. So, instead of reporting back to the Court or taking Lyrio with her, she decided to kill him and follow the trail of his research herself. Only she waited one day too long; after she murdered him, she couldn't find any notes about the *Shadow Grimoire* anywhere, just an urgent note he'd written to himself to summon a Night Messenger.

Erestee inquired around Wormwood and learned that a group of Night Messengers had left town heading south, into the Sable Forest. She followed but found little evidence of their passing on the main road. By luck, however, Erestee *did* find a raiding party of ghouls of the Twilight Empire (*Book of Ebon Tides*) returning (largely empty-handed) from an unsuccessful city raid. Erestee leveraged her Court connections with the company's darakhul captains to persuade them to hunt down The Night Messengers on her behalf, convincing them that The Night Messengers were smuggling a number of refugees that the Court wanted captured or terminated. In return, the ghouls would be allowed to take these "refugees" back to the Twilight Empire as plunder.

With the help of the ghoul raiders, Erestee found the Messengers' trail, and she and a contingent of ghouls caught up with their quarry in the Sable Forest. Upon seeing the raiders approach, the four Messengers scattered to try and split the enemy's forces in an effort to give Bhorhan, who carried


THE WITCHLIGHT TRAIL
Witchlight Trail
Doomsand
Tertso
Trap
Ghoul
Zombie Mastiff
Erestee
Panther
Shadow
Body
Beatriz
Ward Stone
Road
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
1 SQUARE = 1000 FEET
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
to Wormwood
to Corremel



the package, the opening he'd need to press on for Corremel. Erestee, however, seized on the opportunity of Bhorhan being alone, jumping onto his back and stabbing him with a poisoned blade. But she underestimated the hardy bearfolk, and the ranger fought back fiercely, forcing her to retreat.

In the encounter with the Messengers, the ghoul party lost both its darakhul captains, leaving it a rudderless horde of hungry undead chasing after the nearest promise of food: the Messengers.

After Erestee's attack on Bhorhan, the bearfolk ranger stumbled deeper into the woods to hide and recover, but some ghouls caught his scent and followed to make a meal of him. . . .

ADVENTURE HOOKS

If the PCs are already present in the Shadow Realm, they may stumble upon this adventure after becoming lost in the Sable Forest, or they could have been sent by Alluna to ensure Lyrio's message reaches her. From there, they get drawn into the clash between the ghouls and The Night Messengers.

If the PCs are in Midgard (or whatever world your PCs call home), they may have gotten lost in a shadowy forest where the boundary between the prime material plane and the Shadow Realm is thin. Perhaps the insatiable hunger of the ghouls draws their quarry across the veil, or Bhorhan's urgent need for aid drags our unsuspecting heroes into the fray.

The Sable Forest

The Sable Forest is a thick, dark wood shadowed by looming oaks and gloomy reflections of deciduous flora. The adventure begins in the thick of it, approximately three miles from the road leading to Corremel. Strange noises emanate from the trees, sounding almost like normal forest creatures but just slightly *not*.

Moving through the trees is difficult terrain and is heavily obscured unless the PCs are traveling on a road, a trail left by the mysterious witchlights (see appendix), or through a clearing (like areas C, E, and G). Even on trails and clearings, consider all such areas to be lightly obscured from the thick foliage and dim lighting.

Foraging in the Shadow Realm

The Shadow Realm pushes its tendrils into places and creatures it can reach. Foraging in the Shadow Realm risks shadow corruption (*Book of Ebon Tides*).

1. NIGHT MESSENGER IN PERIL

A ghoul in tattered armor stands over a hunched bearfolk dressed in a floppy black hat and a long, well-tailored black coat. Even on the ground, back leaning against a tree, he's almost as tall as the ghoul leering over him. One of his large arms is wrapped around his stomach as he heaves for breath. Two ghouls lie unmoving on the ground near him.

"Sssso hungry!" The ghoul hisses around a long, slavering tongue. "You firssst, bear-man . . . then them, then we find your friendssss!"

Bhorhan (NG **bearfolk druid** [*Book of Ebon Tides*]) is heavily injured and poisoned. He looks weakly around the shadowy forest and roars out, his voice strained and filled with pain. "Sohana? Tertso? Is anyone there? Please, help me! This thing can't take the—" The ghoul claws him before he can finish, and he groans and slumps against the tree.

Creatures. If the PCs have not already intervened, then the **ghoul** spots them and hisses, leaping to attack them for interrupting its meal.

Treasure. In all, the three ghoul bodies have 17 cp, 28 sp, and 10 gp.

Deputy Night Messengers

Once the ghoul is dead, Bhorhan thanks the PCs between labored breaths. He withdraws several *goodberries* from his pack and eats some, reserving enough to offer each PC one. He waves off any attempts to use healing magic on him, as he suspects the PCs will need it themselves. He assures them he'll recover in time . . . but time is in short supply right now.

Bhorhan tells the PCs he is a Night Messenger, an order of couriers sworn to deliver messages and items of import across the Shadow Realm. It's frequently a dangerous job, he explains, but notes that *this* package must be something someone wants very badly indeed—badly enough to send the darakhul after them. While his companions attempted to draw off the raiding party, Bhorhan was attacked—"Stabbed, and poisoned," he says, lifting his hand to show the festering wound in his belly—by a shadow goblin who tried to take the package from him. He

fought her off, but he suspects it's only a matter of time before she comes after it again. If the PCs ask, he can provide a vague description, but he didn't get a good look at his attacker.

Bhorhan believes it's no coincidence the PCs came upon him when they did and urges them to carry the package in his stead, as he can no longer make the journey to Corremel. He warns that they likely will be beset by ghouls—and the shadow goblin, too, no doubt—and though the journey isn't long, it will be perilous. To PCs who balk at the duty before them, Bhorhan mentions Messenger contracts are lucrative, and if they complete this delivery, they'll be entitled to his share of 200 gp.

"Carrying out our duty in peril is the calling of The Night Messengers," Bhorhan says and shrugs out of his coat. "And so I name you all honorary Messengers, a beacon of honor and duty in a realm of shadow."

Bhorhan gives his *night messenger's coat* (see appendix) to the PC that has engaged with him the most favorably. The coat allows them to summon a mount that is attuned to the Shadow Realm and—more importantly—allows them to see the trails left by the witchlights. Without the witchlights as guides, the forest is sure to swallow them as quickly as a ghoul.



The Night Messengers

The Night Messengers are a loose order of Shadow Realm couriers. Not all things can be transported with magic, and not all messages can be entrusted to a spellcaster-for-hire.

The Messengers also help keep places connected. They remain apolitical to protect their neutrality, but Messengers are a welcome source of news and gossip in many courts. Considered a source of relative purity and order in the Shadow Realm, they swear oaths to uphold their contracts with grim seriousness.

Their lore is mysterious and shifting, often including bargains with the Shadow Realm and contracts with witchlights. The truth is uncertain, but Messengers do share a curious bond with the Shadow Realm, despite being somewhat resistant to its corruption.

As part of their training, Night Messengers work in groups, usually of three to five for safety, and learn a coded speech they use to address one another. They are trained to pinpoint safe havens and find uncorrupted food and water, and likewise they learn to navigate the shadow roads, survive, and swear their oaths to uphold their contracts and to support each other. Trainees receive a ***night messenger's coat*** and are sent on their first contract alongside veteran Messengers; if they fulfil the contract and prove themselves worthy, they're officially inducted.

All major courts in the Shadow Realm have a Night Messenger chapterhouse, usually located somewhere unobtrusive, such as a room at an inn or the back room of a tavern. They accept contracts for the locals and locate the nearest or best-suited Messengers to make each run on a case-by-case basis.

There is only one coat, however, so Bhorhan withdraws from his pack a black crystal bauble in the shape of a horse. He breaks the bauble, granting each of the PCs a temporary boon, which allows them to cast *find steed* (as a shadow-touched fey mount) at will for 24 hours, or until the contract is complete, whichever comes first.

He advises them to begin summoning their mounts immediately. It takes 10 minutes to summon with the Charm of Night's Steed, and there's no telling when another ghoul party will come upon them.

While they do that, Bhorhan answers whatever questions he can about The Night Messengers, how the coat functions, the contract, and the Shadow Realm themselves. He will also tell them of his companions—Sohana, Beatriz, and Tertso—who he hopes are nearby and still living. If they're located, they can help the PCs fulfill the contract, but to earn the trust of the other Messengers, Bhorhan instructs the PCs to utter the following phrase: "Not fear, nor hunger. Not gloom, nor darkness. Not ghoul, nor shadow." If the PCs cannot decipher his meaning, he explains: "These are the things a Night Messenger must face on a daily basis that we cannot allow to deter us from our mission."

Once the PCs have summoned their steeds, Bhorhan gives them the package, a parcel sealed with sheafs of paper inside it and a name, "Alluna," written on the front.

Whence Comes the Witchlight?

In other realms, witchlights exist as the magical servant constructs of powerful wizards. In the Shadow Realm, however, masterless (or "free roaming") witchlights wander the wealds, and their purpose and origin is a mystery. Witchlights appear as a floating ball of flickering light of varying colors, similar in overall appearance to a will-o'-wisp. They cannot speak, but they typically understand Common, or sometimes other languages. Sometimes a witchlight can spell words in the air by flying so quickly that its trail of light forms letters. This stunt requires the witchlight to make a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check per word.

After that, read or paraphrase the following:

Bhorhan's ears twitch beneath his floppy hat as a howling shriek echoes somewhere in the trees, distant, but answered by another shriek, another, and then many, drawing closer as the sound reverberates in the shadowy trees.

He struggles to his feet and points deeper in the forest. "Go! I'm afraid your ride begins now, Messengers, ready or not. Run! For the things chasing you will show no mercy."

If the PCs are concerned for Bhorhan, he tells them he knows these woods like the edge of his claws and can camouflage himself to evade detection, but they should not give his safety another thought; the package is their only concern now.

In Pursuit

Ghouls, their zombie mastiffs (see appendix), and Erestee are pursuing the PCs throughout this adventure. The intent is to apply urgent pressure on the PCs to keep moving, relying on their shadowy mounts and the enigmatic witchlight trails to escape. The GM should aim to keep the tension high but take care not to overwhelm the PCs with the unbeatable odds chasing them.

The PCs and their magical mounts can stay ahead of the ghouls as long as they don't stop for long. The ghouls could catch up when the PCs pause for a specific amount of time, such as 10 minutes, or you can have warning signs of the ghouls' approach at any time the PCs are tarrying or struggling with a decision.

Well before any attack, the PCs hear warning signs in the form of the hungry shrieks of ghouls in the distance, the sounds of creatures crashing through the underbrush, or the slavering barks of the zombie mastiffs. Once these noises begin, the PCs have three rounds to resume their journey before 1d2 **ghouls** and 1d2+1 **zombie mastiffs** (use **zombie** stats, but its Slam attack deals piercing instead of bludgeoning) burst out of a dense copse of trees within 30 feet of them. If the PCs dispatch one group, another patrol approaches shortly after. If the PCs don't move quickly, they are overwhelmed quickly.

There is a witchlight nearby (see path 3) that can come to the PCs' aid once during the adventure, if they underestimate the ghoul threat or otherwise get in over their heads. It emerges from the wood and blasts the undead with light, repelling them back into the forest and giving the PCs a moment to escape. The witchlight only risks this aid once and only does so if a PC is wearing the *night messenger's coat*.

2. THE FIRST FORK

The first fork in the road is about half a mile from where the journey started, and the noises of the pursuing ghouls continue as the PCs travel, although it fades by the time they reach where the trail splits.

3. THE DOOMSAND PATH

The left-hand path opens wider, the passage clearer of most trees and undergrowth.

Hazards. This trail has multiple patches of **doomsand** (*Book of Ebon Tides*) as indicated on the map. The PCs can identify and circumvent any of the patches of doomsand with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check. If any of the PCs get stuck, they have 3 rounds to escape and get moving again before they hear their pursuers catching up.

4. SHADOW WOLF HUNT

The right-hand path is narrow, a slender route winding through the trees, but with less flourishing overgrowth.

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check looking down this path allows a PC to hear noise in the underbrush like creatures moving about.

Creatures. This path is usually safe, but with the forest in turmoil, some of the wildlife is in an uproar. This pack of four **shadow-touched wolves** is in an aggressive mood, lurking and waiting for unwitting prey to come closer before they surround and attack.

5. TERTSO'S STAND

At the end of the path is a small clearing, marked by a handful of tall, shadowy trees with gnarled branches spindling out in all directions. Laying on the ground between two trees are two ghoul corpses with crossbow bolts embedded in their backs.

Hazards. Tertso (NG human **guard**) is currently hiding up a tree; he is spotted with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. He fended off a small ghoul party and hastily deployed some nets and trip wires in the foliage.

Two **falling net traps** are set in the branches on either side of the one Tertso is hiding in. Spotting the trip wire stretched between the trees requires a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check.

If a trap goes off, is disarmed, or the PCs make noise near the tree Tertso is in, he stirs from his dozing and leans out of the branches to investigate.

"Hey! You lot aren't ghouls!"

If any of the PCs get caught in the nets, Tertso comes down to cut them free. Tertso is a disheveled, sandy blonde-haired human with thin stubble, wearing a *night messenger's coat* and a long scarf. He stinks to high heaven of something with a horrible musk. (A successful DC 10 Intelligence [Nature] check identifies the smell as boar urine.)

Tertso asks the PCs about Bhorhan. If they don't use the phrase Bhorhan gave them, it takes a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince Tertso of their sincerity. On a failure, he's suspicious and leaves the PCs there while he goes looking for Bhorhan himself. On a success (either via ability check or by repeating the Night Messenger credo), Tertso is happy to hear Bhorhan's still alive, though surprised he handed over the parcel.

"Guess he saw something in you! To trust you with his coat and our contract like he did. My future pay is in your hands, then! If you lot need a breather, I can hide you from the ghouls and their ugly dogs for a bit, but you probably won't like it."

After a beat, he explains:

"In order for me to hide you from them, you're gonna have to smell like me."

The PCs can take a short rest here. Tertso has enough boar urine to make a musk strong enough to dissuade even the zombie mastiffs ("Hey, don't ask! This is a weird and dangerous job!") and then hides them securely in the trees.

The witchlight trail continues to the south. Tertso sends the PCs ahead while he slowly backtracks to find Bhorhan.

Witchlight Trails

The *night messenger's coat* allows the wearer to sense the trails a witchlight leaves behind long after one of the enigmatic Shadow Realm entities has left the area. It can also cause the tracks of multiple witchlights to coalesce into a singular, favored path that can guide one through hazardous areas.

To the naked eye, these trails appear as bluish-gray, smoky paths snaking along the ground, sparkling as if with faint starlight; they smell of a clean-burning fire and emit a sound like faraway windchimes on the breeze.

Treasure. Tertso doesn't have much to spare, but if the PCs need it, he offers up a *potion of healing* and 10 *+1 crossbow bolts*.

6. THE SECOND FORK

The witchlight trail south of where the PCs met Tertso (area 5) winds and twists among the trees for another three-quarters of a mile before reaching another fork in the road.

Erestee's Surprise. While the PCs were with Tertso, Erestee and a ghoul pack encountered Sohana while searching for the PCs' trail. The Night Messenger got away after fighting off and scattering most of the pack. After Sohana flees, Erestee regroups near the second fork; as she tends to her wounds, she detects the PCs approaching and sets up an ambush.

Creatures. Two **ghouls** and a **zombie mastiff** hide in the underbrush near the second fork. Erestee is in a tree 60 feet east of the ghouls (and 20 feet up). From her vantage point, she has a very good line of sight into the area, and once the PCs enter, she targets them with a *scroll of stinking cloud*, placing the cloud to encompass as many PCs as possible. The ghouls and the zombie mastiff emerge from the bushes and attack immediately afterward. Erestee watches how the combat proceeds, intending to wait until the ghouls dispatch the PCs before moving in to fetch Lyrio's package.

Spotting Erestee before she can use the scroll requires darkvision and a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Noticing the ghouls and zombie mastiff ambush in the bushes requires a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. If Erestee is spotted, she flees while the ghouls and mastiff engage.

Sohana Intervenes. After the first round, the ranger Sohana (NG **sable elf** [*Book of Ebon Tides*]) charges in from the eastern trees with a sword and shield. She wears a long *night messenger's coat* and has cropped red hair, a dour countenance, and a brow often furrowed in suspicion or irritation. She engages the nearest ghoul, striking for 8 slashing damage, then uses a second attack at the same creature (or another enemy within 5 feet) for the same damage.

If she hasn't fled already, Erestee leaves her tree and flees once Sohana enters the combat.

Treasure. Among the ghoul bodies, the PCs find 32 cp and 14 gp.

Sohana's Suspicions. Sohana helps the PCs until all the ghouls are dispatched, then immediately asks them about Bhorhan and the package. She is initially suspicious, giving a narrow look at whoever is wearing Bhorhan's *night messenger's coat.* Changing her attitude requires a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, made with advantage if the PCs remember to use the Night Messenger's code phrase.

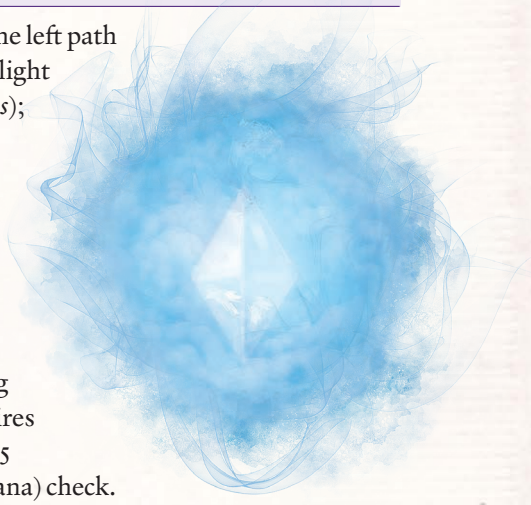
If successful, Sohana begrudgingly concedes Bhorhan must have truly believed they could fulfill the contract if he trusted them with the package. As such, she agrees to help them as far as the next fork before she turns back to look for Bhorhan. She leads them down path 3 after using her *night messenger's coat* to summon her own mount, a shadowy stag.

On a failure, Sohana lets the PCs pass, but is determined to go find Bhorhan and make certain he's alive—and whether the PCs are really on the up-and-up; as they part ways, she assures them they don't want her catching up to them if she finds out they were lying.

When the PCs study the paths branching off here, read the following text:

Both paths are shaded and quiet, winding away into darkness. Down each path, a faint, glimmering light floats off and on in an irregular pattern.

7. THE WITCHLIGHT PATH



Traveling along the left path (path 3) is a witchlight (*Book of Ebon Tides*); it seems to be monitoring the PCs' progress along the trails. If the PCs trust it, it guides them to temporary safety. Identifying a witchlight requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

If Sohana is helping the PCs, she takes them down this path and explains the witchlights have been friendly to The Night Messengers for many years, ever since their founder, Leja Ehjradel (NG wood elf veteran), made a bargain with them. Sohana doesn't know any of the details of the bargain.

The witchlight flares brighter when the PCs approach and guides them along a rolling, gentle path. It takes them by a small creek running clear. Sohana encourages them to refill their water skins here.

8. THE DECEPTIVE PATH

Creatures. The right-hand path has an injured **will-o'-wisp** (reduced to 11 hp) still stinging from an earlier encounter with Sohana; it is presently mimicking the nearby witchlight to draw in prey. Identifying it as a will-o'-wisp requires a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, made with disadvantage due to the will-o'-wisp's deception.

If the PCs follow the will-o'-wisp, it takes them to a thick cluster of trees where two **shadow-touched panthers** are dozing in the branches; the creatures perk up at the scent of nearby prey.

Spotting the shadow-touched panthers requires a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check; failure to spot the creatures results in them ambushing the PCs by jumping down to attack while the will-o'-wisp turns invisible and attempts to get close to a vulnerable PC to attack.

9. SOHANA'S HOLLOW

This lush hollow is surrounded by dense trees—so dense there is almost zero visibility from the outside without the glimmering witchlight trail leading into the thicket. An ancient, mossy tree trunk stretches across the clearing, propped up on one side by weathered boulders, creating a small shelter underneath.

If the PCs arrive here with Sohana, she directs them to take cover under the tree where she can provide them with a protective ward against the ghouls for a short time.

If the PCs wish to take a short rest, describe the following:

Sohana kneels in the center of the hollow, her blade before her, and summons up an energy that emanates outward from her silvery form. Glowing runes manifest on her weapon then appear too on the grass, trees, and rocks. Once the spell ends, Sohana stands and sheathes her sword, a weariness settling onto her face, both too-young and impossibly old.

"That will do for a while," she sighs. "But none of this ends until the job is done."

Sohana says the foliage of the hollow should protect them from being spotted while they rest, and the *magic circle* Sohana cast keeps their pursuers from entering the hollow itself if they *are* discovered.

If the PCs come to the hollow without Sohana, they can't take a short rest without encountering pursuit, but they do find her pack nestled in the void between two of the boulders.

Treasure. Sohana's cache includes two *potions of healing*, a *scroll of lesser restoration*, a *scroll of moonbeam*, a *dagger +1*, plus two waterskins of pure water and four days' worth of uncorrupted rations for a single person. If Sohana is with the PCs, she gives them most of it by way of thanks for their assistance, only keeping one waterskin for herself.

10. THE THIRD FORK

If Sohana is helping the PCs, this is as far as she goes before telling them she needs to go back to find the other Messengers and the shadow goblin's trail. If they try to go with her to help, she says she can move more quickly and quietly alone and insists delivering the package is the most important thing.

11. THE BRIAR PATH

Dark, ominous brambles have encroached on this trailhead, and rows of thorns glisten in the hazy twilight all along the edges of the forked path that follows.

Hazards. This entire trail is lined by thick patches of brambles that are difficult to avoid. The initial wall of brambles cannot be bypassed and must be cut through, burned away, or otherwise cleared to avoid damage (AC 8, 20 hp).

Moving faster than half speed on the path requires a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check if mounted (or a DC 10 Dexterity [Acrobatics] check if on foot) to avoid taking 5 (2d4) points of slashing damage to their mount or themselves. After five checks, regardless of success or failure, the PCs are able to get clear of the brambles.

Creatures. Moving at half speed along the path allows a patrol of three **ghouls** and two **zombie mastiffs** to catch up with them. The creatures throw themselves through the brambles without concern or hesitation in a desperate attempt to catch the PCs; this recklessness causes them to make their checks against the brambles at disadvantage.

Clever PCs might think to continue through the brambles to let the thorns soften up the ghoul patrol. They must move faster than half speed to do so, forcing them to make their own checks or saving throws. The patrol follows them for up to 5 rounds before giving up.

Treasure. There is a total of 54 cp, 14 sp, and 20 gp among the ghoul bodies.

12. THE SHADOWY PATH

The trees along the right-hand path are tightly knit and cloaked in shadows that twitch and beckon.

The witchlight trail on this path is fainter than the others the PCs have seen. In the not-too-distant past, a group of humans from the Material Plane ended up lost here. A witchlight attempted to lead them to a road, but shadows found them first. In the ensuing slaughter, the humans turned into shadows themselves. Witchlights have since stopped taking this trail, but it's still detectable to the magic of the *night messenger's coat.*

Creatures. Spotting the three **shadows** lurking among the trees requires a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. They attempt to ambush the PCs on the trail. If detected, they immediately attack.

Treasure. In total, there are six sets of skeletal human remains, mostly scavenged, half-buried along the trail. Much of their gear has been damaged beyond repair or been lost in the undergrowth, but searching the remains yields 23 cp, 10 sp, a hematite gemstone (worth 10 gp), and a *potion of poison resistance.*

13. THE WARDING CIRCLE

This clearing in the woods is roughly 60 feet in diameter with a large, spreading oak in the center of a curious assembly of stones. There are twelve stones in all, the tallest about four feet in height, well-weathered and marked with small, chipped runes.

The stones here are etched with Elvish runes, which Beatriz Bellamy, a frazzled, dark-haired rogue (CG halfling **spy**) in a *night messenger's coat* is frantically decoding. She mutters to herself, glancing warily at the trees, while her **shadow-touched mastiff** mount, Deathbreath, sits nearby and watches. He growls when the PCs near the clearing, getting her attention. PCs with a passive Perception of 10 or higher notice she has recent injuries from claw attacks.

"No, I taste horrible!" she says. "Oh—! You aren't ghouls!"

She squints at the PCs, particularly one wearing a *night messenger's coat.* "Well, you aren't Sohana, but you'll do! You're Messengers? I'm a Messenger in need! Come on, we can help each other! Keep those damn birds off me while I get these wards up!"



Creatures. There are six **stryxes** (*Tome of Beasts*; or substitute **giant owls** with the changes noted below) in the surrounding trees that have been harassing Beatriz. She and Deathbreath have kept them at bay, but it's slowed her work to a crawl, and she's worried about the ghouls catching up with her.

The stryxes were placed here to watch over the stones by a wizard centuries ago, but he never returned. They've since bred, and the subsequent generations have forgotten why they're here, but they continue to dutifully badger anyone meddling with the stones.

They hoot at the PCs in odd, human-sounding voices:

"Don't help the halfling! We don't know what that rock does, but we know you can't do it! We'll scratch you!"

Beatriz tells the PCs to ignore them:

"They're probably forgotten familiars put here ages ago and have gone batty. Er . . . owl-ly. Whatever."

If the PCs help Beatriz, the stryxes make fly-by attacks on them, but they are fickle. A successful DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check is enough to either make the stryxes too intimidated to do anything more than taunt their quarry from the trees or else convince them they don't need to guard something they can't even remember.

Otherwise, killing three of the stryxes or reducing four of them to fewer than half their hit points is

enough to send them scattering and squawking amongst themselves:

"The interlopers are mean! Where is the maker? We should tell him! Who? Tell who what? Fly away!"

Creature Change. If you use the statistics for a giant owl in place of the stryx, add the ability to cast *comprehend languages* 3 times/day

Protection Circle. After five minutes of peace and quiet, Beatriz figures out how to activate the wards. If a PC wishes to assist her with this task, they may do so with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check. With a success, Beatriz is able to activate the wards after only 1 minute elapses; on a failure, the only effect is the PC annoys Beatriz.

"I thought you knew about arcane things! Just . . . just shut up! Let me think."

Once the ward is activated, the area fills with a soft hum as the runes glow on the stones then fade. While within the ring of stones, roughly beneath the boughs of the oak, the PCs should be hidden from the ghouls long enough for a short rest.

Beatriz inquires after the other Messengers, as she lost track of them when she fled from the ghouls. She got injured in the scuffle, but she insists she'll be fine with a little rest and refuses offers of healing, magical or otherwise. If the PCs insist:

"I appreciate the offer, but I fear I'm not going to recover from this until I see the healer back in Wormwood," and she reveals a festering wound on her arm that is clearly poisoned.

She compliments the PCs for making it this far and says that she'd finish the rest of the trek but fears her injuries would slow her down too much to keep her ahead of the ghouls; she also feels compelled to go find her comrades, who were no doubt still dealing with the ghouls even as they speak. If the PCs want to convince her to go tend to her injuries instead of going after her comrades, they can do so by succeeding on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Rest and Recovery. The PCs may take a short rest within the warding circle if they choose. Additionally, the magic empowering the stone circle here is particularly rejuvenating. Each PC may choose to recover an expended Hit Die or an expended spell slot.

Animal Companions. If the PCs did not kill any of the stryxes, they might attempt to entice one to become a familiar. This requires a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to initiate, as the stryxes were particularly addled after the earlier encounter. A successful check makes them receptive to bargaining.

Treasure. Before the PCs part ways with Beatriz, she empties out a bag on the ground that had a seemingly impossible number of items inside it. She tells them they can use some of the things she's acquired to help them with whatever gets between them and Corremel. She offers them 2 *potions of healing*, a *scroll of magic missile*, a *scroll of faerie fire*, and a flask of alchemist's fire.

14. ROAD TO CORREMEL

The witchlight trail continues southeast out of area 13 for almost a mile, before reaching the edge of the Sable Forest:

The trees begin to clear, thinning out, the shadows reluctantly pulling away like old cobwebs as the spaces grow between them. The undergrowth recedes and the forest quiets, as the plane of a large, flat road becomes visible in the distance, drawing closer with every step.

Erestee does not intend to let the package get away so easily, however. Just before the PCs reach the edge of the forest, she throws a dagger at a tree ahead of them and taunts them, invisibly, from the branches of a tree behind them:

"Well, this has been a lovely chase, but here's where it ends, little messenger rabbits."

Creatures. Hidden completely in the tree cover, **Erestee** (see appendix) drinks a *potion of invisibility* immediately after throwing her dagger. She attempts to use her Assassinate ability with a poisoned crossbow bolt against whichever PC is wearing the *night messenger's coat.* She follows up that attack by targeting a heavily armored PC with *ray of sickness* and casts *shield* when she comes under fire. If forced out of the tree, Erestee drinks another *potion of invisibility* and goes for a sneak attack against a vulnerable PC. She keeps her distance with spells and her crossbow if she can, engaging in melee only if she must. If reduced to 10 hit points or fewer, or if she sees an opportunity to grab the package, Erestee flees.

Treasure. If Erestee is killed, the PCs find: Two doses of *serpent venom*, a *potion of invisibility*, a *scroll of longstrider*, a *scroll of disguise self*, a dagger, a light crossbow, and an onyx ring (worth 80 gp). The ring, worn on her left thumb, is unadorned but, among their own, serves as a symbol of devotion to the Court of Night and Magic.

Concluding the Adventure

Once Erestee is defeated or run off, the PCs reach the main road to Corremel and finish their journey without further incident. Upon arriving in the city, they are directed to the Night Messenger chapterhouse, which operates out of a room at The Horn Gate Inn. There, they find Alluna awaiting Lyrio's package with a veteran Night Messenger, Velarrio Valdost (NG human **veteran**).

Velarrio is relieved to see the package reach its intended recipient, but he is troubled that none of his people returned with it; as such, he's suspicious that the PCs have not been completely honest with him. He says:

"Thank you for your aide, but I must hold this contract in abeyance until we can confirm the details of your account. It is not that I do not trust you, but we have had scoundrels tell us convincing stories before. As such, we have made it a policy to refrain from paying out on a contract for a period of three days, either to allow our people time to return or to allow us to recover the bodies of the fallen or otherwise to confirm the claimant's story. I hope you can understand."

Velarrio offers the PCs the use of a bunkroom they have at the inn for the duration of their inquiry.

Fortunately, Bhorhan, Beatriz, Tertso, and Sohana arrive the next afternoon, clearing up Velarrio's doubts. The four all look worse for wear but intact. The ghouls have been scattered and dispersed, and the rangers are certain they wouldn't dare press an attack near Corremel.

Bhorhan tells the PCs they've proven themselves as Messengers in spirit and are welcome to keep his coat. He thinks he may take some time off to return home and rest. Beatriz pipes up that this might mean the Messengers could use some new recruits, if the PCs are interested.

"You'll have to take an oath," Sohana warns. "And undergo training."

"And sometimes it's messy," Tertso adds, shaking his coat while Beatriz winces and recoils away from him at the smell.

In addition to the invitation and the *night messenger's coat*, the PCs also receive 200 gp as Bhorhan's share of the contract that he promised them.

Continuing the Adventure

The PCs have the potential (and opportunity) to join The Night Messengers and embark on a career in the Shadow Realm, joining in the intrigue and many dangers within.

Whether or not they do, they may follow up with Alluna about the *Shadow Grimoire* and choose to seek it out. They may also wish to learn more about Erestee's past.

Then again, having done their good deed, the PCs may simply wish to return home. But that may be an adventure in of itself. . . .

What's in the Package?

Night Messenger packages are sealed with a unique signet, determined by the chapter receiving the contract.

Delivering a package with its seal broken voids the contract. Nonetheless, the PCs could open it if they wish to take the time.

The letters contain Lyrio's notes about the Shadow Grimoire [See appendix). He believes the book was gifted to a powerful shadow fey sorceress more than a thousand years ago, but can't find any record of her current whereabouts. He believes she and her tower may have vanished as part of a magical calamity or curse, but he thinks she may soon be able to return to the Shadow Realm. He fears both her return and the danger of the Shadow Grimoire in her—or even more sinister—hands, and implores Alluna to follow up on his research. He predicts his own doom by the end of the letter.

Alluna may be as forthcoming or cagey as you wish about this information, if you'd like to guide further adventures in the direction of the *Shadow Grimoire*, or make gaining her trust into an adventure of its own.

GM Secret. The shadow fey sorceress the letters refer to is The Dusk Queen (See the *Shadows of the Dusk Queen* adventure.) Don't share this information with the players.

Hunters of the Tenebrous Plain

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 2ND LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Oma Rattenfanger gathers lost children who, through neglect and their sense of loneliness, slip through the cracks in reality and tumble into the Tenebrous Plain. She then waits as the children's forlornness transforms them into orphans of the black, swelling her minions' ranks in gratitude for her "rescuing" them. One such child, the ten-year-old Mery, fell under her influence after her parents abandoned her to an overcrowded orphanage. The girl's troublemaking coupled with her overactive imagination forced the orphanage to turn her out into the street, where she discovered a swirling dark mist in an alleyway. Her curiosity drew her into the mist, and she then found herself in the Tenebrous Plain. Oma quickly swept in and took custody of the girl, who amused the fey with tales of her imaginary friends.

When Mery began her inevitable transformation into an "orphan of the black," Mery's imaginary friends physically manifested, first as hazy shadows that dispersed within just a few seconds. But as time went on, they grew more and more substantial, becoming beings of solid shadowstuff. Initially, whenever the child grew bored with her no-longer imaginary friends, the shadowstuff disintegrated. However, the more real they became, the less likely they were to dissipate. Though Oma and her orphans of the black have managed to wrangle most of these shadow friends, some have escaped onto the plain. As the so-called Keeper of the Plain, Oma has forestalled Mery's final transformation into an orphan of the black so that she can study the girl out of fear Mery will lose her remarkable ability after her transformation is complete.

Mery's latest creation was her most powerful yet: a shadowy dog, which Mery named Sable, who left the child's side when her attention turned to something else. Its departure initially escaped Oma's notice, and she now seeks the creature's return, especially as Mery herself has shown concern about Sable's disappearance, marking the first time the girl had shown interest in any of her discarded creations.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The PCs have several avenues through which to become involved in this mystery. Oma Rattenfanger holds sway over the Tenebrous Plain, and if the party needs a specific piece of information, they could be directed to her. Someone may hire the PCs to locate Mery for benign—or nefarious—purposes. Or perhaps the PCs encountered one of the strange shadow beasts created by Mery that have escaped into the real world—where they wreaked havoc—and now seek to investigate where they came from.

The Keeper of the Plain

If the PCs look for Oma Rattenfanger for information, they discover they must travel to the Tenebrous Plain (*Book of Ebon Tides*). If the PCs search specifically for Mery, they are directed to Oma Rattenfanger. A PC who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check, or one who talks to a Shadow Realm denizen and succeeds on a DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check, knows or learns that Oma Rattenfanger is known as the Keeper of the Tenebrous Plain, and that Oma can control the plain's environment and the tributary of the River

Lethe flowing through it. The PC also knows/learns that Oma takes in all orphans who find themselves in the Shadow Realm, and that ungrateful visitors anger the fey.

Regardless of which method of information gathering is employed, the PCs know or learn that there is no way to actually *find* Oma Rattenfanger, but instead they're told or know: "Once she knows you're looking for her, she'll find *you*."

Once the PCs settle on a course of action regarding Oma or Mery, the next time they travel anywhere, either together or separately, their journey begins as normal, but before they realize it, they find themselves walking on a plain of tall grass. They initially don't notice; it somehow seems totally normal. They only become aware that something strange is happening—after what, in retrospect, turns out to be about a half hour of walking—once they encounter two **orphans of the black** (see appendix).

When the PCs arrive on the plain, Oma Rattenfanger immediately becames aware of their presence and starts keeping tabs on how they act while there, eventually sending the two orphans of the black to act as emissaries. Provided the PCs don't attack the orphans, they lead the PCs to Oma's hut, which appears anywhere on the Plain she desires.

MEETING OMA

Oma—who looks like a small, plump, motherly elf with a kind smile and cold, wicked eyes—appraises the party for several moments. If anyone speaks while she looks them over, she loses the smile and says,

"Tut tut! Children must wait until they are spoken to before they can speak."

When Oma has finished assessing the party, she says,

"Your arrival is most fortuitous, for I am in need of brave folk to find a lost dog belonging to one of my children."

The PCs may negotiate for a reward for this task, though Oma Rattenfanger will mock any requests for "shiny baubles" or "crass material wealth." She agrees to a reward within reason, however. Once the party and Oma have settled on a bargain, she introduces the party to Mery.

MEETING MERY

The girl displays drastic contrasts between her left and right sides. On one side, her clothes are brightly colored if a little worn, and her flesh has a slightly rosy countenance. On the other side, the colors are muted, tending toward gray, and her clothes take on a threadbare appearance. Mery acts shy until Oma gives her soothing reassurance, after which the child chatters excitedly about the PCs finding her dog, Sable. She also introduces them to a variety of unseen friends and reacts with delight or dejection depending on the PCs' reaction to these beings.



If a PC comments on Mery's odd state, Oma matter-of-factly says,

"It is the way of the young lost souls who come here. They become true denizens of the Shadow Realm; it's the only place that will accept them."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Oma answers any of the PCs' questions. Responses to typical questions are below.

How long has Sable been missing?

"The creature seems to have gone missing just a few hours before you fortuitously arrived."

Can you offer us any protection on the Tenebrous Plain?

"Beside the fact you haven't earned my favor yet, I don't want outsiders thinking they can act with impunity while traipsing about and destroying my beautiful home. Yes, you can give me all your promises not to do anything naughty, but they carry the weight of a mosquito's wing."

Can we take any of your orphans with us?

"While they would do an excellent job keeping an eye on you, I don't want your foolishness to bring harm to them. They wouldn't be good traveling companions, anyway, since they seem to create strife among mundane creatures like yourselves."

What kind of danger awaits us on the plain?

"I find it unbelievable you don't have plains where you come from, my dear child! I think it's safe to presume the same threats you'd find in your mundane savannas make their presence known here. Other than that, the waters of the Lethe are inherently dangerous without my leave, which I shall temporarily grant to you."

What happens if we don't return with the dog?

"The girl is accustomed to disappointment. How else would she have ended up in my care? If you do your best to find Sable, I'm sure she will get over the creature's loss. She has a short enough attention span that she will likely forget about Sable, as she is constantly imagining new friends and pets, anyway. Unfortunately, it will diminish the payment you seek."

Mery will also try to answer the party's questions about Sable and her imaginary friends, but she quickly grows bored with the conversation, allowing time for only two questions, though a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince her to keep talking, allowing an additional question. Possible questions and answers are below.

How will we recognize the dog?

"Well, you can call her name, 'Sable.' She also has a collar with a tag on it. Plus, she likes mice, so she'll eat one if you give it to her."

Do you have any idea where she might have gone?

Mery flaps her arms in frustration. "No!" But after pouting a moment, her eyes light up. "Oh! Well, I guess she could have gone to the Hedge Maze with my other friends. It's that way," she says, pointing to the west. If asked how far it is or for other guidance in finding it, Mery just sadly looks down at her feet and shrugs her shoulders.

Will the dog attack us?

"Oh no, Sable is really friendly, so she won't bite you." She pauses, giving a bit of consideration to the question, and then resumes. "Just in case, here's one of my ribbons, so Sable will know I sent you." Half the ribbon is bright red, while the other half is gray and fraying in a similar manner to her clothing.

Why do your friends keep leaving?

"I dunno. I got tired of them hanging around, I guess, and they just leave. Lucky for them, I made a home where they can play and sleep. I hope I can go there someday."

With their business concluded, Oma Rattenfanger invites the PCs to spend the night under her protection, though a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check detects a tone that suggests *maybe* they should start their search *immediately* instead of *sleeping in a nice comfy bed* while the poor child's *dog is missing*.

If the PCs do spend the night, it passes without incident, though any PCs who keep a watch or otherwise are awake at night will notice the enduring dead-eyed stares from the orphans of the black who apparently don't require sleep. When what passes for morning arrives, Oma and her hut have disappeared, and the PCs awaken to morning on the Tenebrous Plain.

SHADOW BEAST HUNT

Sable left deep tracks when she left Mery's care, giving the PCs a strong idea of the shadow dog's trail, which indeed does lead in the direction of the hedge maze. However, as they progress further, the tracks become fainter. During each day of the two-day trek to the hedge maze, the PCs can make a DC 13

Wisdom (Survival) check to follow the tracks. (The DC rises to 15 on the second day.) On a failure, add a number of hours equal to the difference between the DC and the result of the check. For each additional hour, the PCs have a 10% chance to encounter a hostile denizen of the plain, using the table below:

d10	Encounter
1–2	1d4 **zombies**
3–4	2 **orphans of the black** (*Tome of Beasts 2*)
5	1d4 **violet fungi**
6	1d4 **awakened shrubs**
7	1 **awakened tree**
8	1 **swarm of insects**
9	1d2 **dark servants** (*Creature Codex*)
10	1d2 **wirbeln fungi** (*Creature Codex*)

Each night the PCs spend in the Tenebrous Plain, they also have a 10% chance to have one of the encounters above.

Shadow Crickets. A colony of shadow crickets also chirrups through the night. Each creature who can hear the crickets must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or become distracted by the constant echoing of chirps in their head. A distracted creature has disadvantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma ability checks and the first time they make an attack roll in any combat. This effect lasts for 24 hours or until the creature receives magical intervention, such as a *calm emotions* spell, or stays within the radius of a *silence* spell for 1 full minute. Alternately, a PC who succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Medicine) check can devise something to sufficiently plug the ears to block out the sound. A creature that completely plugs its ears for the night avoids becoming distracted. On an unsuccessful Wisdom (Medicine), the creature receiving these ministrations has advantage on its saving throw to avoid the chirrups' effect instead. All creatures that plug their ears in this manner have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that involving hearing for the duration.

The Maze's Defenses

While the trees seem sickly, they are stout and brambly. A PC who succeeds on a DC 17 Strength check can push through the trees to the other side but takes 10 (3d6) slashing damage as thorns and branches dig into the PC's skin. Each 5-foot section of the trees has AC 12 and 15 hit points. Reducing a 5-foot section to 0 hit points temporarily destroys it, but the destroyed section grows back after 1 hour passes. Destruction of any part of the maze provokes an adjacent section of the maze to animate to defend against its attackers. The branches that animate attack all creatures adjacent to them. They have a +6 attack bonus and deal 10 (3d6) slashing damage on a successful hit.

The Hedge Maze

Mery's imagination created this hideaway for all her creations, so she wouldn't feel guilty about abandoning them as she herself had been abandoned. Because of her imposition to "play nice," the creatures rarely interact with each other and instead take occasional forays onto the nearby plain to terrorize prey.

Gloom fills the maze, reducing the illumination to dim light. Mundane light sources and light created by cantrips or 1st-level spells can't increase the maze's illumination.

1. DEER CARCASS

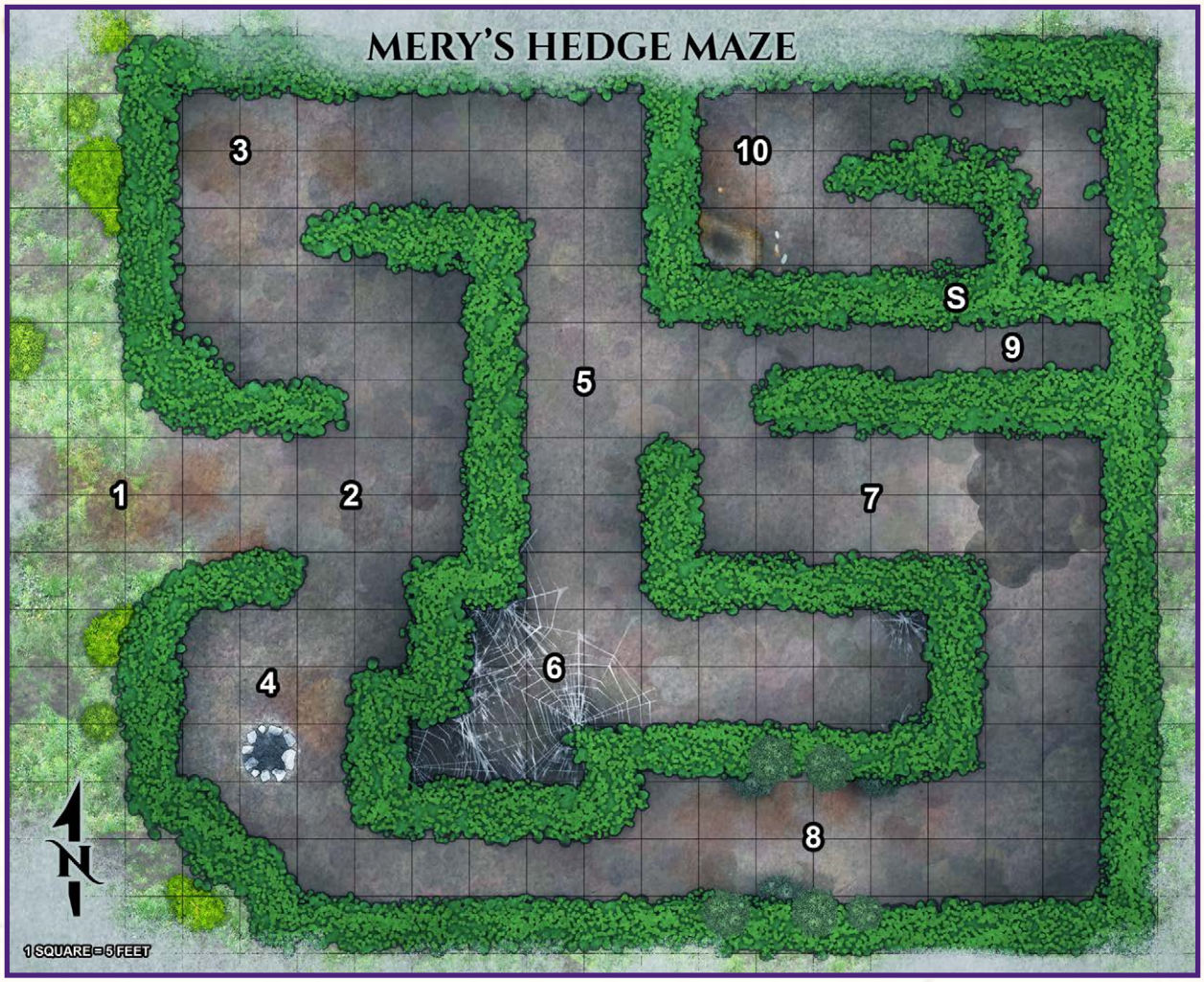
A half-eaten deer partially blocks the entrance to the maze. Flies buzz as they alight on the corpse and then fly away.

Sable killed the deer and devoured part of the animal. While she ate, she sensed the pursuing shadow goblins and fled into the maze.

Creatures. A **swarm of insects** infests the corpse while it consumes the remaining flesh. Non-shadow-based prey intrigues them, so the swarm attacks when a living creature moves within 5 feet of the deer. The swarm also attacks if the carcass takes damage or is otherwise disturbed. A PC who examines the corpse from a distance and succeeds on a DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check recognizes the danger posed by the swarm.

2. INTO THE MAZE

The plains' scrub gives way to soil at the entrance to this hedge maze. The 10-foot-wide passage immediately splits to the north and south. Globes radiating dim pastel colors that barely penetrate the gloom hang from the ceiling in a futile attempt to cheer up the place.



The strong odors of rot (from the north) and sweat (from the south) become faint when the PCs reach the maze's opening. A PC who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the smells and which direction they're coming from.

3. WRONG DOG

This portion of the maze bends around a wall of sickly trees. A rotten odor pervades this area, presumably emanating from the decaying humanoid corpse in the northwest corner.

The creature in this area has yet to discover the bandits in area 4 and is beholden to Mery's edict not to attack other inhabitants. Therefore, it hunts hapless travelers lost in the plain and brings their remains here to feed.

Creatures. Mery's first deliberate attempt to form a shadow creature at Oma Rattenfanger's request resulted in a **death dog.** The girl immediately spurned the creature, which made its way to the maze, where it enjoys safety despite Mery's feelings about it. The death dog fights until it dies.

Treasure. The death dog wears a shadowy collar with a tarnished tag engraved with the name, "Grouchy." The collar grants access to area 10 for one creature.

4. BANDIT HIDEOUT

Visible at the southern end of this area are the remains of a small fire. The air is pungent with the smell of char and sweat.

Creatures. Two human **bandits** trying to eke out a meager existence on the Tenebrous Plain—after going on the run from some shadow fey they managed to rob—couldn't believe their luck when they found this place to hole up in. If they hear any commotion from the adjacent areas, they attempt to Hide, fearful that the shadow fey have found them. When they see the PCs, however, they overconfidently assume they can beat up the newcomers and loot their victims. In the face of strong resistance, the bandits



flee, either when one of them dies or takes more than 5 damage from a single attack.

Treasure. The bandits have a pouch containing 20 gp, which they stole from the shadow fey.

5. CHARGING LANE

This section of the maze seems to be a hub with numerous passages spiraling out from it.

Mery had never seen a pig before she translocated to the Shadow Realm, and when she met one for the first time the creature fascinated her. Unfortunately, she didn't get time to become attached to the animal, as an orphan of the black slaughtered it for dinner. Mery's imagination later conjured up a stronger version, which inhabits this location.

Creatures. A **shadow-touched giant boar** patrols the center of this corridor. If a creature other than one of Mery's creations moves into the northern part of the corridor from area 3, the boar charges.

Treasure. The boar wears a collar with a tarnished tag inscribed with the name, "Boris." The collar grants access to area 10 for one creature.

6. WEBBED RECESS

Cobwebs hang from the top of the hedge maze as the gloom intensifies. Even with the lack of light, metallic glints are visible from deeper within this area.

The illumination is reduced to darkness in this area. However, spells can restore the illumination to dim light. If a mundane item normally provides bright light, here they provide only dim light.

Sticky Webs. The creature here has spun sheets of translucent webs throughout its home. The webs fill the entire southernmost section. Anyone attempting to move through the webs becomes restrained. As an action, any creature can free a restrained target by succeeding on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. A PC who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the webs. Creatures can attack and destroy webbing in a 5-foot square (AC 10; 10 hp; vulnerability to fire damage; immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage).

Creatures. A **shadow-touched giant spider,** borne out of Mery's nightmares, collects items it believes will lure prey to its lair. The spider clings to the ceiling in the maze's dark recesses (at the dead end of area 6). It waits until a creature becomes restrained by the webs or two 5-foot squares of webbing are destroyed before it emerges from hiding to attack.

Treasure. The giant spider isn't intelligent enough to determine an item's worth, so items immediately visible to the PCs are without value. However, a PC who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds Sable's collar along with four rubies (worth a total of 240 gp). Unlike the other collars worn by Mery's shadow creations, Sable's collar allows the entire party to pass through the secret entrance between areas 9 and 10. Burning the webs also reveals the treasure.

7. WEIRD DOGGIE

The maze forms an "L" here, one wing leading west and the other leading south. Where the passage turns, the soil changes to thick mud.

The mud pit sometimes fills with water to suit the inhabitant's desires.

Creatures. Mery's fascination with dogs, mixed with her imagination's desire for the "dog" to swim and possess her version of a prehensile tail, produced an aquatic dog-like monstrosity known as an **ahuizotl** (*Creature Codex;* or use statistics for a **manticore** with the changes noted below). Fortunately for the girl, the creature wandered off before it could give in to its desire for flesh. There is a 20% chance the creature has recently feasted, in which case it does not attack and instead merely attempts to snatch something from a victim before running away, though it defends itself if attacked.

Creature Change. If you use the statistics for a manticore in place of the ahuizotl, change its size to Small and change its fly speed to a swim speed.

Treasure. The ahuizotl wears a shadowy collar with a corroded tag engraved with the name "Andy." The collar allows access to area 10 for one creature. The ahuizotl buried its ill-gotten gains beneath the mud's surface. A PC who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check or spends 10 minutes excavating the mud finds a silver ring (worth 50 gp) and a tourmaline-studded necklace (worth 125 gp).

8. ODD SHRUBS

Several frail shadowy shrubs dot the floor. One of the plants, covered in purple leaves, moves of its own accord.

The sudden appearance of the shadowy hedge maze drew a creature with no connection to Mery to it. The new inhabitant transplanted sickly plants from the Tenebrous Plain to keep it company.

Creatures. When the **razorleaf** (see appendix) returned from a recent hunt, it encountered Sable, which damaged and demoralized the plant creature in combat. It returned here to recover from its wounds. The razorleaf has half its hit points, has disadvantage on its attacks, and has used its Shower of Razors in its fight with Sable (requiring it to succeed on a recharge check to recover the action). A PC who succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes the creature wishes to avoid combat. The razorleaf expresses gratitude with a jaunty shake of its leaves if it receives healing. If the PCs defeat the weakened Razorleaf—or heal it—treat this as a CR 3 creature.

Treasure. The razorleaf has collected several baubles that caught its interest during its hunts and buried them in the soil. Its treasure consists of 4 opals (worth 30 gp each) and a *periapt of wound closure*. A PC who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds the mound of dirt hiding the items. If the PCs heal the Razorleaf, it uncovers its hidden treasure and offers it to them.

9. DEAD END

The trees crowd together through here, providing only a narrow passage that ends at the maze's outer edge.

Sable slipped through an overgrown section of the maze (marked S on the map); the gnarled trees here will part and grant passage to a creature with a token belonging to one of Mery's menagerie. Sable's collar provided her entry to area 10, but it slipped off her as she passed through the secret passage. Afterward, the shadow spider from area 6 retrieved the collar to add to its collection of lures.

Secret Passage. A PC who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices a gray discoloration on the trees blocking the entrance to area 10. The PCs can attempt to force their way through (see the "Maze's Defenses" sidebar). Alternatively, a PC who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes the trees grant temporary access to creatures bearing a token belonging to one of Mery's shadow creations.

Creatures. Two shadow goblin **scouts** (with changes noted below), disguised as farmers, have reached this location in their search for Mery's shadow creation. When they hear commotion caused as the PCs approach, they attempt to Hide in the walls of the maze opposite the secret passage so they can spring an ambush. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check (or a passive Perception of 15 or higher) spots the goblins. Otherwise, the goblins launch their ambush once at least two PCs come within 5 feet of the secret passage.

Creature Change. Remove the scout's Shortsword attack and replace it with the following Sickle and Hook and Trip attacks:

Sickle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Hook and Trip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

10. SABLE'S REDOUBT

As you push through the secret passage, a maze within the maze presents itself. The trees forming the interior walls are sparser and greener, however, and this new maze proves to be not much of a challenge. At the end of this small maze, a dog bed and some chew toys sit in the southwestern corner.

When Mery became upset about Sable's disappearance, she subconsciously sequestered this portion of the hedge maze for her (currently) favorite shadow creation.





Creatures. The object of the party's hunt has wriggled into this hidden portion of the maze, losing the collar granting it access in the process. **Sable** (see appendix) is a fierce-looking canine, similar in size and shape to a coyote, but with all-black fur and with wisps of shadow perpetually drifting up and away from her body. The dog bristles at the party's intrusion and prepares to attack. The PCs have 1 round during which they can initiate their own attack or attempt to calm the shadow dog. A PC who succeeds on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check calms Sable. If the PC mentions Mery's name, they have advantage on the check. Alternatively, a PC can present Mery's ribbon, triggering Sable's Contingent Docility trait; if she fails her saving throw, she willingly follows the party back to Mery's location.

Other Hunters

The return trip is blessedly free of shadow crickets, but the party is subject to a possible random encounter (as detailed in the "Shadow Beast Hunt" section) on the first night of travel.

On the second day of their return trip, the PCs encounter Hubert Delacroix (LG human **priest**). He has undertaken a quest to destroy Mery's shadow creations, several of which have slipped out of the Shadow Realm to terrorize people under his protection. Though he is unsure of the creatures' origins, he discovered Sable's trail and has been following it, leading to his run-in with the party.

If Sable is with the PCs, Hubert prepares to attack. A PC who succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes Hubert is focused solely on Sable and may not attack the PCs if they don't intervene. The PC also realizes the priest has inherently good intentions and may respond to negotiation. A PC who provides a compelling case to spare the shadow beast and succeeds on a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the priest to hold off his attacks.

If the PCs have killed Sable or otherwise left the creature behind, the priest asks if they have seen the shadow beast. If someone reveals that Mery conjured the creature, Hubert demands the PCs allow him to accompany them back to the child so that he can confront her. A PC who mentions that Mery is only a child and succeeds on a DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check quells the priest's rage against the responsible party.

MERY TAKEN

A group of shadow goblins—currently a minor dissident faction on the Tenebrous Plain—ultimately seeks to wrest control of the plain from Oma Rattenfanger. The goblins realize they aren't powerful enough to contest the Keeper of the Plain directly, so their spies search for any signs of weakness they can exploit. When they spotted a slow migration of strange shadow creatures, they took notice, eventually deciding to follow the latest, Sable, to its destination. Subsequently, the goblins traced the shadow creatures' origin to Mery, whose importance was highlighted by the PCs' presence. They formulated a plot to kidnap the girl and force her to make shadow creatures to fight on their behalf and managed to spirit her away while the PCs journeyed to the hedge maze and back to Oma's hut (which, fortunately, is once again back where they originally encountered it).

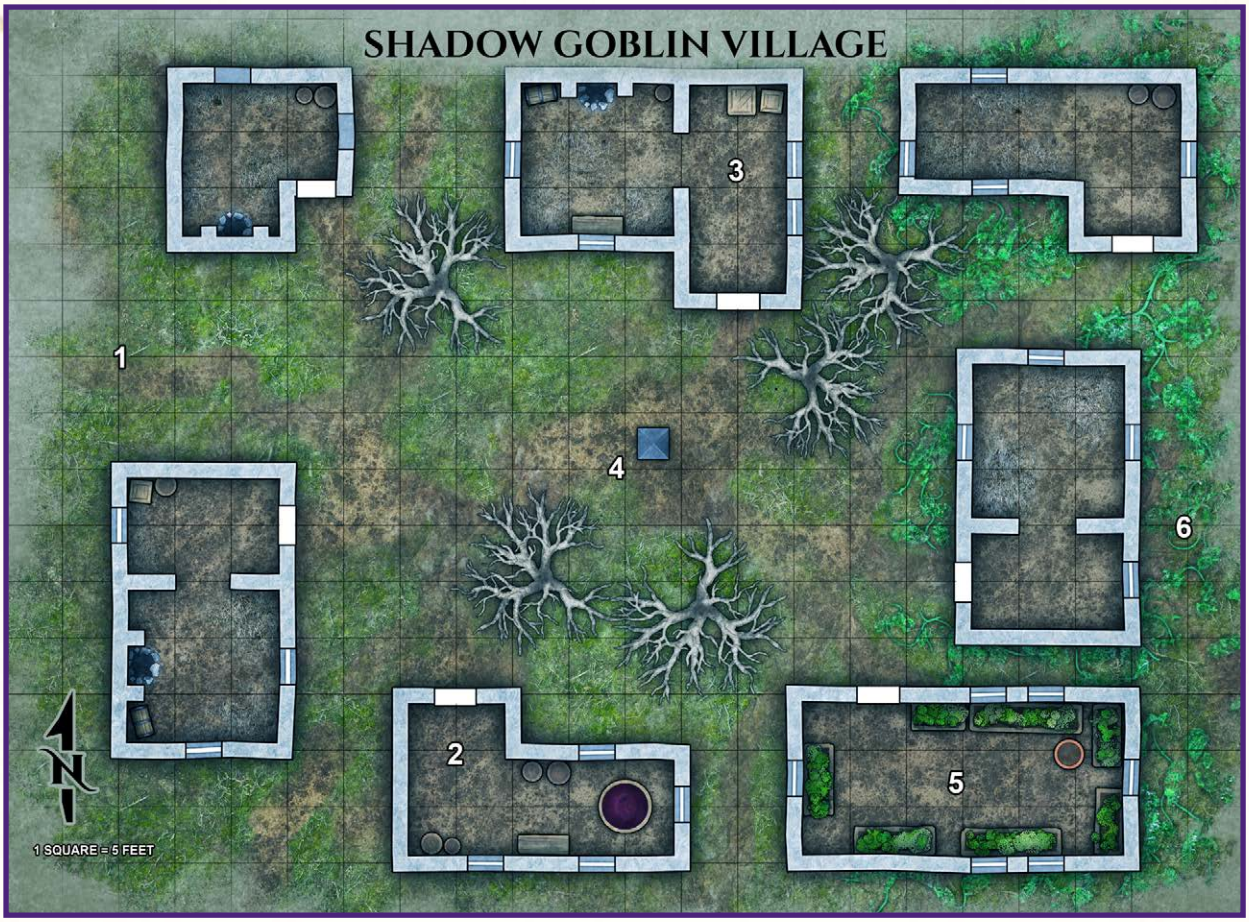
When the PCs arrive, Oma Rattenfanger greets them with the news of Mery's disappearance. Nothing goes unnoticed by Oma Rattenfanger, but she amuses herself by letting the shadow goblins believe their village has escaped her attention. She knows they took Mery, but she can't spare the time to go teach the child's abductors a lesson. She tasks the PCs with returning the girl home instead.

While she initially tries to convince the PCs to rescue Mery as part of their original agreement—and tries to downplay the girl's significance—she allows the PCs to negotiate an additional reward for Mery's safe return. This will not give the PCs leverage to claim the child from Oma's custody without owing her a favor. After all, she doesn't want Mery returned only to relinquish her immediately afterward. Oma knows she could take direct action against the goblins, but she considers them beneath her notice, even though she views their kidnapping scheme as an irritation.

Possible Allies and Antagonists

If the party made friends, or at least become grudging partners, of Hubert or Sable, each of them assists the PCs when they assault the shadow goblin village to rescue Mery. Even if Hubert left the PCs on bad terms, he acts as an ally against the village's creatures before turning on the party. Sable is protective of Mery, so she attacks if any of the PCs threaten her.

With a DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check, the PCs may convince Oma Rattenfanger to send one of her orphans of the black with them. However, the orphan is likely to take offense at



someone ordering it around and may become a liability in combat, using its Incite Violence feature in retaliation.

Shadow Goblin Village

The shadow goblin village is two days' travel from where the goblins took Mery. Though Oma refuses to grant the party safe passage on their journey when asked, she does arrange for the group to remain unscathed while they make their way to the village. The PCs arrive from the west, along a well-trodden path leading to area 1.

1. WELCOMING COMMITTEE

The path opens to a collection of garishly painted buildings surrounding a village square featuring a prominent obelisk. Trees that seemingly refuse to grow leaves or blooms dot the village's interior.

The buildings to the north and south of area 1 are living quarters for shadow goblins who are away from the village on a scouting mission.

Creatures. When the PCs approach this area, four **giant rats** belonging to the wererat stalking area 2 charge at the party. If two of the rats die, the other rats attempt to flee and alert the wererat.

2. "WINE" CELLAR AND STORAGE

The reek of vinegar wafts out of this building on the southern side of the village, which you can see—through a left-open door—contains several crates and a variety of tools useful for day-to-day work.

The shadow goblins devised a wine press, which they use to transform the sickly fruits they collect into something they enjoy. Any creature other than a shadow goblin who drinks the liquid produced by the press must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution save or become poisoned for 1 minute.

The items stored here are worthless except as a source of mundane replacement weapons, such as sickles and clubs.

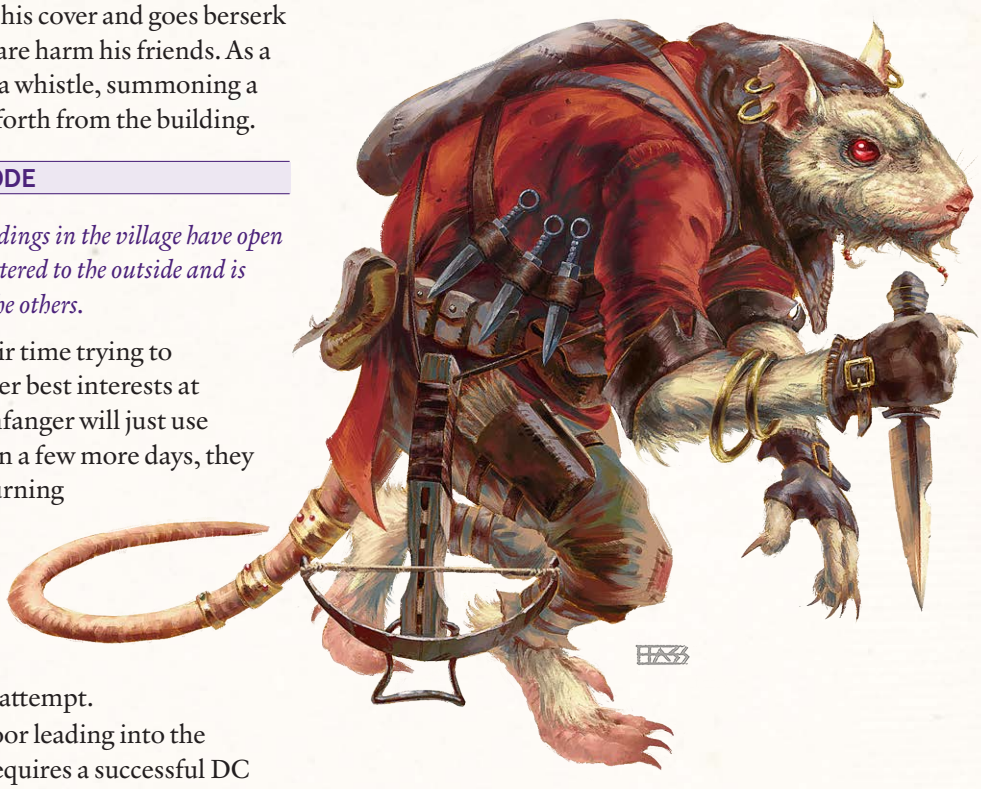
Creatures. A **wererat** allied with the shadow goblins lurks between the buildings, waiting to attack passing intruders. However, if one of his rats returns to

indicate trouble, he breaks his cover and goes berserk against those who would dare harm his friends. As a bonus action, he lets loose a whistle, summoning a **swarm of rats,** which boil forth from the building.

3. GOBLIN LEADER'S ABODE

Whereas most of the other buildings in the village have open windows, this building is shuttered to the outside and is slightly less ramshackle than the others.

The goblins have spent their time trying to convince Mery they have her best interests at heart and that Oma Rattenfanger will just use and discard the child. Given a few more days, they might have succeeded in turning her to their side. However, they have achieved their goal of inducing Mery to conjure a shadow beast they hope to employ against a suspected rescue attempt.



Locked Door. The only door leading into the building is locked, which requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to unlock or a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check to break down.

Trap. Opening the door cuts a trip wire that unleashes four poisoned darts. Make a ranged weapon attack for each dart with a +7 bonus to hit, selecting random targets outside that are within 10 feet of the door. A creature that is hit takes 3 (1d6) piercing damage and must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once triggered, the darts and tripwire must be reset to allow the trap to function once more.

A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the trip wire through a gap in the door. A successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools cuts the trip wire harmlessly. A PC without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage using an edged weapon or tool. On a failure, the wire hasn't been cut sufficiently, permitting the trap to trigger when the door is opened.

There is a 25% chance each round the PCs are inspecting the door that one of the goblins opens the door to trigger the trap.

Creatures. Two shadow goblin **scouts;** a shadow goblin **spy**; Mery (use statistics for **commoner**); and her most recent creation, another shadow dog (use statistics for **death dog**) await those breaking into the building. The goblins have successfully frightened Mery into siccing her shadow beast on intruders, but a PC who uses an action to attempt to convince Mery to turn the beast against the goblins can do so if they succeed on a DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. The goblins can likewise use an action to attempt the same check to regain control of the shadow beast.

4. OBELISK

Indecipherable runes cover this obelisk, which radiates cold and casts a shadow in all four cardinal directions.

The shadow goblins found the obelisk in a little-explored region of the Shadow Realm. They haven't figured out the obelisk's purpose, but they (correctly) reasoned the object is a source of great power, so they gave it a prominent place in the village. The strange column weighs 500 pounds and would be worth 750 gp to someone conversant with esoteric lore on the Material Plane should the party find the means to transport it.

Creatures. If a PC moves within 5 feet of the obelisk, two **shadows** pour out from the pillar and attack.

5. GRAYHOUSE

Open windows let in what light exists in the Tenebrous Plain, shining on an assortment of drab plants that seem healthy despite the lack of sun.

Shadow goblins grow vegetables, which miraculously provide them sustenance. The plants are inedible to creatures that don't reside in the Shadow Realm.

Creatures. The goblins befriended a **shadow blight** (see appendix) that haunts the nursery. If the party investigates the building, it initiates an attack.

6. RESERVES

Overgrown weeds abut the village's easternmost buildings.

The shadow goblins have tried unsuccessfully to clear the weeds, but the plants grow prodigiously and return to their original state within an hour of getting cut.

Creatures. Two shadow goblin **scouts** stand by in hiding to aid their leader. They surreptitiously keep watch on his home at area 3 and wait 2 rounds after spotting the party enter the building. Their focus is so intent on their leader, they have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to spot creatures approaching from the east.

Concluding the Adventure

Mery is happy to be rescued and is especially delighted to be reunited with Sable, if the creature survived. If the PCs try to convince her to come with them—which they can do with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check—she makes them promise not to abandon her like her parents did. If the party finds caring adoptive parents and visit Mery frequently, that fulfills her request. Otherwise, she slips back into the Shadow Realm and becomes a dedicated enemy to the party.

Depending on the outcome of various events, the PCs either earn Oma Rattenfanger's favor or her wrath. If Mery survives and the party returns her to Oma, the fey grants the PCs their agreed-upon reward or helps them in her capacity as Keeper of the Plain. Oma is undecided whether she will permit Mery's transformation to an orphan of the black, suspecting the change will cause the child to lose her gift. While she doesn't seek the PCs' counsel on the matter, a PC who succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes Oma is correct in her supposition.

If the PCs decide to adopt Mery (at least temporarily) and seek Oma's approval, a PC who succeeds on a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Oma to relinquish the girl to their custody. However, she extracts a promise from the party that requires them to aid her once—in any capacity—when she calls on them. (If and when Oma invokes this favor, treat this as if she had cast *geas* on each PC.) If the party absconds with Mery without Oma's knowledge, the fey patiently waits to gain her revenge on the kidnappers. This is also true if she allows the PCs to take Mery and they subsequently mistreat the child.

Any surviving shadow goblins lick their wounds and rebuild before continuing with their schemes. Should they wrest any power from Oma Rattenfanger, they try to take some measure of revenge against the PCs.





The Weeper in Shadow

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 3RD LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The story goes that a long, long time ago, Womford was a normal place in the normal world (whatever *that* might be)—a thriving village with scattered farms, fields, animals, and people. Then one night the wood came from the shadows of the night and took it all away. The village and its surroundings were absorbed, taken into the Shadow Realm—the screams of her lost people echoing in the darkness. The wood—which came to be known as the Wombweald—was alive, and it *devoured* them.

Why is this entity, this living forest called Wombweald? Sometimes—the span of a human lifetime, a score of years, once even in the blinking of a child's eye—the thing that lurks at its dark heart awakens and births terrible, terrible offspring. The Weeper in Shadow some call it, but few know it by any name at all; they just know to avoid it and its wood. The Weeper is a carnivorous, living plant, a very dangerous foe, and it and the wood share an odd intimacy—when it awakens, so does the wood and many of the terrors growing in it, and some of those terrors act as its eyes and ears—and claws, and teeth. The Weeper emits a peculiar, maddening song throughout the wood, which *awakens* and draws any animal or beasts (and occasionally monsters) to it to feed or protect it. Some that try to resist the call are taken by madness.

The Weeper lurks in the Great Midden—a mound of decay and rot that some say draws the dying to feed it. And there it lurks, until it is time to awaken and birth once more.

That time has come again. . . .

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Those who live near the wood know the signs of its waking and are afraid. Many villagers bar their doors and keep their livestock within (or in very stout enclosures). They've all noticed the horrible thorny growths infesting the wood's edges and the horrible cries coming within.

The PCs may simply be passing through when they hear the sorry tale of the Wombweald. Perhaps they hear tale of the awakening wood and have their curiosity piqued; or they're asked to venture into the wood and deal with whatever lurks at its heart once and for all; or a local has ventured into the woods to retrieve a child or beloved pet and the PCs are asked to help.

Running the Adventure

This is a survival horror adventure set in a living wood. The GM should play up the Shadow Realm nature of the Wombweald—it is suddenly and terrible *awake*; odd noises stir up suddenly in the distance, then just as suddenly there is naught but appalling silence. The wood exists in a perpetual summer's end—bloated blooms hang gorged from twisting briars, the air is thick and headily scented. Awakened trees shout or whisper "outsiders!" through mouths not meant to speak. Eyes blink from the gloom, and odd creatures skitter about high in the trees. Peculiar, nauseating fungi abound; strange, phosphorescent growths and lichens cloak branches and boughs, shedding an eerie ochre light that flickers in the pall of the swarms of insects dancing in the paltry

illumination. This gloom touches the twilight, illuminating the wood gloomily, yet never revealing things as they truly are until the viewer comes very close. Imagine a horrible wood from the darkest fairy tale—this place is suddenly and horrible alive and aware—and it doesn't like visitors, at least not until they are dead and feeding the Great Midden.

Traversing the Wood. Each hex on the map equals 2 miles, and the woodland areas are difficult terrain; the PCs encounter deep pools of rotting leaves, twisting roots, and crowding, ancient trees. The PCs can therefore cover 6 hexes per day at a usual pace. However, this wood is *alive*, and as such is very cunning when it comes to ensuring unwelcome visitors become utterly lost.

Uneasy Dreams. Time seems somewhat fluid here and visitors initially find sleep extremely difficult. Resting characters have odd dreams and feel uneasy, and the more people who enter the wood the more this effect increases. After a certain amount of time in the wood, rest becomes all but impossible; consider requiring a DC 13 Constitution saving throw to succeed (with the DC rising by 1 for each day the PCs remain in the wood). The PCs may even encounter restless wanderers who have been awake so long they have died without realizing it (see area 3).

Disorienting Terrain. The PCs must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check or become lost in the wood—unless they have a guide to assist them (see "The Weeper's Mad Song" sidebar). The PCs must make such a check every 4 hours of travel.

Arboreal Animus. The Wombweald *wants* visitors to die of exhaustion. The awakened trees and shrubs within quietly and awkwardly stagger ahead of visitors, trying to trick them toward deadly dangers (and away from the Great Midden)—to die and, ultimately, to be fed to the midden, continuing the Wombweald's cycle of birth and death. The wood can effectively move and grow ahead of any visitors so that it can, to anyone traversing it, actually be larger than is depicted on the map. If the PCs become lost, they move to a random adjacent hex, which could potentially lead them a long way from the Great Midden and even off the mapped area entirely. In this way, the forest can extend itself several miles; however, you may wish to set a limit of three hexes (6 miles) or less.

CREATURES OF THE WOMBWEALD

Many creatures wander the Wombweald, and for every 4 hours spent in it, there is a 50% chance a random encounter occurs. If there is an encounter, roll on the "Wombweald Encounters" table to determine what it entails.

WOMBWEALD ENCOUNTERS

d20	Encounter
1–2	2 deranged **awakened trees**
3–4	A wild **giant boar**
5	A **phase spider**
6	1d4 **shadows**
7–8	1d3 **swarms of insects**
9–10	2d2 **awakened shrubs**
11–12	2 **will-o'-wisps**
13–14	Wandering Animal (see below)
15–16	Curious Event (see below)
17–18	Decayed Locale (see below)
19–20	Lost Villager (see below)

Wandering Animal. A wandering animal is a confused, awakened creature that has been drawn into the wood. It may be a domestic animal, like a sheep or pig, or something bigger and more dangerous, such as an angry bull (use **warhorse**). In general, animals flee, but some may attack if desired.

Curious Events. Curious events can be the distant, unsettling echoes bleating, a sudden collapse of a tree, someone calling for help from far away (never to be found) or other distant (or unsettlingly near) movement or sounds that have no explanation.

Decayed Locales. Decayed locales are remnants of the old village and farmlands that once thrived here—an old gateway, a signpost, or a bridge that crosses a river no longer there.

Lost Villagers. A lost villager is a **commoner** in the forest trying to retrieve a lost child or animal (e.g., a prize pig, bull, or dog).

The Wild Hunt

The Weeper in Shadow does not wish to be found; it simply wants to nurture its children until they are ready to leave the midden, then return to its slumber. As soon as the PCs enter the Wombweald, a curious whispering precedes them, and The Weeper instantly becomes aware of them.

It sends some of its followers to seek out and destroy these strangers. In all, it sends three groups—each comprised of 2 **shriekers** and a **shambling mound.**

These groups should be encountered at varying times as the PCs' venture through the Wombweald. If the PCs are struggling, you might wish to avoid the encounters entirely—or play them simply for horror as passing sounds that vanish into the wood.

Consider having the PCs become aware that one of these groups is coming for them. Have them hear the mandrake's lamb-like bleats and their squeals, like delighted children, as they rush through the boughs and canopies. The shambling mound staggers through the wood, calling out in an inhuman voice that tries to make words but fails.

The PCs can detect one of the groups approaching if any of them succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check (or have a passive Perception of 13 or higher). If the PCs fail to detect The Weeper's minions, an attack occurs immediately. If they do realize they are being stalked, they can set up an ambush, or seek to avoid the encounter entirely, by succeeding on a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check.

These mandrakes are strongly shadow-touched, resembling odd-limbed twigs with bloated rotting heads of vegetation that make them appear similar to rotting, infantile scarecrows. When they engage the PCs, they use their shriek attack first and prefer to attack from the trees high above, which vary from 10–40 feet in height.



The Weeper's Mad Song

When it awakens, the Weeper cries out a maddening cacophony that is part song, part fluting pipes, part screams, and part sob. This sound echoes across the wood and continues until it sleeps once again or dies. The sound can be blocked in the usual ways, but any beast (and occasionally monster) that hears it spontaneously awakens and is drawn to it. Sometimes creatures become confused or enraged by the song, but more often than not, they simply move meekly to the Great Midden to be devoured. The thorny edges of the wood also awaken after a fashion—entwining to form a prickly outer wall. Trees and plants awaken across the wood, too, but they are slow to wake and not generally coordinated enough to attack. They typically simply try to trick outsiders into getting lost and dying.

The deadening nature of the wood makes tracing the source of the noise difficult, but clever PCs may seek to use this as a means of guiding themselves to The Weeper with an animal. Such animals move at the fastest pace they can but may themselves get lost or confused on the way. Any animal guide must succeed on a DC 7 Wisdom (Survival) check when it enters a hex for the first time or become lost. Lost animals move randomly into another hex but are always eventually drawn to the Weeper's song again.

Animal companions and familiars are not affected by this awakening but are aware of something odd in the air and likely show signs of nervousness as a result.

The **shambling mound** is a hulking mass of putrefaction from the Great Midden and simply seeks to engulf and destroy any life in its path. It is made of rot, old bones, twigs and leaves, and hair or fur.

Each of The Weeper's hunting groups is tasked with slaying any who trespass within the Wombweald then dragging them back to the Great Midden to feed its unceasing hunger. If the PCs can trick The Weeper's minions into believing that one (or some) of their number is dead (perhaps using a *scroll of feign death*), the creatures drag their seemingly dead prey directly back to the Great Midden.

GETTING STARTED

The lands just beyond the outer edges of the Wombweald play host to a small number of settlements. At most times, the wood slumbers and offers up game and timber in plentiful amounts and living is generally good, although everyone knows the dark stories. One village is located closer to the wood than any of the others and lies near a curious entrance (area 1). The place is so small, it doesn't even have a name (labelled Start on the map), and its locals know more about the wood than most.

The inhabitants of this collection of a score or so wattle-and-daub hovels survive by raising livestock (mostly sheep and chickens), and the village's oldest resident—Uncle Bandymoth—was alive the last time the Weeper awoke and actually saw it. Bandymoth (N umbral human [*Book of Ebon Tides*] **commoner**) is known throughout the area for this one remarkable event in an otherwise dull life—the time he and his friend Nadge dared each other to enter the Wombweald.

He's very easy to find, and anyone asking questions about the wood is pointed in his direction as the resident expert. Bandymoth is a short, elderly human with two tufts of white hair above extremely large ears. He smokes a large, smelly pipe and often looks into it when remembering things. He walks using an ash stick carved with the face of his favorite dog Nat, who died many years ago.

Bandymoth doesn't like to talk about the Wombweald and must be persuaded by means of a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to tell his story. He recounts all the information in the information table below but does so as part of his story.

He and his friend Nadge were youngsters when The Weeper last awoke. Luckily—or not—it had not been too long since it had last awoken and most folk still kept their animals penned up. Those that weren't—including his beloved dog Nat, as well as his father's prize ram (which somehow wandered away from its meadow)—went into the forest answering The Weeper's mad song. He and Nadge could see how upset his father was, and Nadge dared him to go into the wood to find the missing animals. Despite the danger, he readily accepted . . . and dared his friend to accompany him.

They were in the Wombweald for three days—and never did find the ram or Nat. Nor did they get any sleep. What they experienced is summed up in the "Wombweald Lore" sidebar with one final addition: They found the Great Midden by accident and got a good look at the pods The Weeper had produced—four great horrible writhing masses that held its babes. Bandymoth got more than enough of a good look at them and The Weeper itself. He requires some urging from the PCs to describe what it looked like but does so without the need for a skill check:

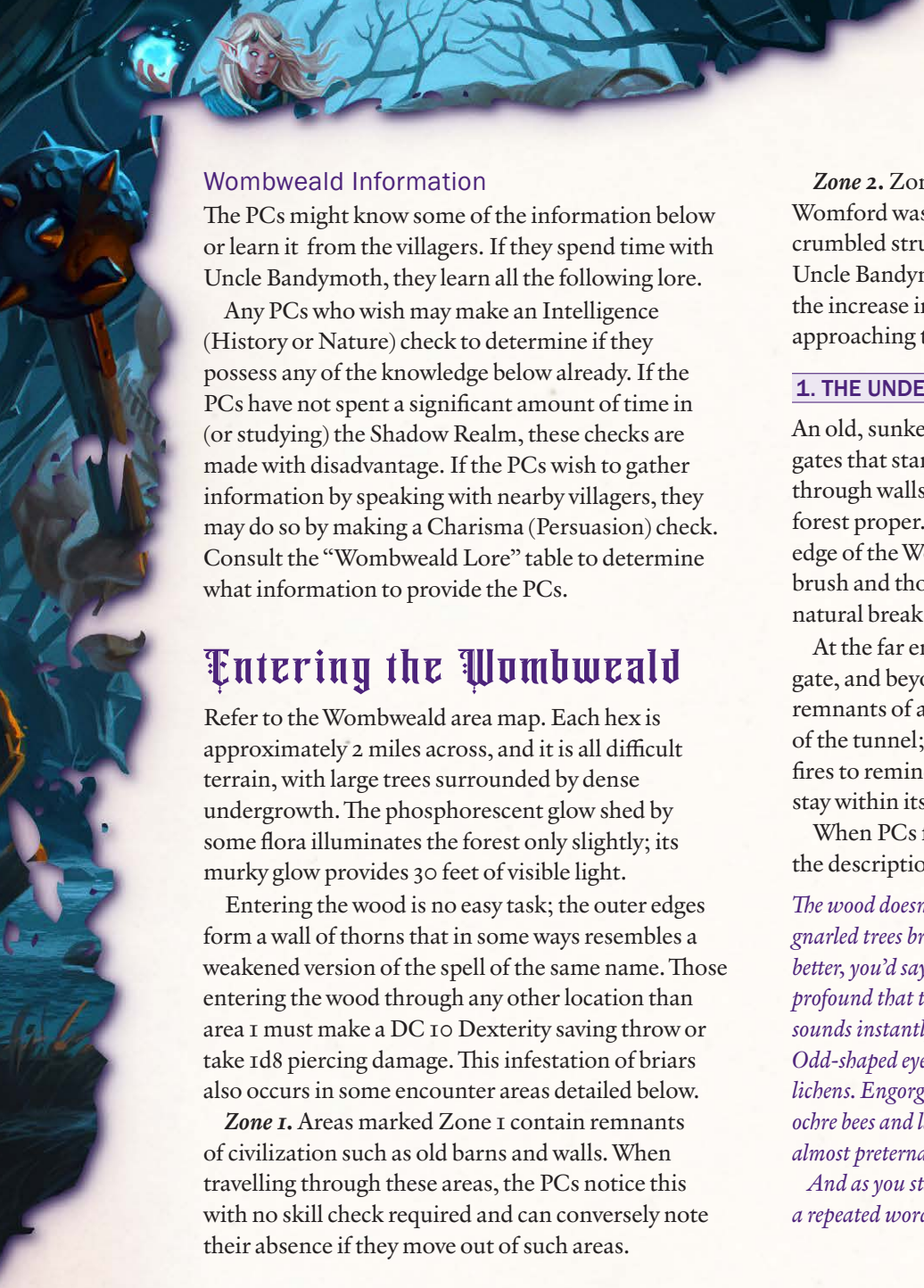
"As tall as a house, it was, a great writhing mass of limbs and vines. The stench was worse than any I have ever known—and I've smelt the rotting dead since then. And it moved! Maybe staggered is a better word for it. It had a head—or what passed for a head—a great open maw like a sick bloom, and as we watched it, a pig—one from a village nearby maybe—scampered near it. The Weeper was on it in a moment, a sick tongue lashing out of its petaled maw, dragging the poor animal, squealing, into its mouth. Then, it slowly gulped it all down. When I close my eyes, I can still see the poor animal kicking in its foul throat, and squealing . . . and squealing. That's when I ran; ran even when I heard Nadge crying for help, and sobbing.

"I abandoned him, I'm ashamed to say. Shortly after that, Nadge's sobbing . . . stopped."

He was never seen again, and Uncle Bandymoth has had to live with the guilt and the stares of his kith and kin ever since.

If pressed for further details, Bandymoth recalls following a stream for a while, heading northeast as far as he could tell, and he remembers there were more buildings nearer the end than at the start.

If the PCs ask Bandymoth to come along as a guide, he is very reluctant and only agrees following a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. He does indeed have a good memory of places; this knowledge allows the PCs to make their Wisdom (Survival) checks with advantage to avoid becoming lost. Bandymoth is old but still sprightly and as such does not slow the PCs down.



Wombweald Information

The PCs might know some of the information below or learn it from the villagers. If they spend time with Uncle Bandymoth, they learn all the following lore.

Any PCs who wish may make an Intelligence (History or Nature) check to determine if they possess any of the knowledge below already. If the PCs have not spent a significant amount of time in (or studying) the Shadow Realm, these checks are made with disadvantage. If the PCs wish to gather information by speaking with nearby villagers, they may do so by making a Charisma (Persuasion) check. Consult the "Wombweald Lore" table to determine what information to provide the PCs.

Entering the Wombweald

Refer to the Wombweald area map. Each hex is approximately 2 miles across, and it is all difficult terrain, with large trees surrounded by dense undergrowth. The phosphorescent glow shed by some flora illuminates the forest only slightly; its murky glow provides 30 feet of visible light.

Entering the wood is no easy task; the outer edges form a wall of thorns that in some ways resembles a weakened version of the spell of the same name. Those entering the wood through any other location than area 1 must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 piercing damage. This infestation of briars also occurs in some encounter areas detailed below.

Zone 1. Areas marked Zone 1 contain remnants of civilization such as old barns and walls. When travelling through these areas, the PCs notice this with no skill check required and can conversely note their absence if they move out of such areas.

Zone 2. Zone 2 is where the ancient village of Womford was located and features many more ruins, crumbled structures, and other signs of village life. If Uncle Bandymoth is with the PCs, the old gent notes the increase in such buildings as a sure sign they are approaching the old village and Great Midden.

1. THE UNDERWAY

An old, sunken pathway leads to a pair of thick iron gates that stand before a natural tunnel—a path through walls of thick trees and foliage leading to the forest proper. Either "wall"—and the entire outer edge of the Wombweald—is thick with trees and brush and thorns, essentially impassable, making this natural break in the trees the only means of entrance.

At the far end of the natural tunnel there is another gate, and beyond that, the Wombweald. Cold remnants of a huge bonfire can be found at the mouth of the tunnel; the villagers occasionally build such fires to remind the Wombweald and its denizens to stay within its own confines.

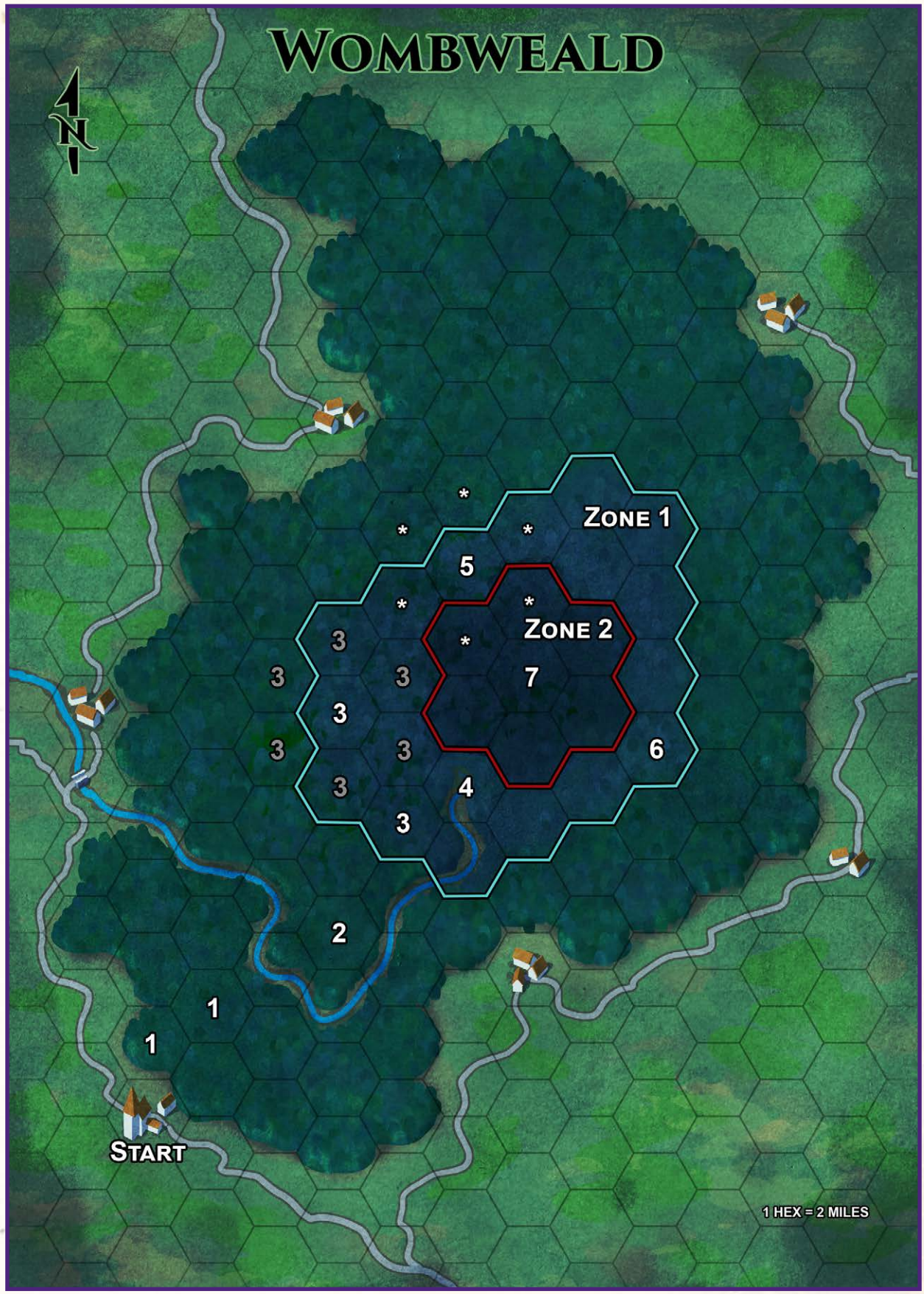
When PCs first enter the wood, read or paraphrase the description below:

The wood doesn't so much surround you as absorb you. Old, gnarled trees brood in the twilight, and if you didn't know better, you'd say they were watching you. The silence is so profound that to speak seems almost like an offense; any sounds instantly deaden and yet are horrifyingly . . . close. Odd-shaped eyes blink from shadows cast by eerie blooms and lichens. Engorged, rotting fruit hangs everywhere; ravenous ochre bees and large pale hornets feast on them. The stench is almost preternatural, as is the thick air bloated with insects.

And as you stand watching, you can hear whispering, and a repeated word: "Outsiders."

WOMBWEALD LORE

DC	Information Learned or Known
5	The Wombweald is so called after the . . . the thing that lives at its heart—a terrifying, slumbering thing that periodically wakes, and whose strange mad song calls animals to it—to feed its growing young.
10	The creature at the heart of the wood is sometimes called The Weeper in Shadow. Sometimes it slumbers for years at a time. When it does, its young later emerge from the wood and bring terror and death. These creatures are vast, mobile plants that lurk on the edges of the wood's edges until they are finally sated, and it is only then that they move on—presumably to cause terror elsewhere.
15	When it is awake, time behaves oddly in the Wombweald; even those that dare venture into its outer edges speak of a horrible sense of waking or being unable to find rest. Stories abound of people slipping into a state of perpetual wakefulness after spending too much time in the Wombweald.
20	There is a rumor of a Great Midden—a mound of decay, huge like a cathedral—that lurks in the dark heart of the wood above the ruins of an ancient village. They say that it's where The Weeper makes its home. Some say dying animals are drawn to the Great Midden and collapse when they reach it.


WOMBWEALD
N
ZONE 1
ZONE 2
5
7
6
4
3
2
1
1
START
1 HEX = 2 MILES

2. THE SCARECROW GROVE

The outer edges of this hex are tangled in thorny briars; PCs seeking to pass through this thorny wall must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 piercing damage.

Beyond, the remains of an old, walled cattle road and scattered, crumbling field walls can be seen beneath the vegetal growth that has long since overtaken it. Hidden in the undergrowth is a mile post, only discoverable with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check; it reads "Nettle, 10 miles" with an arrow pointing northeast along the track.

PCs following the track eventually come to the scene below:

You enter a wide clearing in the wood. Here, you find a small collection of hovels surrounded by fields rampant with weeds but still containing several enormous pumpkins. In the center of each field is a scarecrow—very much battered and encased in thick weeds but clearly humanoid in shape. Another, much larger scarecrow stands not far from the ruins of stone houses, by the side of the cattle road. This one leans upon the large branch of a great tree, a crow resting on its shoulder.

From somewhere nearby, more crows call.

The scarecrows are simply scarecrows, nothing more. The crows, however, are another story. Shortly after PCs see the first crow, there is a sudden calling from the woods all around them, and within 2 rounds, hundreds of crows surround them—perched on sagging rooftops, the scarecrow's shoulders, branches, the walls.

But this call alerts the senses of the things that live below the fields, too—a pair of **ankhegs.** These fields show signs of there being occasional attacks on passing animals for food, and several visible dips in the fields and walls were caused by the ankhegs bursting up out of the earth to attack their prey. The weeds make them difficult to spot, but a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check is enough to notice the odd disturbances. Unless the PCs immediately back away from the scene, the crows





swoop to attack, and any combat or spellcasting alerts the ankhegs below, who burrow up to seek new prey to devour.

Creatures. There are 3 swarms of crows (**swarms of ravens**) as well as the 2 **ankhegs.**

Treasure. One of the crows drops a shiny bauble: a piece of blue quartz (worth 10 gp).

The cattle road continues about a quarter mile northeast before being swallowed by trees and ending abruptly beneath briars.

3. WANDERERS

This encounter can also occur in any area 3 hex.

As the PCs move through this hex, they become aware of a distant conversation. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check identifies the words as being in the Common tongue, but they can't make them out. Unless the PCs seek out the speakers, they move gradually away—possibly encountered later, elsewhere in the wood. If the PCs wish to seek out the speakers, they can locate them with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

The voices belong to travelers who have fallen victim to the wood's peculiar ability to prevent rest. They have been awake for so long they have forgotten what sleep is . . . and their bodies actually died many years ago. Viewed from a distance, they seem to be a foreman and a number of woodcutters, all wearing cowls, moving cautiously through the wood.

As the PCs get closer, they realize the conversation they initially perceived was the sounds of this group quietly singing a work song to stave off the terror they all felt as they wandered the wood long ago before they died of exhaustion. If the PCs speak to them or approach, their true form—and hidden anger at their deaths—is revealed.

Creatures. The creatures are undead; the foreman is a **wight** (wielding a quarterstaff instead of a longsword), and the woodcutters—one for each PC present—are **shadows.** If they notice the PCs, one of the woodcutters screams in terror: "The monsters have found us!" They then attack in wild terror.

4. THE OLD RUINED BRIDGE

The stream that wanders through the wood leads to this location, flowing gently toward it as it meanders. As the PCs enter this hex, regardless of which direction they come from, they pick up one of the stone pathways through this hex that allows them to avoid the swamp. If PCs reach the lake, read or paraphrase the description below:

The path peters out and is swallowed by a swampy lake—perhaps 100 yards across—fed by a sluggish stream. Clearly the pathway used to cross this area, linking to either side of a very high arched bridge near the middle of the lake. At the zenith of the bridge is a small circular chapel. The pathway begins again on a causeway some 50 yards beyond the bridge. The lake is surrounded by forlorn, drowning trees.

From the direction of the bridge comes the sound of faint singing.

Trek Around. The PCs could trek around the lake, which is surrounded by boggy water across most of this hex except for the numerous small paths; doing so adds 2 hours to the time it takes to pass through this hex.

Cross the Lake. They could cross the lake and pick up the path again on the other side; they could swim, or could use any of the large number of fallen logs nearby, many of which could be used to fashion a simple floating raft. Maneuvering such a craft requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity check; if a PC has the Water Vehicles tool proficiency, no check is required.

Sunken Causeway. The pathway linking to either side of the bridge still follows the stone causeway it was built on, but it is sunk beneath the waters.

The Hermit's Knowledge

The hermit's knowledge is mostly from times gone by, so it knows little of what might have happened recently, but it does know information such as the location of the old village of Nettle (area 7), which lies about 4 miles away, northeast from here. It also knows something dangerous lurks in the waters below (the snake). At your discretion, it may also be aware of the hunting griffons (area 5) and may have heard the wanderers from area 3, so it can potentially warn the PCs about those dangers.

Animal companions and familiars are not affected by this awakening but are aware of something odd in the air and likely show signs of nervousness as a result.

The PCs can navigate along the sunken causeway, which is about 2 feet deep at its lowest point at either side, avoiding deeper water. Once the PCs reach the midway point, each must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. On a success, the PC can cross without issue; on a failure, the PC slips on a mossy patch of stone and falls into the deeper water. Getting back up onto the path from the water requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Creatures. The mildewed waters surrounding the arched bridge contain a **shadow-touched giant constrictor snake.** The weird watches those on shore, preferring to attack characters in the deeper water, which gets progressively deeper away from the sunken path, going from 10 feet to 20 feet deep. If any PC falls off the sunken causeway and into the water, the water weird chooses that moment to attack.

The Hermit of Devil Bridge

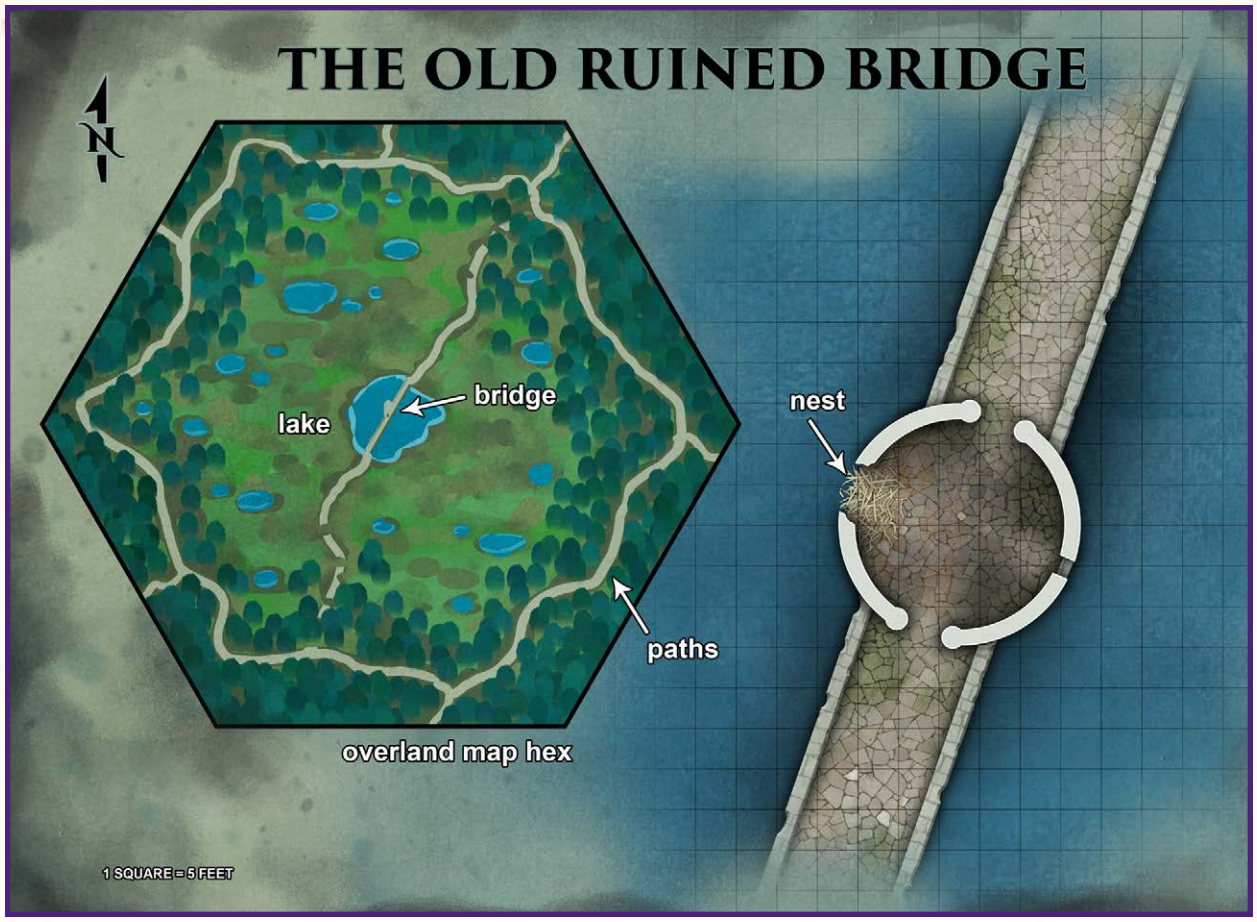
The arched bridge rises so steeply it is impossible to see from one side of the arch to the other. It is built of great, smooth blocks of stone and rises to the chapel, which is entered by arched openings at either side. The singing emanates from the chapel and is a mixture of strange, unfamiliar hymns and nonsense rhymes. The voice is male.

If PCs enter the chapel, read or paraphrase the following description:

The archways are carved with flowers and open into a wide space below a fractured stone circular roof about twelve feet above you. Two narrow windows open into the space, one of which has been long ago shattered and now hosts a very large nest made of mud, twigs, and bone that reaches all the way up to the ceiling. On the walls are decayed frescoes that now depict only patchy, incomplete renderings of religious figures.

Most notably, however, is the ceiling above, which hosts an ancient stone face. Its lips move as it sings.

The face belongs to the Hermit of Devil Bridge. The hermit was once an arcane guide and seer. However, its connection to this plane is now unstable, a result of the Shadow Realm's corrupting influence. (And perhaps some effect caused by the Weeper's song as well.) The hermit has a passive Perception of 12 and only wakes from its songs if it is spoken to or notices passing characters, at which point its eyes open and its face, although seemingly stone, stretches to its maximum four feet of elasticity, and peers down at its visitors. The hermit cannot attack and. It can help the PCs, though, as its knowledge, though ancient, is still valid. However, dealing with the hermit is risky.



The hermit speaks in an oddly gentle way and introduces himself, politely asking the PCs who they are and where they are heading. Underneath its cordial words, however, lurks *anger.* Each time a PC asks the hermit a question, they must make a DC 12 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. If they succeed, the Hermit answers their question.

If PCs fail a check, the face grimaces and yells "Outsiders!" and "Murderers, come to steal my children!" Its voice is of the earth, fetid and blasting, as it begins to scream, its mouth warping and distending.

Thunderous Wail. PCs inside the chapel must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) thunder damage and be deafened for 1 hour. The hermit's screaming can be stopped by a *silence* spell or similar effect, and likewise any spell or effect that manipulates stone can be used to force shut the hermit's mouth.

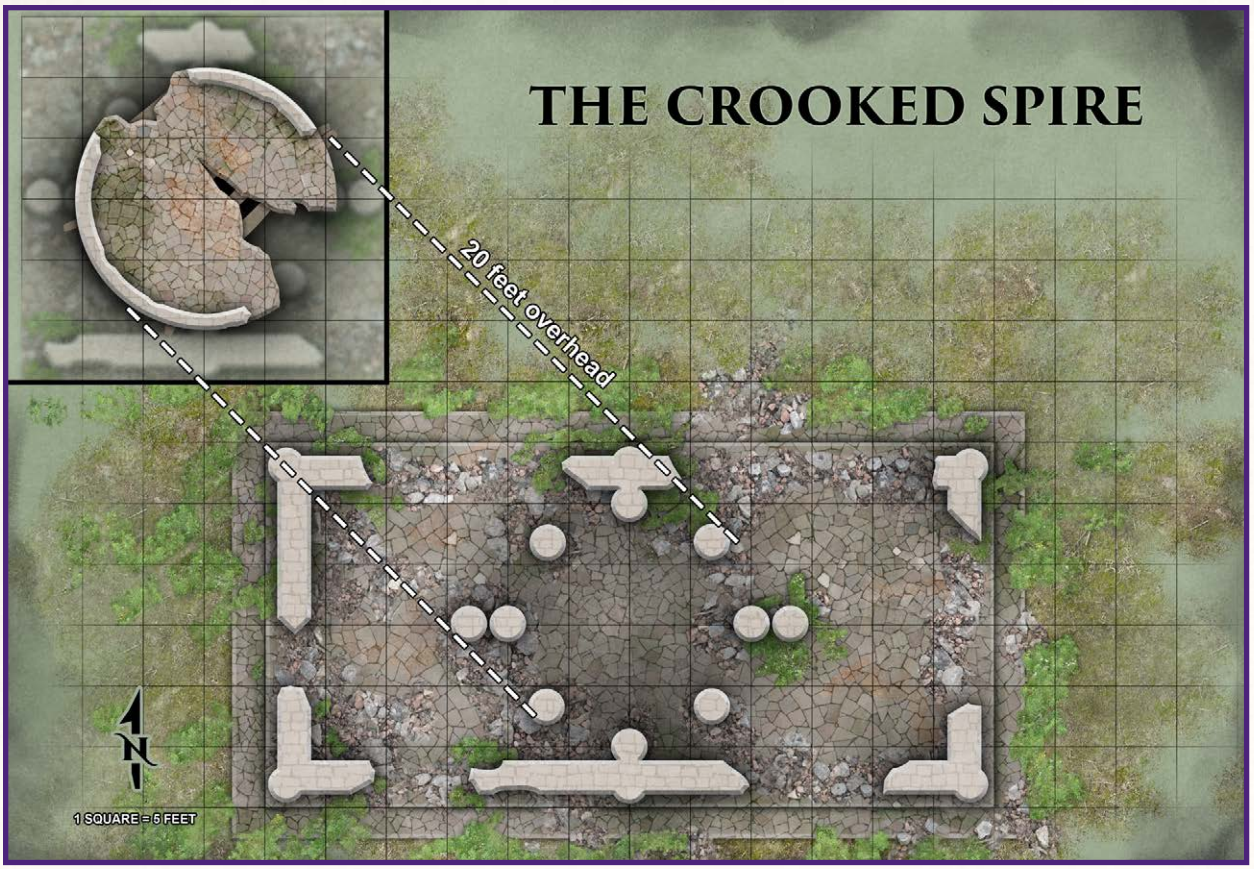
Creatures. The hermit has AC 17 and 18 hp. The mouth screams for 8 rounds in total. For each 2 rounds that pass, the hermit's screaming summons an **awakened tree,** which drags itself from the edges of the lake nearby to attack.

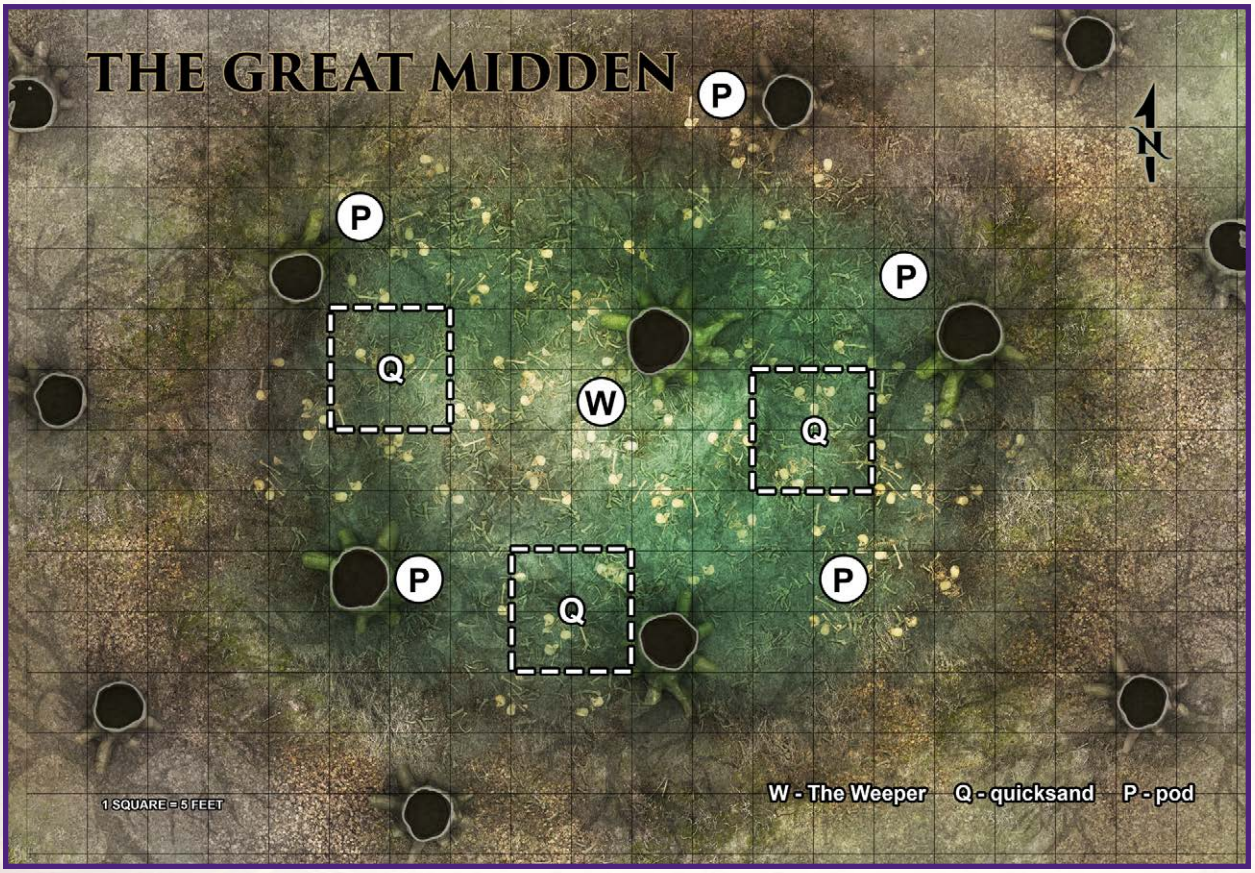
The unsettling nest in the window is the home of a trio of **stirges;** they remain in their home unless attacked or are frightened into attacking by the screaming. Make one DC 12 Wisdom saving throw for the stirges collectively; on a failure, they emerge from their nest and attack the nearest PCs.

5. THE CROOKED SPIRE

The ruins of a temple—now not much more than a roofless stone shell—occupy a sparse clearing in the trees here. A great weather-beaten spire towers above where the temple roof would have been, rising almost eighty feet above the ground. The spire shows signs of significant damage, where stone slates have detached from their timber supports, but seems solid and stands higher than any tree.

Creatures. Two **griffons** roost in this hex, lured here—and then driven mad—by The Weeper's song. They may be encountered individually as they hunt in any adjacent hex marked with an asterisk. If the PCs discover this location before they've encountered the griffons elsewhere, they find them in their lair.


THE CROOKED SPIRE
20 feet overhead
N
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET


THE GREAT MIDDEN
P
P
P
Q
W
Q
P
P
Q
N
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
W - The Weeper Q - quicksand P - pod

Lair. The griffons make their home in the lower part of the spire, where there are some exposed timber beams and floorboards 20 feet above the ground. The temple walls, columns, and the spire are ivy-choked and fairly easy to climb, with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check every 10 feet. The griffons have a trio of chicks and defend them with terrible ferocity, attacking anyone coming near the temple. PCs who reach the dizzy top of the spire can clearly see the foul Great Midden in area 7 as well as the lake at area 4 and the rough outline of the wood itself.

Treasure. Among the nest and bones are a wooded musical pipe inlaid with silver, with a mouthpiece made of cow lips (worth 50 gp); a curved walking stick set with a carved stirge head and a small circular piece of jet in its mouth (worth 100 gp); and a small statue depicting a trio of dancing humanoid stoats juggling a terrified silver eel (worth 75 gp).

Griffon Chicks. The 3 griffon chicks (**eagles,** removing the ability to fly), which cannot yet fly, are roughly the size of a wolf, though PCs making a successful DC 15 Intelligence check may realize that, to the right person, they could be valuable. The chicks are worth 150 gp each to the right buyer; however, catching them requires a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to corral each one. Any PC proficient in Animal Handling knows it would be almost impossible for the PCs to take the chicks with them unless they happen to be carrying appropriately-sized cages. The chicks won't attack unless provoked.

6. FRENZY

The wood in this hex is thick with undergrowth, making visibility very poor.

Creatures. As the PCs move through this area, they encounter a **bulette,** drawn to the Wombweald and then maddened and trapped by the Weeper's song. The bulette moves with great speed, dashing through the wood. Any PC who makes a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check (or has a passive Perception of 12 or higher) hears the bulette coming and can move out of its way; those with a passive Perception lower than 12 must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone after diving to the ground to narrowly avoid the charging creature. If this happens, the bulette stops its charge 30 feet from the PCs and initiates combat. If all the PCs succeed on the rolls above, the bulette simply keeps charging through the wood unless provoked. If combat ensues, the bulette flees if reduced to 30 or fewer hp.

7. THE GREAT MIDDEN

The outer edges of this hex are tangled in thorny briars like those encountered elsewhere in the Wombweald; PCs seeking to pass through this thorny wall must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d8) piercing damage.

Beyond the briars, a stench of rot prevails, as well as a brooding sense of expectation. This area of the Wombweald is seemingly more awake and alive than any other. The stink of death grows more powerful as the PCs approach the center of the hex and the Great Midden itself.

The trees seem to sag here, perhaps poisoned or drained by whatever malevolence lies at this place's dark heart. Before you, a great, abhorrent mound rises 20 feet from the leaf-drowned forest floor. The mound is a midden of decay; not only of trees and festering rot, but animals, too—along its edges you can see the empty eye sockets of stags; the swollen and bloated bellies of dead boars; and the sad, mangy fleece of lambs, blackened by fungus and rot. Confused, pitiful animals also wander, dazed, nearby.

At the crown of this monument of rot is an enormous, grotesque plant, a thing whose fleshy trunks make it look alien and strange . . . wrong. The size of a bull, it bloats outward, gripping—and sickening—the trees nearby with tendrils that drip with festering fungal growths. Green limbs flick spastically from its corpulent core. This revolting horror culminates with a leering bloom, a head from which flicks a flaccid, vegetal tongue. Nearby, half a dozen green pods hang from trees with their thin, cocoon-like shells; you can just barely see the faint hint of motion lashing about inside.

The Great Midden. The Great Midden rises to 20 feet in height and is a mound of unstable decay. It is difficult terrain and in 3 marked locations the rot is soft enough to act as **doomsand** (*Book of Ebon Tides*).

The Weeper in Shadow

The true origins of **The Weeper in Shadow** (see appendix) are not known. The Weeper is a carnivore, feeding on the small deer, giant insects, and snakes—or pretty much any living creature—that find their way into the Wombweald. It happily devours humanoid flesh when available, using its roots to soak up the nutrients from a freshly decomposing corpse.

The Weeper understands words in Common but cannot speak, although it can convey those words it feels to its many followers and subjects across Wombweald. It can use the midden itself to rise up against its foes: every 3 rounds it issues forth a **shadow-touched awakened shrub**, a vile animated mass of carcasses and vegetation. These shrubs continue to be born until the Weeper or the intruders are destroyed.

The pods containing **weeper saplings** (see appendix) hang from trees near the midden. The Weeper does everything in its power to stop them from being harmed.

One of the pods is larger than the rest, containing a queen, like its mother—a rare event in the lifespan of The Weeper. The queen pod is statistically the same as the others but with one major difference: on the first round after it takes any kind of injury (even if the damage destroys the pod), the pod peels open, revealing 6 writhing spore tendrils within (each with AC 12 and 1 hp). In the following round, these spore tendrils shoot out of the pod, randomly scattering 5d6 feet from the queen pod, which immediately dies.



The spore tendrils—juvenile versions of The Weeper itself—cannot take any actions or reactions and instead simply seek to scatter across the wood, using their full move speed of 15 feet to get as far away from the PCs as possible. Their ultimate goal is to find a place where they can fester and grow. If they escape, the death of The Weeper is but a momentary pause before the wood awakens once more. . . .

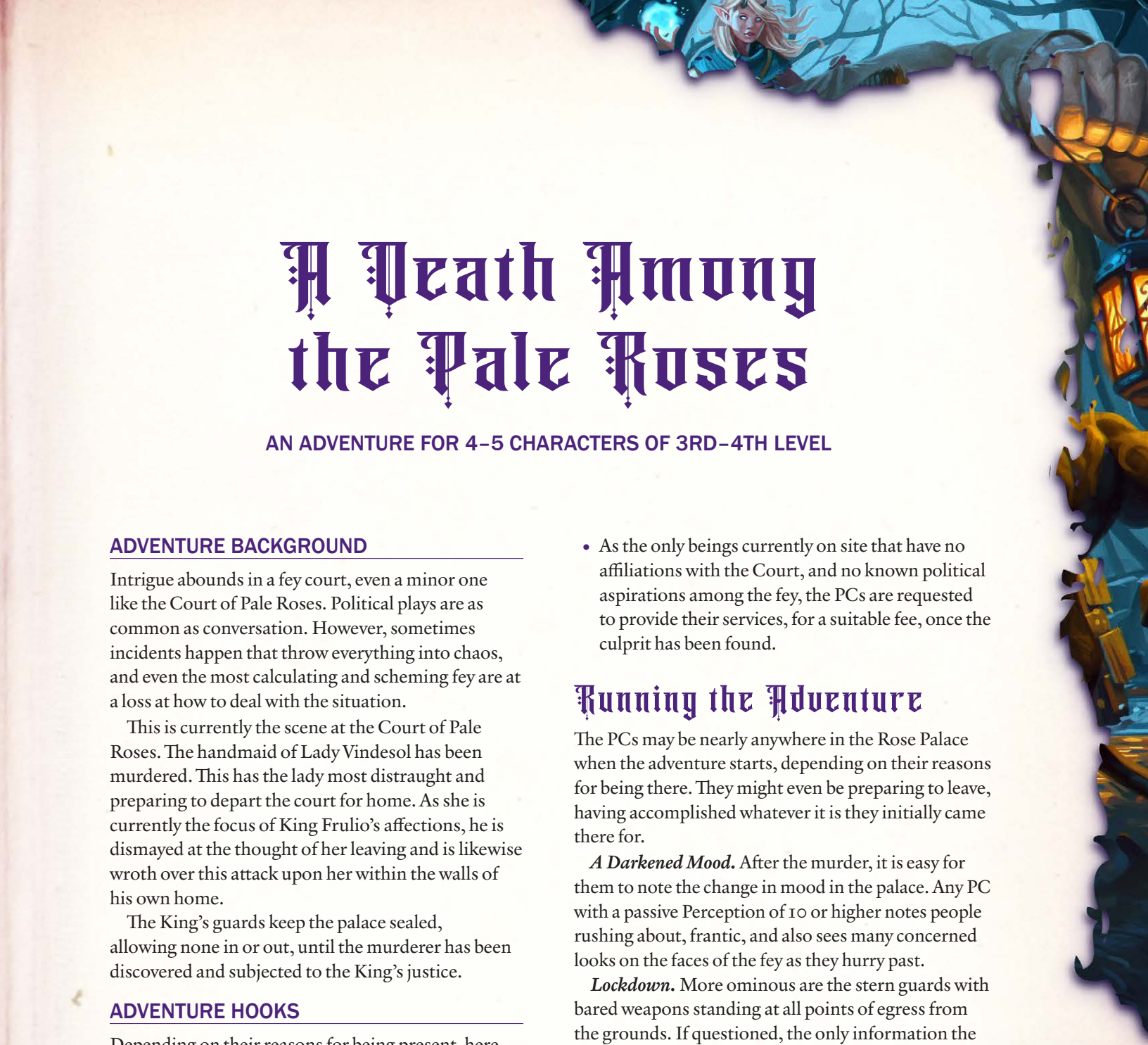
The Weeper becomes visibly agitated when any creature moves within 60 feet of it and attacks—and attempts to devour—any that comes within reach.

Treasure. Found adjacent to or near the surface of the midden are a trio of silver ingots (worth 50 gp) each; a leather satchel with a fine copper broach pin set with a tiny ruby (worth 200 gp); a stuffed toy duck that never seems to be where you left it (worth 200 gp to the right collector); a fist-sized, bronze, cockroach-shaped jewelry box (worth 25 gp) holding an obsidian earring (worth 40 gp) and a much folded *scroll of mirror image;* a beautiful (if strange) silver, jet, and wire broach in the shape of a horsefly (worth 350 gp); a *potion of vitality* in a green glass vial with a wax seal; and a *wand of magic missiles* gripped in a withered, severed hand that has two thumbs. There may be more items within the midden, as well, but searching it is *extremely* unpleasant.

Concluding the Adventure

After The Weeper is destroyed, if Uncle Bandymoth accompanied the party, he suddenly declares he'll "Have a bit of a sit" and wanders to a place where he can see what is left of The Weeper, which he prods with his pipe when he walks by it. He sits contentedly for some time and then slumps over slightly, dead, but with a comfortable smile on his face. He has seen the enemy he feared and dreamed of, slain by heroic strangers, and is happy to finally be at peace.

Otherwise, without The Weeper's influence, the PCs have little trouble escaping the Wombweald. Any creatures they encounter on the way out of the forest appear to have regained their senses, and the sense of malevolence in the air seems to have lifted. So, too, have the normal sounds one would expect to find in a wood returned, which comes as a bit of a shock after all the time spent in the eerie, deadening silence.



A Death Among the Pale Roses

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 3RD–4TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Intrigue abounds in a fey court, even a minor one like the Court of Pale Roses. Political plays are as common as conversation. However, sometimes incidents happen that throw everything into chaos, and even the most calculating and scheming fey are at a loss at how to deal with the situation.

This is currently the scene at the Court of Pale Roses. The handmaid of Lady Vindesol has been murdered. This has the lady most distraught and preparing to depart the court for home. As she is currently the focus of King Frulio's affections, he is dismayed at the thought of her leaving and is likewise wroth over this attack upon her within the walls of his own home.

The King's guards keep the palace sealed, allowing none in or out, until the murderer has been discovered and subjected to the King's justice.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Depending on their reasons for being present, here are some ways the PCs can be brought in to investigate the murder, assuming they do not volunteer:

- The PCs found it necessary to seek aid from King Frulio. Perhaps they were lost in the Shadow Realm, or pursued by enemies, or simply in need of a place to rest. The king's hospitality places them firmly in his debt, allowing him to call upon their service in this matter to repay him.
- The PCs are diplomatic envoys from another court, seeking King Frulio's favor on behalf of their patron. He agrees to look favorably upon their patron's proposals if they assist in this matter.
- As the only beings currently on site that have no affiliations with the Court, and no known political aspirations among the fey, the PCs are requested to provide their services, for a suitable fee, once the culprit has been found.

Running the Adventure

The PCs may be nearly anywhere in the Rose Palace when the adventure starts, depending on their reasons for being there. They might even be preparing to leave, having accomplished whatever it is they initially came there for.

A Darkened Mood. After the murder, it is easy for them to note the change in mood in the palace. Any PC with a passive Perception of 10 or higher notes people rushing about, frantic, and also sees many concerned looks on the faces of the fey as they hurry past.

Lockdown. More ominous are the stern guards with bared weapons standing at all points of egress from the grounds. If questioned, the only information the guards offer is the king has forbidden anyone from leaving the premises until he orders otherwise, along with a dire warning to stay well clear of the doors and make no attempt to leave, under penalty of death.

Information Gathering. A successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check can convince a courtier or fellow palace visitor to divulge that there has been word of a murder on the premises, and the king is livid. Beyond that, little information is forthcoming until Gilfrith, the King's manservant, arrives to escort the PCs to King Frulio Cornutus' audience chamber. PCs with a Passive Insight of DC 17 or higher notice the normally taciturn Gilfrith is



greatly upset about something and doing his best to hide it; if questioned, he merely tells the PCs, "Best if you speak with his majesty."

As the liveried servant ushers you into the King's audience chamber, the first thing you notice is the absolute silence. Wide-eyed courtiers in finery, both fey and other folk, line the walls of the room, clustered together near the pillars, as if hoping the stone columns will shield them from the gaze of the angry shadow fey that stalks back and forth before the throne at the far end of the hall.

A herald, in subdued tones, announces: "All rise for His Majesty, King Frulio Cornutus, the Duke of Roses, the Count of—"

"Enough!" The King interrupts. "Bring the outsiders forward."

The eyes of the hushed courtiers follow you as you approach the dais upon which the throne sits. Gilfrith introduces you, and the fey monarch ceases his pacing to turn toward you, hands clasped behind his back.

"Our house has been violated. A murder most foul committed under our own roof. A life promised safety and succor at our pledge has been taken. Our honor, compromised. More importantly, someone we care about deeply has been cut deeply by this loss, and we intend to make amends, secure our home, and punish the guilty.

"We understand that you lot, of all the people currently under our roof, have no political ties or motivations here. This makes you an impartial party. Furthermore, your whereabouts at the time of the murder are accounted for, so suspicion cannot fall on you. I therefore charge you with the investigation of this murder and the task of finding the guilty, so that the king's justice may be served. Our court will be at your disposal, and I hereby command that any within this palace shall offer any aid to your investigation that is within their means. Gilfrith will show you out so you may begin," the king finishes and turns his attention from you, resuming his agitated pacing.

The pale fey that escorted you here steps forward and gestures back to the doors.

The layout of the Rose Palace is not provided in the detail typically found in an adventure—e.g., with read-aloud descriptions, then monsters, traps, and features, and finally treasure—as this adventure is structured around the PCs investigating the murder. A room-to-room search is unlikely. Rather, the PCs must investigate whatever locales or individuals the evidence they gather points them to. Skills, observation, and dialogue are the path to success, and combat will be a secondary consideration. All the information regarding the victim, murderer, and manner of death is given to the GM up front. It is up to your players to find the clues and leads necessary to uncover this information.

A general overview of the rooms numbered on the map is provided, along with a guide to what NPCs and creatures can be found in these areas. Details of a room's contents are not provided unless pertinent to the investigation. If your PCs search for treasure or other items, you can feel free to determine the contents yourself, but remember that they have been charged with investigating a crime, which gives them the freedom to move about and inspect details of areas and speak with the inhabitants; they do not have carte blanche to wander wherever they like and take whatever they desire, and the castle's inhabitants will surely object to such behavior and react accordingly.

The Murder

The young high elf Eillyn—handmaid to the king's current paramour, Lady Vindesol—was found dead after drinking from a poisoned goblet of wine. Among the servants at court, Lady Vindesol is known for occasionally being less than kind to servants. But Eillyn was extremely devoted to her, and because she knew how the Lady sometimes was with commoners, she'd taken it upon herself to serve as the Lady's royal taster, to make sure nothing ill ever befell her . . . which proved to be her undoing. (See the "Notable NPCs" section below for more information.)

The Lady spent the evening elsewhere (with the king, though no one would be so uncouth as to speak that fact aloud), so the body was found the next morning by Gilfrith, the king's manservant. After the PCs speak with the king, this information can be presented to them by Gilfrith himself, or any of the guards, including those on duty outside the door to the guestroom where the heinous act occurred.

THE CRIME SCENE

Eillyn's body has been taken to lie in state in the palace's private shrine (area 12), but the room where she died (area 23) has been left otherwise untouched. When she was found, the handmaid was lying on the floor near the bed, a goblet, a serving tray, and a spilled bottle of wine scattered around her. A small amount of the poisoned wine remains within the goblet.



Poisoned Chalice. A PC proficient with alchemist's supplies, brewer's supplies, herbalism kit, or poisoner's kit can discern, with a successful DC 15 ability check using one of these tools, that while the wine in the goblet was poisoned, the wine in the bottle was not; if the PCs do not possess any of these tool proficiencies, they can potentially learn this information through magic, availing themselves of the services of the king's alchemist, or some other means. The vintage of the wine is not relevant, but if a PC asks, it's a bottle of Year of One Hundred Sorrows Eternal Twilight Lethe Noir.

Chain of Custody. The bottle came from the wine cellar in the palace, a fact that can be discerned by questioning the king's sommelier, Filkin Mulliget. The goblet was delivered to the room by a servant, Thasim, though the sommelier does not remember Thasim by name or description.

Secret Correspondence. A successful DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers a stack of letters under the bed, all addressed to Eillyn. Most are unopened. If read, they are revealed to be love letters from Gilfrith, expressing his ardent desires for her.

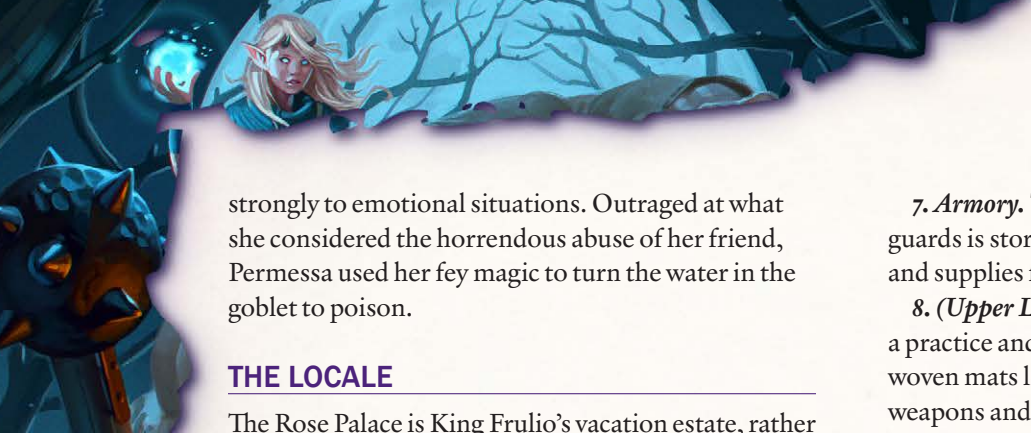
THE RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

The wine was meant for Lady Vindesol and was delivered by a disgruntled servant, Thasim, who had, earlier the day of the murder, received a belittling rebuke from the lady.

After this tongue-lashing, Thasim took a moment to cry by the fountain in the garden. She drew the attention of Permessa, the nymph-like **crinaea** (see appendix) that inhabits it, as well as the **vodyanoi** (see appendix) ambassador Dobrilo, who was in the fountain, having a soak.

The ambassador suggested Thasim water the wine in the goblet as a form of revenge, tricking the lofty lady into swilling the vodyanoi's bathwater. The servant did so, taking some water from the fountain.

The crinaea, however, is a much more mercurial and emotional creature who reacts deeply and



strongly to emotional situations. Outraged at what she considered the horrendous abuse of her friend, Permessa used her fey magic to turn the water in the goblet to poison.

THE LOCALE

The Rose Palace is King Frulio's vacation estate, rather than his primary seat of power. The designation, however, is somewhat of a misnomer, as the king is rarely here purely on leisure. The central garden itself is a ruse, a place where the king's alchemists and gardeners pretend to grow new varieties of illusion seeds. He allows rumors to spread that this garden, and not the ones at his seat of power, has a connection to the Somering Well, to keep meddlers, thieves, and saboteurs off-track and obsessed with what is a mere aesthetic enhancement to the building.

The palace is built in a ring shape, with five towers projecting up from the upper level. Each tower tops a hall that separates the ring into five wings. A central garden sits in the midst of the ring.

The following is the key to the Rose Palace map, naming and giving a brief description of the various rooms and locales marked.

The Arcanist Wing

This wing is reserved for the king's alchemists and arcane spellcasters.

1. Laboratory. This room is where the king's alchemists and mages practice their craft while living in the Rose Palace. Tables of equipment and shelves full of ingredients and reagents line the walls.

2. Storage Room. This room is packed with spare equipment, firewood, and crates full of materials for restocking the laboratory.

3. Bedrooms. These rooms serve as quarters for the king's arcanists. Currently, only one of them is occupied, serving as the quarters for the Alchemist-in-Chief, Olmed Carroso.

4. (Upper Level) Library. Shelves of arcana fill this room, where the spellcasters and alchemists of the court come to research and study.

The Barracks Wing

This wing houses the king's guards and officers.

5. Barracks. The rank-and-file guardsmen in the palace bunk here when not on duty.

6. Officers' Quarters. Each of these rooms is the living quarters of one or more of the officers in charge of the palace guard.

7. Armory. This is where weapons and armor for the guards is stored, as well as additional weapons, armor, and supplies for their upkeep and maintenance.

8. (Upper Level) Training Hall. This room serves as a practice and exercise area for the palace guards. Two woven mats lie on the floor. Several racks of practice weapons and shields line the walls, as well as target dummies for both archery and melee practice. Two barrels of water sit in one corner near the door.

The Clergy Wing

This wing contains places of worship and quarters for the clergy.

9. Chapel. This chapel is dedicated to Loki (or any trickster or mischievous god) and open to all household staff as well as guests.

10. Visitor's Chapel. This area can be used for worship by any visitors, with adequate space to set up shrines and idols. Currently it is bedecked in black wall hangings and used as a worship area for the Void priestess (*Midgard Heroes Handbook*; or any dark domain) and her followers.

11. Sacristy. This room stores clerical vestments, altar trappings, and other materials used for ceremonies in the various chapels.

12. (Upper Level) Private Shrine. This small worship area is reserved for the king and select guests and is tended by Vares the Silent.

13. (Upper Level) Bedrooms. These rooms are quarters for the court's clergy as well as rooms for visiting priests.

Domestic Wing

This wing contains the servant housing, the kitchen, and the dining hall. Quarters for less important guests are also in this wing.

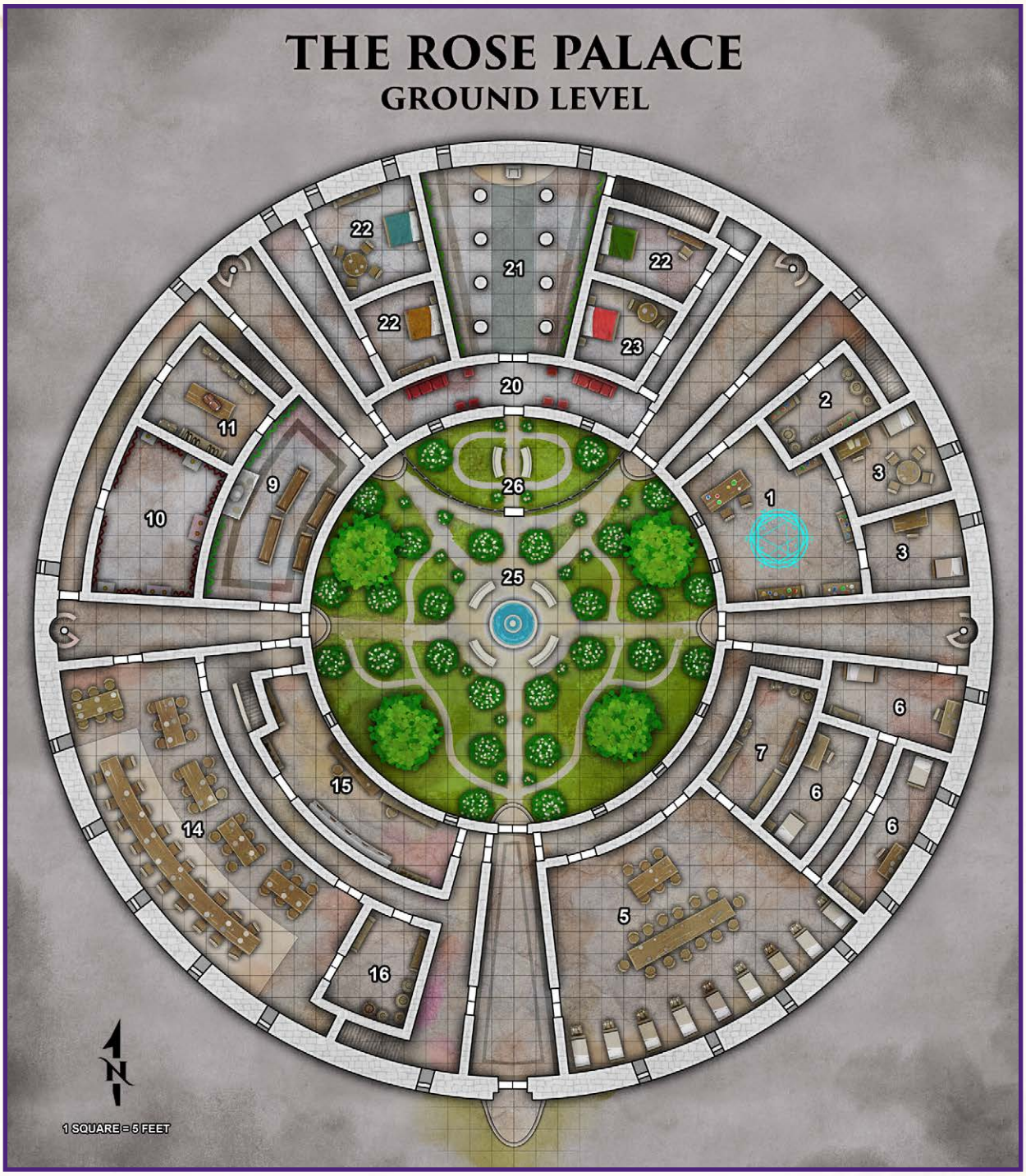
14. Dining Hall. This hall is used for feasts on formal occasions and serves as a general eating area for the guards and staff the rest of the time.

15. Kitchen. This kitchen holds a host of tables, shelves, and sinks, as well as a massive fireplace.

16. Pantry/Storage. This room contains the palace food stores, crockery, and dining ware, as well as extra tables, chairs, and other accessories.

17. (Upper Level) Servants' Quarters. The servants of the palace reside in these rooms.

18. (Upper Level) Guest Rooms. These rooms are given to the less important guests staying at the palace. Currently both Lady Vindesol (after the murder) and Dobrilo are lodged in rooms here.



19. (Upper Level) Washroom. This room holds four copper tubs for bathing, as well as a large wooden tub that can be occupied by multiple people. Water is piped in from a cistern on the roof.

The Royal Wing

This wing holds the king's royal chambers, as well as those of his close advisors and important guests.

20. Waiting Room. Those awaiting audience with the king are kept comfortable here until they are summoned to the audience chamber.

21. Audience Chamber. This room is where King Frulio holds court when in residence. The PCs are received here at the beginning of the adventure.

22. Fine Guest Rooms. These rooms are reserved for important guests and friends of the king.



23. Crime Scene. This is another fine guest room, but this is the one in which Lady Vindesol was staying—and in which Eillyn was found dead.

24. (Upper Level) Royal Apartments. These rooms are used by the king when he is in residence at the Rose Palace.

25. Palace Garden. A grand fountain is the central feature of this garden, crafted of marble and carved with animals and fey creatures pouring water out of pitchers or spitting it from their mouths, the arcs of water tumbling down into two raised basins, then flowing down into a central basin below. The main garden is mostly filled with rose bushes, bearing white and pale pink blossoms.

26. King's Private Garden. In the north part of the Palace Garden, a wrought-iron fence and gate

covered in climbing ivy holds the king's private garden, only accessible with keys in the possession of the Royal Gardener, his assistant, and the king himself. The lock requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to pick.

27. Guard Towers. Each tower has arrow slits opening to the surrounding landscape. A spiral staircase descends to a hall on the first floor.

Gathering Information

The PCs may not have any immediate suspects or persons of interest to question, or they may try to get a general feel of the place by plying information from courtiers, servants, guards, or other persons in residence not listed in the "Notable NPCs" section. In such cases, allow them to roll the appropriate/relevant ability checks at DC 15. Many fey are not forthcoming about themselves or eager to give up secrets, though fear of the king's wrath or the desire to put someone else in the uncomfortable position of increased scrutiny may motivate them to speak out. Each individual success provides one of the following pieces of information. Not all of them are helpful, or even truthful, but some can lead the PCs to discovering other clues.

- "That Void priest and her lot. They're the talk of the Court, but how can you trust people that just want to bring everything to an end? Why do they stay? What do they want from us?"
- "The vodyanoi ambassador—I don't trust him. He hardly speaks to anyone, just stays in his room soaking in a tub, or floats out in the garden fountain, defiling it with his filth. Plus, I heard the vodyanoi are all shapeshifters. How can you trust anyone that can *look like* anyone?"
- "The king's tired of Lady Vindesol. She just wouldn't take the hint and leave. Perhaps this is his way of getting her to go, and he's just looking for a convenient scapegoat."
- "Vares *the Silent*, indeed! I could have sworn I heard his voice nattering away in the library."
- "I wonder where all the gnomes have gone. Court's usually full of them. Normally can't turn a corner without tripping over one of the little scoundrels. But I can't remember the last time I saw one."

Where Have All the Wyrd Gnomes Gone?

An unusual occurrence related to the murder is the distinct lack of wyrd gnomes (***Book of Ebon Tides***) in the palace. This fact may go unnoticed by anyone unfamiliar with the Court of the Pale Roses. But the court normally has a large population of wyrd gnomes—approximately 1,300 of them live within King Frulio's territory—and their numbers are higher than any other represented race in the court. Despite this, only three are currently in residence at the Rose Palace: the sommelier, the assistant to the Royal Gardener, and the king's fool. So where are they?

One effect of the psychic abilities of wyrd gnomes is their precognitive abilities grow more powerful when they gather in numbers. This increased psychic power can manifest in several ways, including shared prophetic dreams. This is exactly what happened here. The wyrd gnomes present in the palace all had the same dream one night, a dream in which a female elf was pulled into the fountain by a great, watery hand and drowned. After this, Permessa, the crinaea that lives in the garden fountain, rose from the waters. Then King Frulio appeared with a broken wine bottle, using it remove the heart of the crinaea, and the water of the fountain turned to blood.

Most of the wyrd gnomes working in the palace decided it would be best to be elsewhere for a few days, taking leave publicly or surreptitiously. Arla, the assistant to the Royal Gardner, stayed because she was ordered to do so. Orryn, the sommelier, remains out of a sense of duty, as the broken wine bottle gave him a sense that wine would play some part in the impending tragedy the dream foretold, and he might be able to divert or reduce the effect of the event if he remained on site, as all wine in the palace goes through him first. As for Anwicket—the king never goes anywhere without his fool, and thus she remains.

If a player specifically asks about wyrd gnomes, or their character succeeds at any ability check to recall anything regarding the population numbers of the Court of Pale Roses, then allow that PC to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check to realize the lack of wyrd gnomes on the palace grounds is highly unusual.

NOTABLE NPCS

There are several important personages, interesting characters, and suspicious figures within the palace, and the PCs' interpretation of clues, statements from interviews, or hunches may lead them to interact with these individuals.

ANWICKET FOLLY, KING'S FOOL (CN wyrd gnome bard)

The wyrd gnome Anwicket is the king's fool; she dresses the part, wearing a harlequin outfit of full motley, carrying her scepter of office—a wooden stick topped with a stuffed monkey's head—and a belled cap hiding the white stubble on her head. Anwicket is King Frulio's constant companion and there is nothing of the king's business she does not know. However, though she is the king's fool, she is not foolish. She keeps the king's confidence and uses her position to sow humility among the ranks of the courtiers and keep her position within the court secure. Her antics are carefully considered and delivered for full effect without causing great waves in court or greatly angering those that could strike back at her later.

The Murder. If questioned about the murder, her answers are oblique, sometimes addressing the issue without providing any real context the PCs are likely to understand. As a wyrd gnome, she had the same premonitory dream as the others of her race (see "Where Have All the Wyrd Gnomes Gone?" sidebar) and has determined who the likely culprit is.

Permessa. Anwicket considers Permessa a dear friend and wants no part in exposing her guilt; yet she feels compelled to always speak some portion of truth. For example, if the PCs ask her if she knows the identity of the murderer, Anwicket might answer back with, "Someone with poor taste in wine?" If questioned directly about Permessa, Anwicket simply advises them, "Don't get wet trying to talk to her. You might catch your death."

Dobrilo. If asked about Dobrilo, on the other hand, Anwicket likely provides more tantalizing answers, though again, no outright lies. She has been trying to figure out the vodyanoi's game since his arrival and would love for him to run afoul of the king's anger. A question about the vodyanoi and whether he might have a hand in the murder could provoke a response of, "That one seems like he might have a hand in many things. Worth keeping an eye on, in my opinion. Just mind the smell."



DOBRILO, VODYANOI AMBASSADOR (NE vodyanoi ambassador)

Dobrilo is a member of the vodyanoi race, ostensibly at the Rose Palace as an ambassador of his people, a small tribe of aquatic shapeshifters that lives at the bottom of a lake. However, he is also attempting to discover the location of something called the Somering Well, which is said to flow from a planar spring with great powers of fertility and growth. He wishes to ascertain the whereabouts of the well so that his people can harness the inherent magic of its icy waters to their own advantage. Thus far, he has been unable to uncover the information he seeks.

Gilfrith. Dobrilo finds the murder to be an annoyance, as the increased scrutiny of the guests is interfering with his mission. He likewise finds Gilfrith to be a pest and a bore and is happy to cast aspersions on the steward if questioned about the murder. He mentions the obsessive nature with which Gilfrith pursued the handmaiden, constantly sending her messages (true) and becoming enraged when she spurned him (false).

EILLYN, LADY VINDESOL'S HANDMAID (CG high elf commoner)

Since Eillyn is deceased, the PCs can't speak with her directly (unless they attempt to use *speak with dead* or other magic to do so), but some of this background may be useful to the GM for determining how some of the finer nuances of the mystery play out.

Eillyn had been with Lady Vindesol for many years, having come to her service very young. When they were home in the Summer Lands, the Lady was always an extraordinarily kind and generous person. But when the Lady was stressed, she could sometimes be unkind—particularly to servants or commoners not in her employ. Unfortunately, the Lady was *always* stressed when she traveled—and particularly when she was courting, as she was on this trip to the Rose Palace.

And so, it had not surprised Eillyn when, from the hall, she overheard the lady speaking harshly to Thasim; the lady had asked for a specific vintage of wine that she knew was in the palace wine cellar, but she had to repeat the name of the wine she wanted three times, and Thasim still got it wrong when she repeated it back.

Royal Taster. Eillyn had once heard about an incident some years ago—perhaps apocryphal (though Eillyn believed it)—in which a servant had slipped some bloodroot herb into a lord's wine as revenge over some unkind remarks, which resulted in a night of extensive, horrible vomiting for the noble. Eillyn wished for nothing like that to ever befall her lady, and so, ever since hearing this tale, she'd taken it upon herself to serve as a de facto royal taster for her.

ELLEC ISH-VARDES, MISTRESS OF THE CLOISTERS (NE satarre priest)

The Mistress of the Cloisters is a satarre **priest** and cleric of Vardesain (or any dark domain). As her cult is currently in vogue among the Court of the Pale Roses, she has deigned to accompany the king here to his vacation palace. She can typically be found in the guest chapel (area 10), which has been decorated with the trappings of her cult.

The Murder. A true nihilist, Ellec has little care whether the murder is solved or not and is currently enjoying the chaos surrounding the incident. If questioned about the murder, Ellec goes so far as to suggest that what may appear to be murder might instead be suicide.

Eillyn. She intimates that Eillyn had recently been distraught over the overbearing advances from the king's manservant, Gilfrith. This is patently false, and Lady Vindesol, Gilfrith himself, or anyone familiar with Eillyn can tell the PCs otherwise.

FILKIN MULLIGET, PALACE SOMMELIER (LN wyrd gnome commoner)

Wyrd gnome Filkin Mulliget is the palace sommelier. If shown the remains of the wine bottle from Eillyn's room, he can account for it, saying that it left his stores sealed and in possession of a servant, along with a single goblet and tray. Unfortunately, he can't remember which servant it was. He's sure it was a woman. Definitely not a gnome. He's fairly certain she had dark hair.

GILFRITH, KING'S MANSERVANT (N shadow-touched servant)

Gilfrith is a shadow-touched **commoner**. Once a mortal man, he ran afoul of King Frulio; to avoid retribution, he agreed to a foolish bargain that saw him transformed and bound to Frulio's service indefinitely. While Gilfrith is incapable of disobeying his master's commands, his loyalty is entirely a product of the magic that binds him. He speaks no ill will of his master but maintains enough of his own will that his repressed emotions often show on his expressive face, typically in some sort of horrible grimace or twisted frown. He has been ordered by the king to make himself available to the PCs, and assist them in any way in which he is capable, unless directly countermanded by the king himself or due to an already standing order. (For example, if the PCs wanted access to the king's chambers, they would have to provide a convincing argument or evidence that it was necessary to further their investigation. Even then, Gilfrith would have to seek Frulio's express permission first before granting them access.) In other words, nothing that might compromise the king's safety or his plans is permissible without first receiving the king's leave. Otherwise, Gilfrith is bound to do whatever the PCs ask so long as it will further their investigation.

Eillyn. Gilfrith was enamored with the victim, Eillyn. If confronted over his spurned attempts to woo her, he admits to being heartbroken but not angry. He says she was not unkind when she rebuffed his advances, and he is adamant that he didn't wish her dead or any ill will.



Lady Vindesol. If asked about Lady Vindesol, a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check prompts Gilfrith to say that he didn't know Lady Vindesol very well—she was not the kind to mix casually with servants—but he knows that Eillyn was extremely devoted to her. After initially demurring to speak further on the subject, another successful Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check, now DC 15, prompts Gilfrith to acknowledge that he had heard some of the servants grumbling that Lady Vindesol was sometimes unkind; he (honestly) can't remember who it was that was complaining.

KING FRULIO CORNUTUS (LN shadow fey first servant of Hecate)

King Frulio Cornutus—the Duke of Roses, the Count of Spiders, the Lord of Illusions, the Lord Mayor of Lurgestown, and the Baron of the Void Immaculate—is a young and vigorous shadow fey whose obsession with arcane workings and enchantments brings him many willing followers . . . and a number of those who pretend to some arcane knowledge but whose true purpose is spying for weakness at the court. He is unmarried but is currently wooing Lady Vindesol.

LADY VINDESOL OF THE LINDEN TREE (CG high elf mage)

The puckish Lady Vindesol of the Linden Tree hails from the Summer Lands. The high elven mage has been a guest of the king's for quite some time—long enough that some suspect she has perhaps worn out her welcome. Since the murder, she has removed herself to a guest room in the domestic wing until she is ready to depart the palace. A pair of the king's guards watch over her door, and she has a bodyguard with her at all times.

Eillyn. The lady is distraught over her handmaid's death but cannot think of any reason why someone would kill her. She last saw Eillyn alive about an hour before her body was found. (She had left the room after ordering her wine to find King Frulio to request some sort of entertainment or diversion.)

Royal Taster. Lady Vindesol doesn't know what Eillyn thought she was doing, taking a drink from her wine chalice like that; it wasn't like her to do anything of the sort. If this line of questioning comes up, it quickly becomes clear that, until that moment, the lady had not considered that the poison might have been intended for her.

Wine Order. If asked about the wine, Lady Vindesol remembers ordering an exceedingly dull-witted servant to bring her a bottle of "Year of One Hundred Sorrows Eternal Twilight Lethe Noir" (a Wine of the Summer Court varietal), and that she had to say the name of the wine *several* times because the servant kept repeating it back wrong. The Lady confesses that she might have barked at the servant a bit after that. She also confides that being away from home always causes her a great deal of mental disquietude and that leads to her sometimes being terse with people. Finally, she notes that the girl took so long to fetch the bottle that she forgot it was even coming and as a result left the room before it arrived.

Sleeping Arrangements. If questioned about where she spent the night—since it clearly wasn't in her room, else *she* would have discovered Eillyn's body—the Lady blushes and will initially try to deflect, before finally confirming that yes, she spent the night elsewhere. If pressed, she becomes momentarily

flustered, before turning affronted, saying things like, "I'm sure where I lay my head at night is none of your concern" and so on. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception or Intimidation) check can get the lady to admit she spent the night in the king's chambers, but after that she insists the PCs leave.

OLMED CARROSO, KING'S ALCHEMIST (N human mage)

Alchemist-in-Chief of the Court, Olmed is a human mage. He can be of assistance to the PCs if they need anything analyzed, such as the poison found at the scene, testing to determine if Eillyn actually died of poisoning, determining the nature of the poison, or similar tasks. Olmed complies, but only grudgingly; he would rather be working on his personal projects in his lab and leave such chores to his colleague—Igo Natterbutt, wyrd gnome and Chancellor of the Royal College Alchemical—who enjoys such work and is more skilled with poisons. However, Igo left the palace suddenly to return to the college, citing an emergency, several days before the murder. Olmed is irritated because they were working on experiments together that now must be put on hold until Igo's return.

PERMESSA (N crinaea)

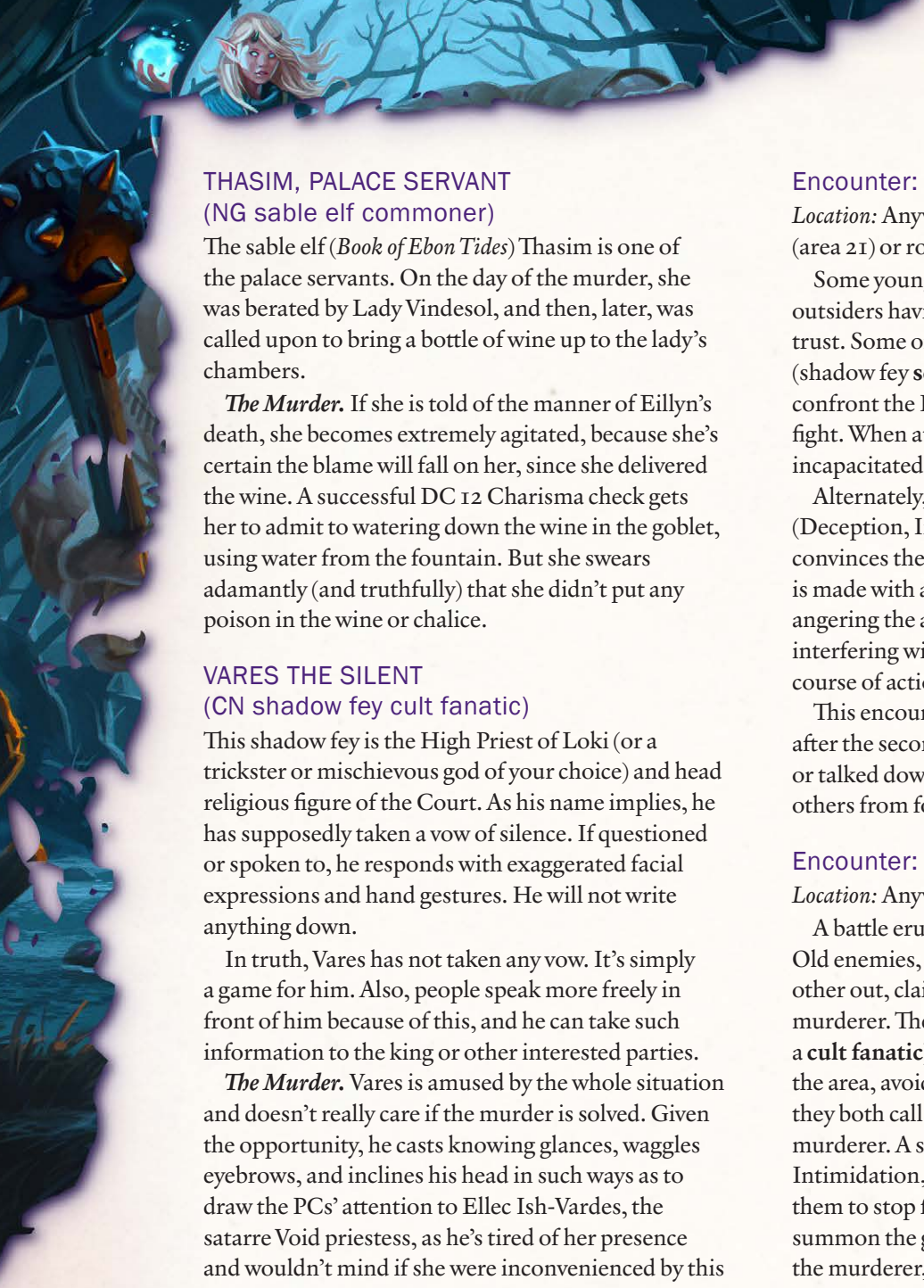
Permessa is a **crinaea,** which are nymph-like water fey who look as if they are made of water and plants and inhabit small bodies of water such as wells and fountains. Permessa inhabits the fountain at the center of the palace garden (area 25). A gregarious and kind soul, Permessa loves to speak with those who visit her fountain. She listens to the gossip of the servants as they come and go, fetching water, and speaks with them about their duties and their day. Visitors are typically a special treat for her, allowing her to hear about the wide world beyond the palace and her little pool.

While highly intelligent, Permessa's emotions are volatile and she is quick to feel things and feels them to a degree beyond which most mortals could even conceive of.

Thasim. Thasim, the sable elf servant, is a close friend of Permessa's. Lady Vindesol's treatment of Thasim enraged Permessa, and in the heat of that rage, she bestowed her curse.

The Murder. Cornered by strangers with evidence of her part in Eillyn's death, Permessa may lash out in fear of her discovery unless the PCs are careful in how they speak to her, such as having people Permessa considers friends accompany them when they question her, such as Thasim, Anwicket Folly, or Arla Mulliget (see "Encounter: Tactical Gardening" section).





THASIM, PALACE SERVANT (NG sable elf commoner)

The sable elf (*Book of Ebon Tides*) Thasim is one of the palace servants. On the day of the murder, she was berated by Lady Vindesol, and then, later, was called upon to bring a bottle of wine up to the lady's chambers.

The Murder. If she is told of the manner of Eillyn's death, she becomes extremely agitated, because she's certain the blame will fall on her, since she delivered the wine. A successful DC 12 Charisma check gets her to admit to watering down the wine in the goblet, using water from the fountain. But she swears adamantly (and truthfully) that she didn't put any poison in the wine or chalice.

VARES THE SILENT (CN shadow fey cult fanatic)

This shadow fey is the High Priest of Loki (or a trickster or mischievous god of your choice) and head religious figure of the Court. As his name implies, he has supposedly taken a vow of silence. If questioned or spoken to, he responds with exaggerated facial expressions and hand gestures. He will not write anything down.

In truth, Vares has not taken any vow. It's simply a game for him. Also, people speak more freely in front of him because of this, and he can take such information to the king or other interested parties.

The Murder. Vares is amused by the whole situation and doesn't really care if the murder is solved. Given the opportunity, he casts knowing glances, waggles eyebrows, and inclines his head in such ways as to draw the PCs' attention to Ellec Ish-Vardes, the satarre Void priestess, as he's tired of her presence and wouldn't mind if she were inconvenienced by this investigation.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE PALACE

While locked down and subdued due to the murder and the king's resulting anger, the Rose Palace is still filled with mercurial, mischievous, and scheming fey, and is a hotbed of intrigue and political machinations. As such, incidents inevitably occur that are peripheral or even completely unrelated to the PCs' investigation. Run as few or as many as you desire, simply by inserting the encounter in an appropriate locale when the PCs are present.

Encounter: Arrogant Knaves

Location: Anywhere other than the audience chamber (area 21) or rooms where guards are present.

Some young, brash shadow fey are upset with outsiders having the run of the palace and the king's trust. Some of these malcontents, four knaves (shadow fey **scouts**), armed with rapiers and daggers, confront the PCs and attempt to goad them into a fight. When at least two of their number are killed or incapacitated, the others attempt to flee.

Alternately, a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check convinces them to leave the party alone. This check is made with advantage if the PCs point out that angering the already incensed king further by interfering with his chosen agents may not be a wise course of action.

This encounter can be run more than once, but after the second time a group of knaves are defeated or talked down, their failure is enough to discourage others from following suit.

Encounter: Fey Battle

Location: Anywhere without guards present.

A battle erupts between two members of the court. Old enemies, one of them has decided to take the other out, claiming that that the defeated foe was the murderer. The two shadow fey (a **bandit captain** and a **cult fanatic**) engage in a running battle through the area, avoiding any guards. If they notice the PCs, they both call for help, saying they've discovered the murderer. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check is needed to get them to stop fighting, made with advantage if the PCs summon the guards. Both accuse the other of being the murderer, but neither is convincing, especially when they start giving details, which do not match the situation of Eillyn's death.

Encounter: Tactical Gardening

Location: Central Garden (area 25).

As the PCs are passing through the central garden, any PC whose passive Perception is 13 or higher (or announces they're making an active Perception check in the area) notices a disheveled wyrd gnome sitting on a small, marble bench under a willow tree to the northeast. Upon closer inspection, she appears to be bandaging her arm, where the cloth of her tunic is shredded and bloodied.

Arla Mulliget (NG wyrd gnome **commoner**) is Assistant to the Royal Gardner. If asked about her wounds, she is hesitant to speak about what happened. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Persuasion) check—made with advantage if the PCs take the time to heal the 6 damage she has taken—will convince her to open up to the PCs about her problems.

She is currently working the gardens alone, as the Royal Gardner, another wyrd gnome, took a sudden leave of absence. Unfortunately, a recent shipment of seedlings and cuttings contained a surprise: A pair of **children of the briar** (see appendix) stowed away in the crate and are now loose in the King's private garden (area 26). Arla has been unable to contain them herself and reluctant to seek assistance, worried she will be blamed for the problem. Thus far, they seem reluctant to leave the King's Garden. If the PCs agree to deal with the children of the briar for her, Arla tells them why the wyrd gnomes in the king's court have all disappeared, as well as describing the prophetic dream she—and presumably all the other wyrd gnomes stationed here at the Rose Palace—dreamed prior to the murder (see the "Where Are All the Wyrd Gnomes?" sidebar). Arla also mentions she fears for the safety of the crinaea Permessa. Arla says the crinaea is beloved by the residents of the palace, and she is a fiercely devoted friend to many of them.

If the PCs defeat the children of the briar, they find the crate in which they stowed away nearby. Carved into the wood inside, just beneath the upper lip of the crate, is a symbol: four lines in an octothorpe pattern, with a quartered circle in the square at the center. This symbol was to allow them to recognize another agent awaiting them on the inside. This symbol can be found in the vodyanoi ambassador's quarters (area 18), as he was to use these fey as additional agents in his task to secure a sample of the Somering Well water. If captured, the fey admit to being here to aid a spy, and they would know their contact by being shown that symbol. Such a symbol can be found in the guest room of Dobrilo, the vodyanoi ambassador.

Concluding the Adventure

The adventure ends when the PCs present their evidence to the king and pronounce the name of the guilty party. Wishing to bring an end to this embarrassing situation and provide some sort of solace to Lady Vindesol, King Frulio is willing to condemn anyone the PCs name as the guilty party, so long as they provide compelling evidence of their guilt. Should the PCs extract a confession from Permessa, the King is shocked and saddened and not unmoved by her pleas for mercy. Rather than kill her outright, he proclaims that her punishment shall be banishment, effective immediately. As she becomes weaker the longer she is away from her fountain home, this likely means her death anyway, unless she finds a new water source to bond with.

For their efforts, King Frulio awards the PCs 350 gp in assorted gems, as well as magic items from the king's personal collection. The PCs may choose any two of the following: a *bag of holding*, a *lantern of revealing*, a *mithral breastplate*, or a *wand of secrets*.

A Plea on Behalf of the Guilty

If the PCs discover that Permessa is guilty of Eillyn's murder, they are approached by Thasim, Arla Mulliget, and Anwicket Folly. They point out that Permessa is adored by the palace staff, and the incident was only her doing what she felt was necessary to redress a wrong done to her friend. They also infer that the king would be just as happy, or happier, with any other culprit for the murder. They suggest the PCs implicate Dobrilo, the vodyanoi ambassador. They are certain he has sinister motives. If his involvement with the children of the briar (see the "Encounter: Tactical Gardening" section) has been uncovered, the trio point to that as proof he means the Court of Pale Roses harm. Better an outsider with ill intentions pays the price than one of the king's own loyal subjects.

Should the PCs agree to this, they can approach Permessa and ask her to locate some water from her fountain in his quarters and turn it to poison. Its presence can be used as evidence against the vodyanoi, as the king's alchemist can confirm it is the same poison that killed Eillyn. As for motive, Anwicket Folly suggests he might have suspected that Eillyn had somehow learned of his plans here at the palace and sought to silence her before she brought her suspicions to the King. No matter who the PCs accuse as the guilty party, award them experience as if they had defeated a CR 3 creature.

Reflections and Remembrance

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 4TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In the Shadow Realm, beneath the night-dark boughs of the Blackwood Forest, wood and stone buildings have been built around the base of a tower constructed of jagged shards of mirrored glass. The tower's occupant, Fultaris of Arborin, sits in his chamber in an ensorcelled stupor, unable to do more than reflect on his decision to pay the Queen of Night and Magic an unsolicited compliment.

Fultaris' prison was a curiosity at first, but over time, the psychic emanations of his condition have changed the personalities and habits of the residents living nearby, and the reach of his anguish has only been increasing over time. News of the phenomenon has started to spread, and some fell denizen of the Shadow Realm will leverage it to its advantage if the heroes can't end it one way or another.

This adventure takes place in Blackwood, a dark forest located about midway between the Courts of the Shadow Fey and Corremel, in and around the environs of Brightsigh Tower. The characters must determine how to enter the tower and how to end Fultaris' punishment. The task is complicated by the automaton-like villagers and tower attendants, as well as a troupe of darakhul acting as agents for Vizorakh the Ravenous, an undead dragon of dread repute.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Select one of the following reasons for the characters to become drawn into this adventure, or make up one of your own, based on the needs of your campaign:

Hunter's Request. Hunters and trappers visiting the Hunt's Retreat near the Court of Night and Magic have noticed the humanoids that live around Brightsigh Tower, deep in the Blackwood, have been acting strangely. The Retreat's steward hires the PCs to investigate and stop the cause of this behavior.

Shadow Road to Danger. Traveling along a shadow road, the PCs are surprised when the road terminates at the edge of a cherry orchard with a strange tower at its center. The shadow road won't reappear until Fultaris' torment is ended.

Darakhul Intervention. While resting between adventures, the characters hear rumors about a strange tower made of broken glass. The conversation turns to the mad wizard and his unwilling, dominated servants who apparently reside in and around the tower. A man named Edvard (NE human darakhul **spy**) talks at length about the treasures fabled to be in the tower and urges capable heroes to join his expedition to delve the site.

The Blackwood

The Blackwood is a deep forest of approximately 300 square miles located south of the Courts of the Shadow Fey and north of Corremel. The forest is largely comprised of beech, oak, birch, pine, and fir trees, with many hawthorn bushes and ferns. Trees in the Blackwood are more gnarled than their counterparts on the Material Plane, and they grow more closely together. The tree canopy is thick with interlinked branches, so the forest floor almost never sees sunlight, wan as it is in the Shadow Realm.

Shadow fey nobles and their courtiers often visit the Blackwood to hunt for game or sport. The sound of their horns can be heard as they chase their quarry,

usually wild boar or whitetail deer, and the day's catch is dressed at camp. The Blackwood has claimed many lives, so undead are not uncommon among the trees.

TOWER ENVIRONS

Brightsigh Tower is in a cherry orchard near the center of the Blackwood. Despite the lack of sunlight, the trees produce bitter, red-black cherries, the juice of which is fermented into an unusual varietal of *wine of the winter court* (*Book of Ebon Tides*). The trees in the orchard are spaced around the tower so it stands in the center and has room for a number of stone and wood buildings that are interspersed in a rough circle around it. The tree canopy above the orchard is thinner than most other parts of the Blackwood.

Lighting. The portion of the Blackwood surrounding Brightsigh Tower is dimly lit regardless of the time of day or night. Unless otherwise noted, the interiors of the buildings surrounding the tower are dimly lit during the day and dark at night when the residents are abed.

Residents. Unless otherwise noted, the residents of the tower environs are unarmed **commoners.** They dress in sturdy woolen clothes and leather boots or clogs. Men favor tunics, breeches, and feathered caps, while women wear long-sleeved dresses, pinafores, and head scarves. Most women wear their hair in a single braid.

The commonfolk are polite and greet the PCs or engage them in meaningless small talk. They can't answer questions about anything occurring in the tower or outside the orchard, and they don't engage in gossip about the other residents.

The commonfolk have glazed and vacant eyes, their reactions are a touch too slow, and their conversation is stilted and unemotional. A character who observes the residents for a few hours can make a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Arcana) check to determine the residents are charmed; the check can be made with advantage if the PC specifically theorizes the residents are charmed.

If a PC delays a commoner for more than a few minutes, they politely excuse themselves and try to resume whatever activity they had been engaged in. If they are prevented from doing so, they become agitated and hasten their attempts to exit the situation. If there is no way for a resident to resume their daily activities, they attack the characters with whatever tool they are holding and fight until an avenue of escape opens.

Unless their life is directly threatened by an undead creature, the residents of Brightsigh Tower and its environs cannot see or otherwise sense undead.

Trees. The trees in the Blackwood are not vulnerable to fire damage. Most of the trees near Brightsigh Tower stand approximately 100 feet tall, but the cherry trees are significantly shorter, at a mere 35 feet in height.

Buildings. All the buildings near the tower, except the tower itself, are constructed of wood and granite.

Doors. Unless otherwise noted, all the interior and exterior doors in the settlement are made of wood with AC 15 and 27 hp and a damage threshold of 10.

1. A TOWER OF JAGGED GLASS

Standing 100 feet tall, Brightsigh Tower matches the height of the tallest surrounding trees and looms above the cherry trees and other structures in the orchard. The exterior of the tower is constructed entirely of jagged shards of mirrored glass set at random angles, and no door or other means of ingress is evident.

The magically constructed walls have AC 15, 500 hp per 5-foot-square section, and a damage threshold of 20. Damaged sections recover 70 (20d6) hp each day at midnight. There is no door into the tower, but access can be gained through the Fairy Ring at location 11.

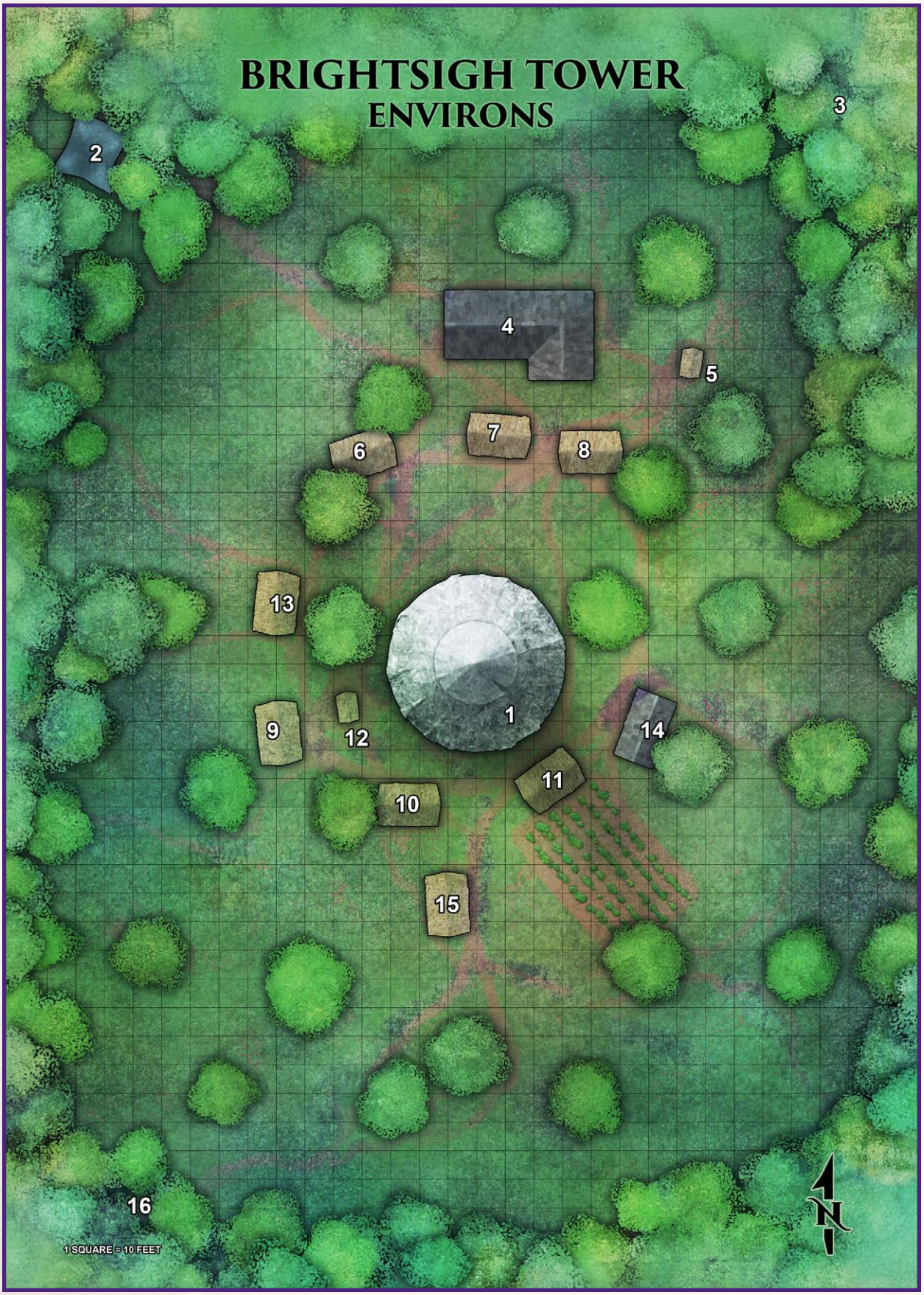
A creature that attempts to climb the tower can climb 15 feet per round without an ability check but takes 13 (2d12) points of slashing damage for each 5 feet it climbs. The shards are both silvered and magical. There is no painless way to climb the tower.

The lowest windows can be found at a height of 25 feet above the ground and are leaded shut. Each window has AC 15, 100 hp, and a damage threshold of 10.

The interior of the tower is detailed in the "Inside Brightsigh Tower" section later in this adventure.

2. DARAKHUL ENCAMPMENT

A small canopy has been erected in a narrow space between the trees here. From this bivouac, Vuto Baeez (LE **iron ghoul** [see appendix] commands six darakhul **veterans**). This group is part of a larger contingent serving Vizorakh the Ravenous, a powerful, undead dragon. It has commanded its agents to investigate the tower and surrounding area, discover what type of magic has caused the villagers to act in their strange manner, and discover (and capture) the source of the magic, if possible. If any


BRIGHTSIGH TOWER
ENVIRONS
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1 SQUARE = 10 FEET
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darakhul are destroyed, reinforcements arrive from their larger encampment in a day and a half.

The darakhul observe the PCs and interact with them if approached. They reveal information as noted in the "What the Darakhul Know" section below and otherwise share generic observations about the area. If a darakhul is caught lying, it refuses to converse further with any of the characters. Until the tower has been investigated, the darakhul enter combat with the characters only in self-defense, and only if there is no way to flee the situation. A darakhul that flees returns to its camp after an hour has passed.

Treachery. Once the darakhul see that the residents are no longer acting unusually, they approach the party at their earliest opportunity. They are initially friendly, but once the PCs seem at ease, and Vuto feels they have no more information to impart, he gives the signal to attack. The darakhul fight to the death while Vuto still stands but have a 25% chance of fleeing on their turn each round if he is destroyed.

What the Darakhul Know

By the time the PCs arrive, the darakhul have been watching the settlement for a few days. Any of them can share the following information freely:

- They have been sent from Corremel to investigate the strange activities that have been reported in the area. The PCs can discern this lie by succeeding on a Wisdom (Insight) check opposed by the tale-teller's Charisma (Deception) check.
- Residents work in a silent and unnaturally mechanical fashion. The residents do not speak to the ghouls.

Any of the ghouls can also share the following information if the questioner succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check:

- There is a spirit of some sort in the woods at area 3. The darakhul hope to avoid conflict with it and haven't approached it. They are unsure if the creature is a ghost or some other type of undead.
- All their attempts to enter the tower have failed.
- One of their number was ordered to climb the tower to enter through a window. The unfortunate darakhul was torn to shreds by the tower walls.
- The residents of the settlement get angry if their routines are interfered with in any way.

Vuto Baeez alone can tell the PCs the following if a character succeeds on a DC 18 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check.

- The darakhul troop is also here to discover the fate of a darakhul who was sent to investigate the area over a year ago. If Sascha is returned to the camp, Vuto will pay the PCs 150 gp each. He doesn't mention that they intend to take anything interesting or magical—by force if necessary—when they leave.
- No one enters or leaves one of the houses west of the tower (area 13). They have observed a young male elf sleeping on a cot in the residence. The elf couldn't be roused. Vuto feels the elf is the key to entering the tower somehow, but despite attempting numerous, sometimes painful, methods of rousing him, the elf remains still.

You Look Fine Today, Your Grace, or, What's Going on Here?

The trouble in Brightsigh Tower and its environs stem from a comment Fultaris of Arborin, the prisoner of the tower, made to the Her Celestial Majesty Sarastra Aestruum years ago. At the urging of his attendant, Georges Hulbére, he approached the Queen at a gala and told her, "You look fine this evening, Your Grace."

The Queen of Night and Magic, offended by the generic compliment, used her ***Shadow Grimoire*** to ensorcel the elf lord and his staff. Despite the enchantment, Fultaris knows he affronted Sarastra, but he can't remember what he did or said. To break the enchantment, he must remember the words he spoke to the queen and write a formal letter of apology to her that must be delivered to Hypatia, the priestess at area 14.

Every person the PCs meet in this adventure—except the darakhul and their leader, Hypatia, Georges Hulbére, the ghost of Gretl, and Fultaris himself—greets them with, "You look fine today, Your Grace," every time they see them.

3. HAUNT SITE

For several years, Gretl Hulbére and Fultaris' son, Iann, met in this quiet thicket for a weekly rendezvous. When Gretl's husband, Georges, discovered her unfaithfulness, he paid a coven of hags to curse her lover to fall into an enchanted, nightmare-haunted slumber during their next tryst. While Gretl tried to rouse her sleeping paramour, Georges murdered her with a butcher's knife taken from the tower kitchen, cutting through the gold wedding band on her hand as she tried to fend him off. He then buried her body in a shallow grave beneath the roots of a nearby birch tree. Iann's unconscious form rests in the house at location 8.

Haunting Presence. Gretl is now a **ghost** who haunts the site every day from midday to sundown. She looks like an incorporeal shadow with hawkish features, talon-tipped fingers, and wearing the kind of old-fashioned dress Iann liked. If left undisturbed, she stares at a white-barked birch tree nearby. If spoken to, she points at the base of the tree and says:

"That is where it happened. That is where we did it. The circle is broken."

If she is questioned at length, Gretl becomes frustrated and attacks, focusing her fury on her interrogator. If her interrogator retreats into the orchard, she doesn't pursue them. If Gretl is destroyed, she reforms at the site with full hit points at noon the following day.

Quieting the Dead

Gretl can be put to rest in one of two ways:

Laid to Rest. The PCs can return Gretl's wedding band to her body and rebury her remains. The PCs can find her broken wedding band among her husband's belongings at area 7 in Brightsigh Tower. Her remains are buried among the roots on the south side of the birch tree she gestures to when she is spoken to.

- A character that makes a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check discerns that Gretl wants them to interact with the roots of the birch tree in some manner.
- A character that makes a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check can tell the scars on the birch tree's roots were made with a shovel.

Postmortem Vengeance. If the PCs prefer action, they can instead kill Gretl's husband, Georges, with the knife he murdered her with, then return the murder weapon to her ghost. The knife can be found in area 7 in Brightsigh Tower. When used as a weapon, the knife has the same statistics as a dagger, except it lacks the thrown property.



If Gretl is put to rest, she thanks the PCs and says:

"My husband, Georges, convinced Lord Fultaris to pay a compliment to Her Celestial Majesty Sarastra Aestruum. He knew the words would incense her, but he bade our lord say it anyway. Perhaps he remembers the exact words that were spoken. . . ."

Gretl then fades away.

4. VALSTITZ WINERY

The cherries harvested from the orchard are pressed and fermented into *wine of the winter court* in this building. The Valstitz family has run the winery for several generations, and this building predates the appearance of Brightsigh Tower and its prisoner, Fultaris of Arborin. The Valstitz family currently consists of patriarch Hans, his wife Marlies, and their teenaged children, Ortrud, Detlef, and Josefa. They live in quarters on the second floor of the winery. If encountered, they behave in the same strange manner as the other residents do.

The winery has two floors and a cellar. The first floor is the winery proper, containing tuns, barrels, corks, long-handled wooden spoons, and all the other equipment required to make wine. The cellar is accessed through a double-doored hatch in the floor. A fixed wooden ladder is used to go down into the cellar. Block and tackle are used to move full barrels of wine from the winery to the cellar and vice versa.

Wine Cellar. The cellar is used to store the wine fermenting in casks, as well as the bottled wine, until it can be transported to market. Several wheeled dollies are used to move the heavy wine barrels. If the characters explore the cellar, they find there are two cases, each holding twelve bottles of *wine of the winter court*. A bottle of the wine can be purchased from Hans or Marlies for 400 gp. Each bottle holds four servings of wine.

In addition to the usual effects of the wine, the first time a PC drinks it while in the settlement, they have a vision:

Your vision blurs for a moment, and when it comes back into focus, you are walking across a crowded ballroom toward a tall shadow fey wearing an immaculate black dress. You have the impression the room and other guests are also exquisitely appointed, though she is the only figure you can see clearly. As you draw nearer, she turns and casts her chilly gaze toward you. Just before either you or she can speak, the vision vanishes.

5. LETHE-TAINTED WELL

A three-foot-tall ring of stones here is bracketed by a pair of sturdy wooden posts topped with a small, wood-shingled roof. A bucket dangles from the fixed pulley attached to the crossbeam braced by the two posts. The cold, black water from this well is drawn from an underground tributary of the River Lethe.

A creature that drinks from this well must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion. Whether the creature makes the saving throw or not, it has the following vision:

You and a handsome shadow fey are standing on the periphery of a large ballroom. The room is full of nobles, courtiers, and servers, though a single figure commands your attention. "There she is," the shadow fey says with a gesture. "Remember, you must not be too effusive. Tell her she looks fine. She will know what you mean." The vision then fades like mist under a hot sun.

The residents of the area never drink from this well.

6–11. RESIDENCES

The commonfolk of the settlement live in these homes. On the exterior, each of the domiciles has stone walls that are 20 feet to a side, a peaked thatch roof, and a stonework chimney. A single small window allows what little light there is to filter into the room.

Inside, the homes are sparsely decorated, containing only the necessities of life: a wood stove, one small bed per person, work tools, a table with chairs, and kitchen utensils.

The living arrangements are as follows:

6. Alec LaRose and his wife Lorè (both human woodcutters).

7. Twyla Nygaard and her children Flora and Viola (all elfmarked; Twyla is a seamstress, and her daughters are weavers).

8. Thudra Hubblested (a dwarf cooper).

9. Cygnus and Xan Petalstar (both shadow fey hunters).

10. Paola Ghest (gnome jack of all trades), Tobin Krentz (shadow fey carpenter), and Loy Braid (minotaur mason).

11. Desmond and Ursula Dupaigne (both human gardeners).

12. WELL

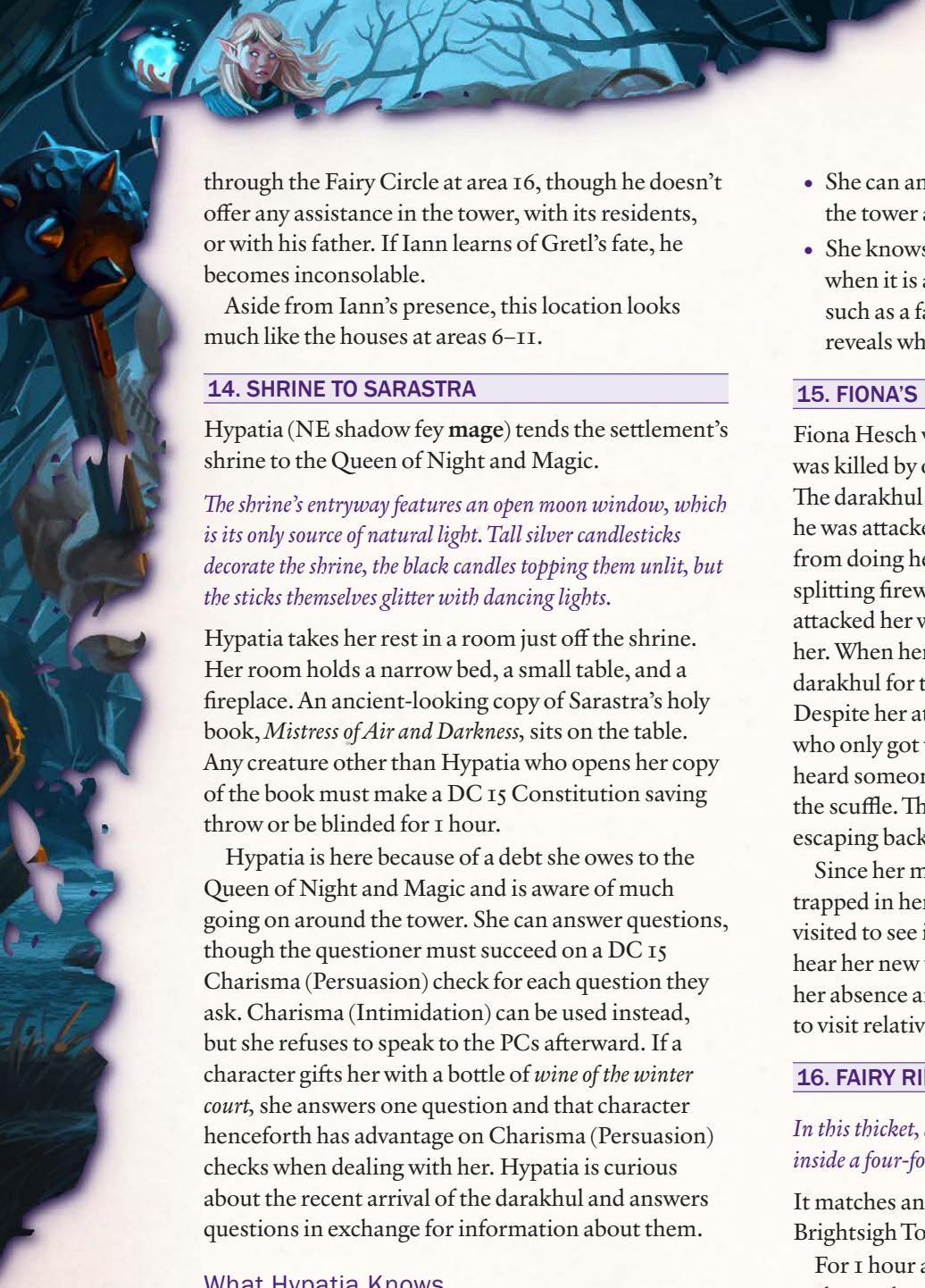
The water from this well is perfectly mundane and potable. The locals draw their water from here.

13. IANN'S HOUSE

The comatose body of Iann, Fultaris of Arborin's son, rests in this house. Iann was cursed to a nightmare-filled slumber at the behest of his lover's husband, Georges Hulbére. Any of the following wakes him from his enchanted sleep:

- Having *remove curse* or *greater restoration* cast upon him.
- Putting Gretl Hulbére's ghost to rest.
- Having his bare skin touched by the bare skin of an unmarried person. He becomes charmed by the person whose touch woke him.
- Slaying the hags who laid the curse upon him. The coven consists of a **green hag,** a **sea hag,** and a **night hag.** They live two miles north of Brightsigh Tower, toward the heart of the Blackwood.

Once he is awake, Iann (male elf **noble**) is charming and polite but otherwise like the other residents. He is happy to explain how to access Brightsigh Tower



through the Fairy Circle at area 16, though he doesn't offer any assistance in the tower, with its residents, or with his father. If Iann learns of Gretl's fate, he becomes inconsolable.

Aside from Iann's presence, this location looks much like the houses at areas 6–11.

14. SHRINE TO SARASTRA

Hypatia (NE shadow fey **mage**) tends the settlement's shrine to the Queen of Night and Magic.

The shrine's entryway features an open moon window, which is its only source of natural light. Tall silver candlesticks decorate the shrine, the black candles topping them unlit, but the sticks themselves glitter with dancing lights.

Hypatia takes her rest in a room just off the shrine. Her room holds a narrow bed, a small table, and a fireplace. An ancient-looking copy of Sarastra's holy book, *Mistress of Air and Darkness*, sits on the table. Any creature other than Hypatia who opens her copy of the book must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 hour.

Hypatia is here because of a debt she owes to the Queen of Night and Magic and is aware of much going on around the tower. She can answer questions, though the questioner must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check for each question they ask. Charisma (Intimidation) can be used instead, but she refuses to speak to the PCs afterward. If a character gifts her with a bottle of *wine of the winter court*, she answers one question and that character henceforth has advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks when dealing with her. Hypatia is curious about the recent arrival of the darakhul and answers questions in exchange for information about them.

What Hypatia Knows

Hypatia can answer the following questions:

- She can answer any questions about Fultaris, his punishment, and how to end it. She requires a significant commitment from each of the characters—an agreement for a year of servitude to the Queen of Night and Magic for example—to answer any questions about Fultaris.
- She knows the truth of Iann and Gretl's relationship, Gretl's murder, and where her body is buried. She knows where the hags who laid the curse on Iann reside. She does not know how to put Gretl's spirit to rest.
- She can answer questions about the residents of the tower and its environs.
- She knows about the Fairy Circle at area 16 and when it is active. She requires something valuable, such as a favor, from the questioner before she reveals when the ring can be used.

15. FIONA'S HOUSE

Fiona Hesch was the local washerwoman until she was killed by one of the darakhul camping at area 2. The darakhul told his commander, Vuto Baeez, that he was attacked by Fiona when he prevented her from doing her work. In fact, he saw a lone woman splitting firewood with no witnesses around, so he attacked her with the intention of killing and eating her. When her life was imperiled, Fiona saw the darakhul for the first time and defended herself. Despite her attempts, she was slain by the undead who only got to take a couple mouthfuls before he heard someone approach to investigate the noise of the scuffle. The darakhul hid Fiona in her hut before escaping back to his encampment.

Since her murder, Fiona has risen as a **ghast.** She is trapped in her house, and the few residents who have visited to see if she is available for washing can't see or hear her new undead form. They are unconcerned at her absence and explain it away as Fiona having gone to visit relatives.

16. FAIRY RING

In this thicket, a two-foot ring of indigo mushrooms sits inside a four-foot ring of assorted blue flowers.

It matches an identical pair of rings at area 1 inside Brightsigh Tower.

For 1 hour at noon, and again for 1 hour beginning at the stroke of midnight, the ring of mushrooms acts as a *teleportation circle* keyed to the ring at area 1 in the tower. If the characters step inside the circle of mushrooms at one of the specified times, they are transported from one ring to the other. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check can determine the purpose of the circle.

Inside Brightsigh Tower

The interior of Brightsigh Tower contains much of what the PCs would expect to find in a noble's home, as well as several things that seem out of place, or even absurd. Much of the tower seems grounded and real, but some areas feel less substantial and dreamlike.

Ceilings. Each of the tower's five levels has 25-foot-high ceilings.

Doors. Unless otherwise noted, all the tower's doors are made of wood with AC 15 and 27 hp, with a damage threshold of 10.

Lighting. Most rooms in Brightsigh Tower are magically illuminated. Unless otherwise noted, the rooms are brightly lit from 1 hour before breakfast in the morning to 2 hours after dinner in the evening. The rest of the time, they are dimly lit.

Servants. Unless otherwise noted, the servants inside the tower are all N elfmarked (or half-elf) **commoners.** They dress in Fultaris' family livery: a black wool suit braided in silver over a navy-blue linen shirt and navy-blue hose. The servants of the tower are all under the same curse as the residents of the tower environs and exhibit the same traits and quirks.

1. THE GLADE

The Fairy Ring in area 16 in the Tower Environs allows creatures to teleport to the corresponding Fairy Ring located in the southwest quadrant of this chamber.

As the last glimmers of teleportation magic fade around you, you find yourselves standing on a carpet of lush green grass, surrounded by a ring of indigo mushrooms. To the east is a well, and further beyond that is a small pavilion with a roof of black and red checkered shingles. Another pavilion, to the north, has a pure white roof. The room is lit as though the sun shines from above, and the air is fresh and sweet. Everywhere you look in this chamber, you can see large bushes loaded with ripe blueberries. Almost immediately after your arrival, you hear a song coming from the two pavilions.

Dangerous Walls. Thick, ropey vines studded with mirror shards climb the exterior walls of the glade as well as the large central column, blocking—and initially obscuring—the stairs going up. The vines have AC 15 and 150 hp per 5-foot section. Brushing against them or attacking them with a melee weapon deals 4 (1d8) slashing damage to the attacker.

Safe Refreshments. The blueberries are delicious and the water from the well is sweet. Characters can eat and drink their fill in the glade. The berry bushes are refreshed each morning at dawn.

False Fey

As soon as the PCs arrive, a satyr sitting beneath each pavilion starts playing its instrument in earnest and calling the newcomers over. Each of them is playing the same song, and each is as skilled as the other. The satyr the PCs choose not to approach jeers their decision loudly. The characters have disadvantage on Charisma checks when interacting with him for the rest of this adventure.

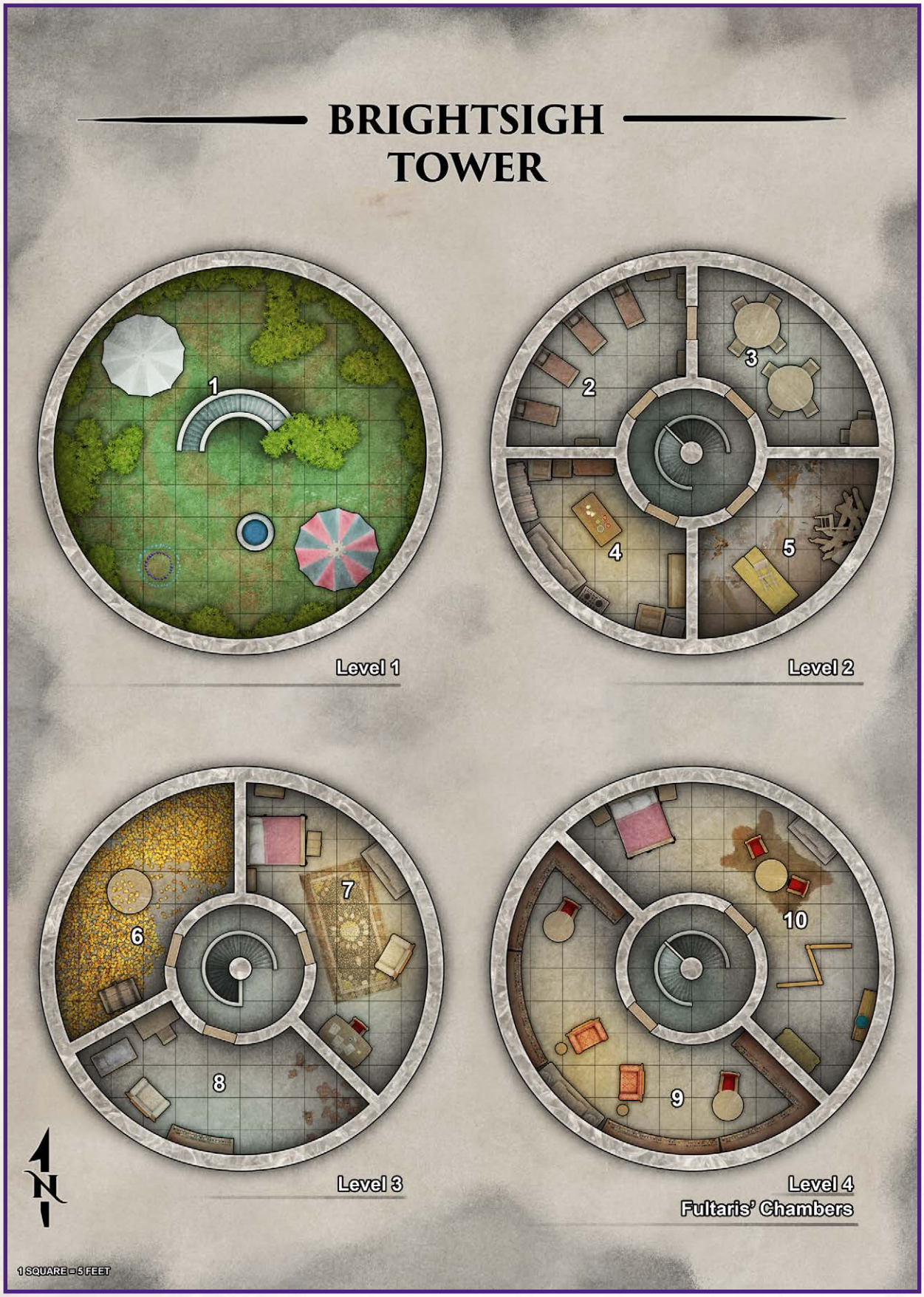
Ashes. A satyr with glossy black fur can be seen sitting, playing a harp, in the black and red pavilion to the east of the fairy ring. If Ashes is approached, he finishes his song with a flourish, closes the book of music he is using, and tells the PCs that if they kill Ambrose, he'll dispel the vines blocking the stairs. If Ashes perceives any attempt by the PCs to steal his book of music, or if he is attacked, he assumes his true form as a **barbed devil** and fights to the death.

Ambrose. In the pavilion with the white roof to the north of the fairy ring, a satyr with shaggy and unkempt white fur plays a hurdy-gurdy. If approached, Ambrose finishes his song and then greets the PCs politely. He then explains that he's not allowed to grant anyone access to the stairs leading to the rest of the tower. He confides he can make an exception if they retrieve his book of music for him, which Ashes, the other satyr, has stolen. If they fulfill his request, Ambrose gives each of the PCs a family insignia which allows them to pass the vines blocking the stairs unharmed. If Ambrose is attacked, he assumes his true form as a **unicorn** and fights to the death.

2. SERVANTS' QUARTERS

Fultaris' few living servants take their nightly rest in this room. It holds four narrow beds and wardrobes. Three of the wardrobes are unlocked and hold nothing but servants' livery. The northmost wardrobe is locked and can be opened with a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Inside, in addition to servants' livery, are two silver and emerald house insignias (worth 50 gp apiece), a *vicious shortsword*, 3 vials of serpent venom, and a half-used disguise kit.

The servants are: Dylainn Ventnor, Joichim Culdada, and Stanislaus Puetsche. The last bed belonged to Nole Freitzman, who was murdered by the **darakhul** intruder Sascha a year ago. His body can be found at area 5. If the other servants have occasion to speak about Nole's absence, they simply state he went to visit family.


BRIGHTSIGH TOWER
1
Level 1
2
3
4
5
Level 2
6
7
8
Level 3
9
10
Level 4
Fultaris' Chambers
N
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

3. SERVANTS' DINING ROOM

The servants take their meals and recreation in this chamber. This room is empty during the daytime and can be used as a place for the PCs to take a short rest without drawing attention or comment. After dinner, one of the servants typically plays the lyre while the others play a game of backgammon, draughts, or fox and geese. The game sets noted are of masterful quality (worth 100 gp each).

4. KITCHEN AND PANTRY

Fultaris' cook, Tatja Proulxe (N shadow fey **commoner**), prepares meals in this clean and well-stocked kitchen. Her pet rat, Nim, is an **imp** in disguise. Tatja is in a perpetually foul mood from Nim's nightly subliminal urgings to murder the living residents of the tower so he can be free of his obligations to the Queen of Night and Magic. She chases the PCs out of the kitchen if they spend more than a few moments in it. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check can make Tatja friendlier to the PCs temporarily, but such checks are made with disadvantage. If Nim is removed from Tatja's presence for longer than 24 hours, she becomes friendly to the characters and the other servants.

Tatja sleeps on a fold-out cot in front of the kitchen fire. There is a 20% chance of her being absent from the kitchen any time after dinner. In such instances, she is either visiting Ashes in the glade or Georges Hulbére in his chambers.

Pantry. If the pantry is searched, the PCs find a full set of cook's utensils and two bottles of *wine of the winter court*. On a shelf, they find Tatja's cookbook, and next to that is her journal, most of which details her series of dreams that revolve around strange, disembodied whispers in the dark. If a PC looking through her journal makes a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they can make out the impression of the written-then-erased statement, "*Georges did this to us. . . .*"

5. TRASH REPOSITORY

Piles of broken furniture, crumbling masonry, broken mirrors, and debris of all types litter every inch of this chamber. The floor is tilted at a ten-degree angle toward the exterior wall. Foul liquid pools on the floor, sitting waist deep at the northeast corner. The room reeks strongly of refuse, rot, and death, though the odor strangely hasn't passed beyond into the corridor or any of the other chambers.

Locked In. A living creature that sets foot in this room cannot leave it again unless they are wearing a house insignia.

Muck Raker. All the rubbish produced in the tower, including humanoid waste, is deposited in this chamber. Where the additional trash originated is unknown. An **otyugh** happily devours any offal and vegetable waste, though, like the humanoid residents, it cannot detect dead or undead creatures. The otyugh was once Fultaris' housekeeper, Fleur. She has forgotten most of her human life but is quite timid, even now. She remains hidden in the pool toward the wall when the PCs enter but attacks any living creature that tries to remove anything from the room or comes within the 10-foot reach of her tentacles.

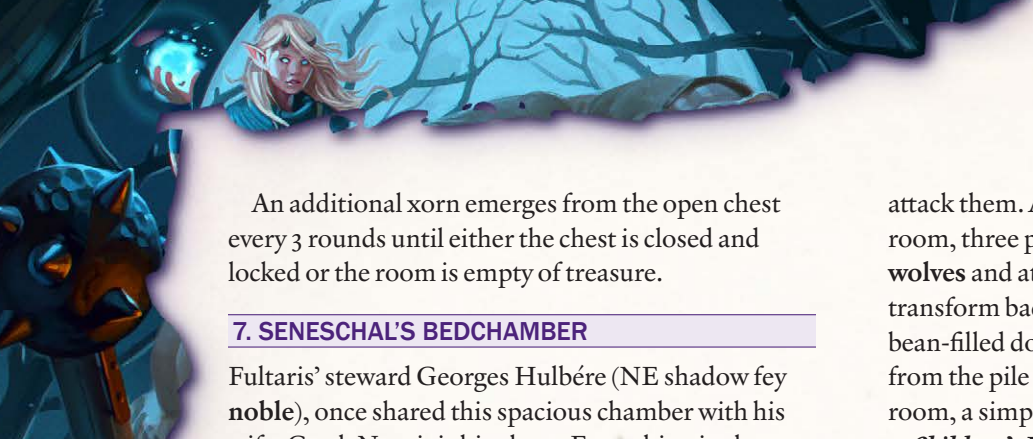
Unquiet Dead. If a living creature enters the chamber, the bodies of Nole Freitzman and Tatja's former kitchen assistant, Remy, animate and rise from the foul pool as bloated **ghasts.**

Child's Toy. If the PCs spend 30 minutes searching the room and succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they find a blue plush bear with mother-of-pearl eyes wearing a house insignia. The bear was beloved by Fultaris' son, Iann, when he was a child. If they give the toy to Fultaris, he becomes lucid for 1d6 hours.

6. TREASURY

The door to this chamber is locked, requiring either a successful DC 20 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools, or the key found in Fultaris' wardrobe, to open. Piles of gold coins and loose gems are scattered haphazardly across the floor of this room and a locked, iron-bound chest sits at the southern-most point. The entire room seems to glow from the light shining off the treasure.

Unwanted Guests. There are 3,635 gp scattered across this room and 2,150 gp worth of gemstones. The chest contains a portal to the Elemental Plane of Earth. If it is opened, requiring a successful DC 15 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools, a **xorn** emerges and immediately starts devouring the treasure. The xorn ignores conversation in favor of eating, though it defends itself. If attacked, the xorn engages in combat but continues using one of its claw attacks each round to instead scoop treasure into its maw. The xorn can consume 100 gp per claw attack it forgoes per round, or 300 gp per round if it forgoes all three claw attacks.



An additional xorn emerges from the open chest every 3 rounds until either the chest is closed and locked or the room is empty of treasure.

7. SENESCHAL'S BEDCHAMBER

Fultaris' steward Georges Hulbére (NE shadow fey **noble**), once shared this spacious chamber with his wife, Gretl. Now it is his alone. Everything in the room is opulent, from the thick rug, well-stuffed leather seats, thick feather bed and down duvet, and the finely polished wood furniture.

A Murderer's Tools. A locked, steel-bound trunk is located at the foot of the bed. A successful DC 20 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools can open the lock, as can the key Georges carries on his person. The trunk contains a moldering set of servant's livery, stiff and stained with dried blood, and a chef's knife, similarly tarnished.

Gretl's wardrobe, situated directly north of the bed, is too close to the bed to open easily. Sitting on the floor of the wardrobe, beneath her clothing, is her wedding band, which appears to have been cut with a blade.

A Broken Circle. Georges can be found in these quarters from just after dinner each day until the following morning. There is a 10% chance each evening he is visiting with Tatja, the cook. When questioned, Georges is cagy and vague, favoring lies to the truth. He pretends to be charmed, like the other servants, and if his deception is discovered (with a successful DC 15 Wisdom [Insight] check), he simply smiles and shrugs. He flees rather than fights, if possible, and only takes up arms if he has no escape.

8. GLYNN'S NURSERY

Fultaris' second-born son, Glynn, died as a toddler long before Fultaris' imprisonment in Brightsigh Tower. Fultaris' residual grief has caused this chamber to become a haunted replica of his son's nursery.

Half of this chamber holds a crib from which hangs a mobile depicting carved wooden angels chasing dragons, a rocking chair, a shelf holding many books, and a table upon which his garments were changed. The other half of the room is piled with stuffed toy animals of every imaginable variety, wooden soldiers, and toy weapons.

Violent Toys. If the characters spend more than 1 minute in the nursery, 12 **flying swords** spin into the air from the pile of toys. After another minute passes, if the PCs are still in the room, 4 of the wooden soldiers (use statistics for **awakened tree**) move to attack them. At the end of their third minute in the room, three plush wolves transform into **winter wolves** and attack. Once defeated, all the enemies transform back into toys; afterward, a sad-looking, bean-filled donkey—Glynn's favorite toy—walks from the pile and sags down in the center of the room, a simple toy once again.

Children's Books. The books on the bookshelves are beautifully illustrated, but the only words in any of the books are: "*You look fine this evening, Your Grace.*"

If the toy donkey is given to Fultaris, he becomes lucid for 1d6 hours.

9. LIBRARY

Shelves of books stretch from floor to ceiling. Two wheeled ladders, one on each side of the stone fireplace, allow readers to access books on the upper shelves. Flanking the fireplace are a pair of statues shaped like a robed elf sporting a confused look. A pair of comfortable chairs sits in front of the fire, each with a round side table to hold books. The north and south portions of the room each hold a larger round table with stools for easier research. The room is comfortably warm and smells faintly of cherry-scented tobacco.

Among the Stacks

Each of the thousands of volumes on the shelves, regardless of its title, contains a single repeated line: "'*You look fine this evening, Your Grace,' said Fultaris of Arborin.*"

Unabashed Fairkin. A single volume, titled *Unabashed Fairkin Not Given to Pryde*, contains a single line buried amidst the others: "*Fultaris you fool, if you offer me a sincere apology via my agent, and promise henceforth to never speak to me again, you may be freed.*" If *Unabashed Fairkin* is given to Fultaris, he becomes lucid for 1d6 hours. Finding this line requires a PC to spend 1d6 hours on the task and a successful DC 22 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

The shelves seem to ripple for a moment at the stroke of midnight as the books reshuffle their locations upon them. Books that have been removed from the shelves fly back to the shelf at this time.

Darakhul Agent. A frantic darakhul **veteran**, who was a trollkin in life, with a long, squared beard, is on the southern ladder pulling books from the shelves, slowly flipping pages while scanning the text, then dropping them to the ground. He mutters incomprehensibly to himself. Sascha abandoned his disguise as the servant Nole (whom he killed) ages ago, when he determined the people in the tower

couldn't see or hear him. He is searching through the stacks for anything that might set him free of the tower. He hasn't been able to leave since he offended the satyr Ambrose on his arrival in the glade; the unicorn swore to destroy Sascha should he ever set foot in the glade again, so the darakhul hasn't attempted to return to use the fairy ring to escape. Sascha takes no heed of the PCs as he thinks they can't perceive him. They must make a Charisma (Deception or Intimidation) check, contested by Sascha's Wisdom (Insight), to convince him they are not torments conjured by the tower. If the PCs try to physically stop Sascha's search, he unleashes a bloodcurdling scream and attacks until he dies, or they leave him alone.

Guardian. One of the statues flanking the fireplace is a **shield guardian.** If a character tries to damage a book or remove it from the library, the door closes and locks, and the guardian animates and attacks, ceasing only if the book is replaced upon a shelf.

10. FULTARIS' CHAMBER

A sense of sadness and loss permeates this well-appointed living chamber. Despite the luxuriousness of the furnishings and decorations and the lack of dust, the room feels abandoned and untended.

Fultaris of Arborin. Fultaris (LN elf **mage**) sits at a table in front of the fireplace. He stares vacantly, showing no indication he notices any of his surroundings. A meal and glass of wine sit untouched on the table before him.

Fultaris is lost in an incomplete reverie of his encounter with the Queen of Night and Magic. In this state, he cannot interact with the PCs. If he is made lucid, the characters can interact with him normally. If they can remind him of what he said to Sarastra, he can make his apologies and end everyone's torment.

Fultaris' Guardian. An **invisible stalker** watches Fultaris from its position beside the fireplace. If the PCs try to move or harm Fultaris, it springs to action, targeting spellcasters over other threats. If Fultaris becomes lucid, the elemental's debt to him is fulfilled, and it returns to the Plane of Air.

Treasure. If Fultaris is wakened to lucidity and ends his imprisonment, he allows the characters to keep any gold and gems they retrieved from the treasury. In addition, he offers them their choice of his *staff of charming* or his *ring of spell storing*, which currently has no spells stored within it.



Concluding the Adventure

Once Fultaris has apologized to the Queen of Night and Magic through her agent Hypatia, the residents and servants cease being charmed. They don't wish to talk about the time they have spent in the tower or its environs and seem embarrassed about the ordeal. They can also now see the undead, including the darakhul, if any are present. The tower itself dissipates in a vaporous funnel at the stroke of midnight following Fultaris' apology.

If Fultaris dies before he can apologize, Sarastra eventually visits the residents and offers them freedom in exchange for a favor of her choice at her time of choosing.



Big Briar's Blessings

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 4TH–5TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The umbral humans (also known as dark folk) that live in the village of Leer seem a little bit . . . *porcine*. They have a swine-like mien about their features, snort as they laugh, and have revolting table manners and odd little quirks that are more than a little . . . *farmyard*.

The pigs in the village are a different story. They seem quite human at times—they're pigs, of course, so they can't talk, signal, or communicate in any way a person could—but there's something oddly intelligent about the way they look at you. There is something going on behind those eyes, as if they're struggling with strange memories that they can't quite form properly into thoughts, no matter how hard they try. Oddly enough, if one were to count all the people and all of the pigs in the village, the number would be exactly the same.

This is because, in the village of Leer, sometimes the pigs become people and the people become pigs.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

This adventure works best if it is sprung unexpectedly on PCs. The sudden rush of children to their sides, as detailed in the "The Village of Leer" section, should disarm the ever-resourceful PCs, and the subsequent interaction should pique their interest enough for them to see what transpires.

If you prefer a stronger hook, the PCs may have heard tales of a marauding troll of great size and fearful toxicity menacing the countryside and are asked to dispose of it.

Aunt Crabapple's Curse

This unfortunate malady afflicting the people of Leer is caused by one of the residents: Aunt Crabapple, a hag whose curious curse is tied to this place.

She, like the other villagers, has a pig. Sometimes she lives in her dark folk body; sometimes her pig does . . . and vice versa. If one of the afflicted (or their pigs) dies, then their counterpart simply vanishes. Except in Aunt Crabapple's case, if *she* dies, her consciousness trades places with her counterpart. And she *remembers*.

When she dies—and she's died quite a few times—the villagers all shift from pig to person or vice versa. And though she remembers, when the new Aunt Crabapple rises, the rest of the village has no memory of Aunt Crabapple being the reason for this situation, allowing her to be reborn to rule the place once more, whether she is a pig as person or person as pig.

Only Aunt Crabapple knows why all this is happening, and she'll go to any lengths to hide her secret. She is a **mirror hag** (see appendix) and has lived many long lives in the village. Her pig self—which is currently in control—intends this phase to last a very long while and will do everything in her power to ensure no strangers are going to come into her village and unravel things. That's why she got rid of all the pesky mirrors that might unmask her; she likes them just as they are. . . .

The Leer pig minds are currently in people bodies—and have been for many years—and are enjoying life. Truth be told, they've been people for so long, they aren't entirely sure that they even *are* pigs. And thankfully, now is the time of the Blessings, when the unexpected protector of the village, the **briar troll**

(see appendix), whom the locals call "Big Briar," visits. Heralded by the strange arrival of her trollstone, Big Briar comes to take her *succulent* offerings: a trio of young, healthy pigs. When the—well, to call them *sacrifices* seems very dramatic, so let's call them *presents*—when the *presents* are taken, Big Briar leaves the village, and the threat of her presence in the nearby forest ensures the villagers will be left in peace for another season.

Aunt Crabapple is the only one who knows what's truly going on here. It's her curse, and to be truthful, she can barely recall how she came by it—something about being cast out of her coven and being bound to this place. She knows what the runes on the *Horrid Fetish* (area 9) say, but her thinking is that for now she may as well enjoy herself.

The very odd thing is that for every person in Leer there is a corresponding pig, and if something bad happens to one, something bad happens to the other. For example, if one dies, the other squeals and vanishes, never to be seen again. Likewise, each baby born in the village is marked by the birth of an adorable new piglet. It is simply the way of things, and the villagers don't find it particularly strange.

Crabapple keeps her "alter-pig" safely locked up in her grotto, just in case, because she fears that if both of her bodies die at the same time, this whole sorry mess might unravel and that could be the end of her. Which is true—kill the hag and her pig at the same time, and the curse is lifted.

Meet Aunt Crabapple. Crabapple looks like a kindly, if strange, old lady. Her sweaty breath comes in short, sharp gulps, and her nasal voice is littered with the odd, unwelcome snort, particularly when referring to the succulents. She laughs a lot and sings about blessings.

Meet the Locals. The locals are not bad (pigs); they go day-to-day foraging, and they fully accept that the *gifting* of a few lowly pigs occasionally to keep their troll happy is a small price to pay for privacy. Like the pigs, when the humans have their turn, their memories are clouded—they know something odd is going on, but Aunt Crabapple keeps them busy and distracted enough so that soon they forget. After a day or two, they accept things as they are—and assume it's how they always have been.

When the pigs are in the dark folk bodies (pigfolk), they can speak as a dark folk normally would, though they likely seem dull and unintelligent. When the dark folk are in the pig bodies (peopleswine), they cannot speak or otherwise communicate outside of normal pig noises.



Pigfolk and Peopleswine

The minds of the people of Leer are sometimes in their dark folk bodies and sometimes in pig bodies. Likewise, sometimes the minds of the pigs are in their own porcine bodies and sometimes they're in the dark folk bodies. This might understandably cause some confusion when running this adventure.

To help the GM (and players) keep this straight, in this adventure, when referring to pig-minds-in-people-bodies, we call those creatures "pigfolk"; when we're referring to people-minds-in-pig-bodies, we call those creatures "peopleswine."

Running the Adventure

Aunt Crabapple does not want strangers to know and talk about this place, so the PCs are in grave danger of being poisoned, paralyzed, and fed to the "Ravenous Troll" effigy (area 3) as a further present for Big Briar.

The Village of Leer

The PCs are wandering through a wood or forest after a hard day's travel, when suddenly they hear children giggling nearby. Within moments, a quartet of local children emerge from the trees and, laughing, lead the PCs by their hands into the village of Leer, which lies very close by.

If the PCs try to escape, a couple of locals spot the PCs, shout blessings, and invite the PCs to come rest. If need be, adult locals warn the PCs that beyond their village, the terrible *Night Things* lurk—creatures of enormous mouths, pointy claws and horribly bendy bones. They thrive in darkness, are drawn to pretty faces, and are best not faced without a decent meal, rest, and a hearty smile. If the PCs wish to continue their journey anyway, perhaps they become lost and find their way back to Leer. Or perhaps they face the terrible *Night Things* (whatever you decide they may be) and a very stiff fight, which may leave them longing for hearth, stew, and a good night's rest.

When PCs first see the village of Leer, read or paraphrase the following description:

A wide clearing opens up in the trees here, a space surrounding a short, sharp grassy hill and rocky tor. Around thirty hovels sag in the muddy clearing. Pigs wander about, but most are kept within a large pen by a duck pond. All about the grassy hill are dozens of low, simple tables and chairs. At the edge of the village is a small rocky tor with a wooden ladder leading to a cave, and a nearby waterfall flows down the cliff face and feeds the duck pond below.

The entire area dances with flowers, noise, and abundance, as the locals—who must number around a hundred—busy themselves preparing for some sort of celebration. They carry hefty trays, singing as youngsters throw bright powder paint at everything. Everyone is smiling or laughing or both.

At the heart of this color and spectacle, a single great wooden figure leers out of the sharp hill, its vast, toothy wooden head smiling broadly on a body the size of a small house. It stands on a great pile of dry timber. At this grotesque figure's feet are a trio of pigs, tied with ribbons, their flanks a vivid riot of powder paint.

No Mirrors

Crabapple has one weakness—a weakness that immediately unmasks her disguised form and reveals her as the hag she truly is: her reflection. She has taken pains to destroy every mirror in the village and then gone one step further: everything in the village that can reflect an image has been dulled. Apart, that is, from the reflections cast by pools of water, which is beyond even her talents to stop or prevent. Crabapple is careful to avoid such reflections, staying away from the duck pond (area 2) whenever possible.

A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check is needed to note the lack of reflective surfaces; reduce the DC to 15 if PCs are searching the village for clues. A similar check also notes that Crabapple always avoids the edges of the duck pond when moving about the village.

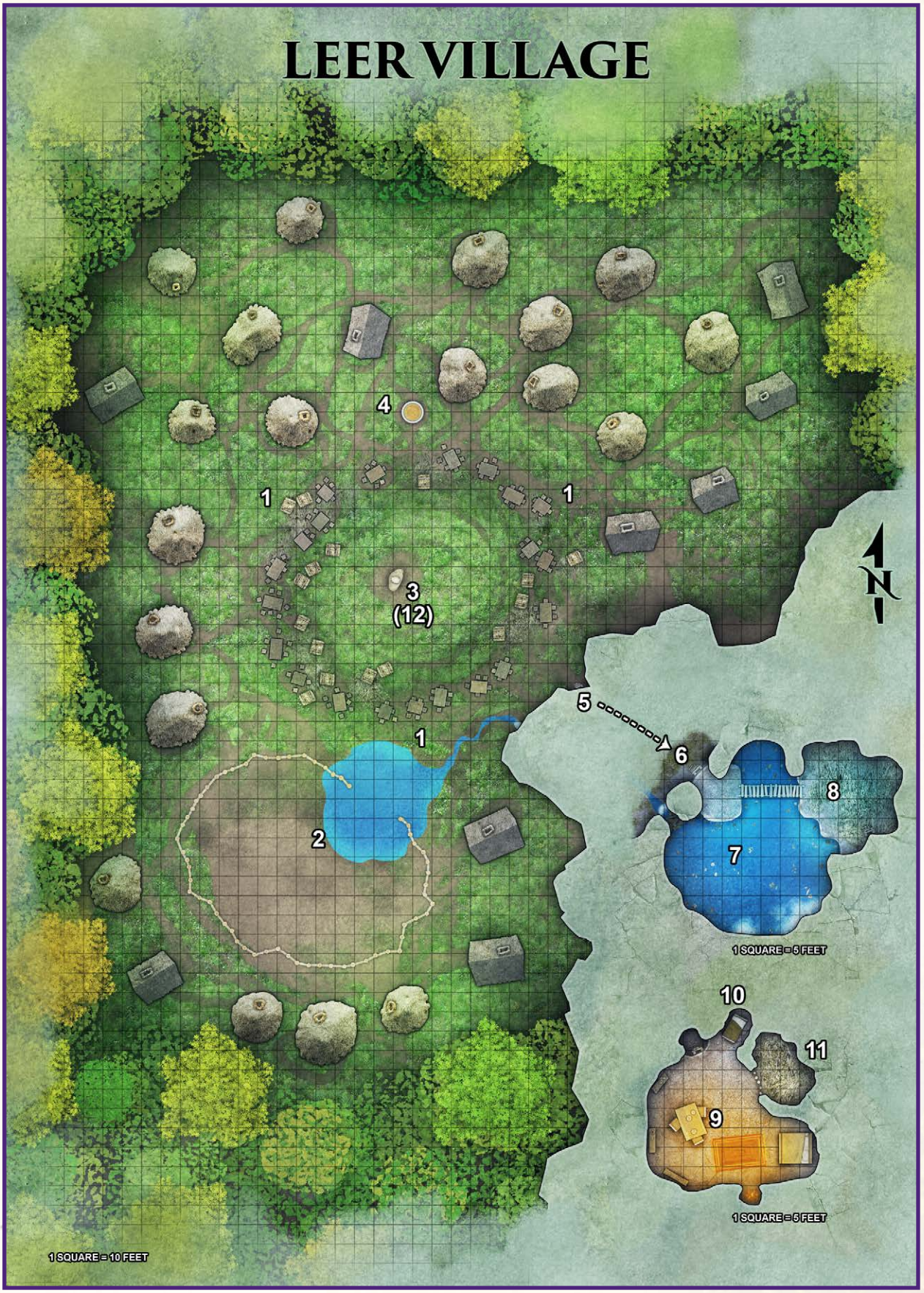
PCs bringing such surfaces into Leer—like a nice shiny breastplate or silver mirror, for example—are dangerous to Crabapple. If she even glimpses her reflection, she reverts to hag form (a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw allows her to avoid), in which case she teleports back to her boudoir in her grotto (area 9).

The locals view Crabapple as a kind, benevolent leader, an eccentric soul. Blatantly attacking her brings about their wrath, as well as that of her assistant, Young Todge. They defend her, provided they are not aware she is a hag.

Young Todge is an **alp** (*Creature Codex*; or substitute a shadow goblin **spy** with the changes noted below) who is frequently at Crabapple's side in the form of a mangy chicken, at least when he's not invisible and spying on the villagers. He is sometimes seen in his native form as an ugly young fey with a sneering grin who swings a pigstick at any pigs nearby. He has little loyalty to the hag but he is scared of what she might do if he doesn't help her in a fight, so he usually does.

The pair reside in Aunt Crabapple's grotto (area 5) but may be encountered anywhere in or around the village.

Creature Change. If you use the statistics for a shadow goblin in place of an alp, add the ability to cast *invisibility* at will.


LEER VILLAGE
4
1
1
3
(12)
1
2
5
6
8
7
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
10
11
9
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
N
1 SQUARE = 10 FEET

THE RESIDENTS

One hundred and nine dark folk make up the humanoid population of this seemingly happy village. One hundred and nine pigs also live there, though counting that many pigs is never easy. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check identifies the pigfolk as having a slightly porcine mien about them. Likewise, an identical check while examining or viewing the peopleswine notes they have an oddly humanoid aspect about them, as if a keen intelligence is behind their eyes.

Don't concern yourself too much about the way pigfolk behave. They are fairly human; they can speak as dark folk normally would but will likely be seen as very dull and unintelligent by the PCs. They tend to give themselves away during their leisure, especially after they have had some cider.

The pigfolk use what the humans left behind last time the changeover happened but don't have the ingenuity to grow crops, close doors, or repair things. They do understand the abundance of rotting apples hereabouts produces great amounts of cider, which they love, as it makes them giddy. They gather up the apples in a big vat (area 4) and squash them, serving up cider by the bucketload when it's ready—which is just as the PCs arrive in town.

They have worked out how to make fire and how to make an odd pottage of root vegetables, which they adore and serve in copious amounts, but never eat with any manners, restraint, or cutlery. They also sing songs (often forgetting the words) and play simple instruments, such as drums and whistles; with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the PCs notice this detail or any casual observation of the locals' curious manners and ways.

Spells That Affect Animals

Any spell that affects animals, including ***animal friendship*** and ***speak with animals,*** work on the pigfolk here presently (that is, the ***people*** in the village, who currently have pig minds), but ***not*** on the peopleswine (people minds inside pig bodies).

Spells such as ***charm person*** work on the peopleswine but ***not*** the pigfolk. Be a bit inventive in this ruling, using it to enhance the adventure's story rather than fixating too much on the rules. Using spells like this is risky, however, as detailed in Stranger Danger below.

The locals all have an extraordinarily good time, and, as sociable animals, love being around the PCs. But the PCs, of course, will likely want to sneak off or invent some excuse to get away even for a short time so as to investigate or chat with NPCs. A PC can extricate themself with a successful DC 12 ability check—which ability depends on what the PC wishes to attempt; each time a PC fails such a check, the DC goes up by 1 on subsequent attempts, as the locals begin to get a bit suspicious of the PCs' actions.

An Unlikely Protector

None of Leer's residents are frightened about the impending arrival of Big Briar, who is always heralded by the appearance of her *trollstone*. A trollstone is the same size as Big Briar and suddenly appears in town without warning. When the troll leaves, the trollstone vanishes some brief time later, though its disappearance is something no one ever pays any attention to. None of the PCs has ever heard of such a thing, but a PC who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (History or Nature) check knows enough about trolls to know that it is strange. The Leer villagers see the occasional gift of three pigs as an acceptable compromise for being left alone by the outside world and, in theory, are at least in some measure protected by Big Briar. If the PCs press to find out how often the troll appears, no one remembers very well when the last time was, but all feel it was a long time ago.

Village Olders

The village is ostensibly ruled by Aunt Crabapple, but she's too busy to do everything, so she has the help of several Olders. The dozen or so Olders of the village—the de-facto watch and moral compass—each carry a pigstick, an object of hefty holly wood affixed with tinkling bells, pig ears, snouts, trotters, and tails. The title "Older" is a misnomer, since the age range of the Olders is oddly wide. The rather spiteful young girl Bittersweet who delights in chasing and beating pigs is an Older, but so too is Eldon Liverwort, who is so old he can take a day to rise out of bed. The Olders all



love Crabapple—unless she reveals herself as a hag—and, although they are weak, they help her with minor tasks, one of which is detailed further below.

Stranger Danger

The PCs are, perhaps unknowingly, in considerable danger. Crabapple doesn't like strangers poking their noses into the village's affairs. She and her fellow locals like to keep this place just that—a *local* village for *local* people; they have no need of strangers. Strangers talk and might bring unwanted attention on the village.

Trouble occurs if a PC:

- casts *speak with animals*, *animal friendship*, or *charm person* to identify there is something odd going on in Leer.
- threatens any villager.
- shows too much interest in the pigs and starts asking awkward questions about them.
- becomes aware that when a pig or local dies, a corresponding pig or local vanishes accordingly.
- releases any of the succulents (area 3).

Something Special. If any of these events occur, Aunt Crabapple quietly orders the Older, Mrs. Grumpleswyne (area 1), to prepare "something special"—a local, poisonous Shadow Realm mushroom called a Beauteous Slumbercap, the essence of which is very difficult to smell or taste. If PCs keep a close eye on Mrs. Grumpleswyne, they can notice her adding the mushrooms to food or beverage with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check; closely observing Crabapple at work may also yield this information. Without such an action only a *detect poison and disease* spell or a DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check can detect the slight earthy smell of the mushroom in whatever food or beverage the PCs are given.

Beautiful Slumber. Grumpleswyne has enough Slumbercap essence for 12 doses. A *protection from poison* spell makes a PC immune to the effects, as do other types of poison protection. Unless protected, those consuming the mushroom in any way must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or be affected by the "beautiful slumber" when they next rest, falling into a deep sleep that only can only be ended by taking damage (at least 1 hp), or the use of a *lesser restoration* spell or a similar effect.

Unconscious PCs are wrapped in pig scarecrows (area 3), taken quietly by the Olders to the Ravenous Troll, and gagged and bound, ready for the arrival of Big Briar, at time the effigy is burnt. Such bindings are detailed in area 3 and in the Trollstone and the Briar Troll event, detailed further below.

HELPFUL LOCALS

The PCs can speak to locals about the village and its residents with a successful Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check, but any suggestion of something going on between pigs and locals is laughed off.

DC	Local Talk
10	Very popular is Aunt Crabapple! A fair and reasonable matriarch whom we all love and trust, along with the Olders! And that little friend of hers, Young Todge, helps tend her miraculous stone garden up in her grotto.
15	My, but she brings us big eggs! From those special two birds of hers, her fell poultry she calls them. They must be big, and she says they're too mean to be allowed out of her cave.
20	She keeps her favorite pig in the grotto with her always, dotes on her, they say. I hear she calls her My Little Crabapple when she thinks no one is listening. She must really love her!

1. THE PARTY FIELD

Scores of old straw bales, tables, and chairs lie scattered around the periphery of a hill here, on the top of which is a massive wooden effigy of some kind. Flowers, ribbons, and food abound in the cheery space, which is thronged with smiling folk.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices how battered everything is—tables, chairs, even the houses look like they haven't been tended for many years.

Mrs. Grumpleswyne, the best cook in the village, dishes up the fare from a huge table not far from the foot of the hill. This table is laden with goods, while nearby, a cauldron sits upon a roaring fire. The capable Older and cook is a good friend of Aunt Crabapple and may, in certain circumstances, lace the PCs' food and drink with the potent local poison (see "Stranger Danger" section above). A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a trio of enormous eggs—about the size of a human head—on this table, gifts from Aunt Crabapple, from her "special chickens."

See "Two Curious Clues" for information you can share with the PCs during the party.

2. THE GREAT STY AND DUCK POND

A huge, battered wood fence surrounds a muddy sty fed by a duck pond near the tor. Scores of pigs wallow happily within.

This is where most of the village pigs are kept, although several escape from time to time and wander about looking for food. Presently, the fence is secure and keeps in a pig formerly known as Charlock, who may be of some help to the PCs (see "Events" section below). When the PCs are investigating the sty, remember that spells that affect animals do not work on the peopleswine.

The pond is fed by the waterfall adjacent to Aunt Crabapple's Grotto (area 5); the water cascades down the tor, forming a stream that feeds into the pond.

3. THE RAVENOUS TROLL

Atop the large hill at the center of the village sits an enormous, wooden effigy in the shape of some sort of leering giant with a bulbous head. A ramshackle ladder leads up to the mouth of the figure, and the mouth of the effigy has been filled with stuffed sacks wearing horrid pig masks—some kind of "pig scarecrow." The earth surrounding the effigy shows signs of old charring.

Tied by ribbons to a stone post near the base of this structure are three young pigs.

The three succulents seem quite content to munch on the turnips scattered at the foot of the structure. The ribbons securing them to their posts are wrapped around more substantial pieces of rope to prevent them from running away. The ladder allows locals to easily feed the effigy—more wood or scarecrows—and are quite sound; they do not burn (perhaps they were made fire resistant by the peopleswine when they were ascendant) and should allow easy escape for any PCs who find themselves within the burning effigy (see "Events" section below).

The land here is charred from previous effigies, and several giant footprints (belonging to Big Briar) exist nearby, heading away from the effigy and the village.

4. THE CIDER VAT

The smell of fermentation hits you long before you see the massive stone cistern full of crushed, fermenting apples standing in a small clearing between houses.

5. AUNT CRABAPPLE'S GROTTO

A rickety ladder leans up against the cliff face here and rises twenty feet to a cave opening in the face of the tor. Flecks of water from the adjacent waterfall spatter your faces as you survey the area.

6. ENTRANCE

The ladder ends at a narrow shelf of rock at the entrance to the grotto, beyond which is a wide cavernous area. The entire east and south walls form a magnificent waterfall that cascades into the chamber and out through gaps in the rock down to the village below. A cave opening lies across the vast, dark pool; there is a large wooden gate there.

Crabapple pulls the ladder up after her when she goes into her cave and then also uses the ladder as a bridge to get across the dark pool (area 7) to the cavern above (area 8).

7. THE PETRIFYING WELL

This waterfall is crammed with slowly petrifying objects—you make out countless curiosities, from dolls to kettles, cartwheels to scissors.

The petrifying well is a natural curiosity that slowly coats objects in mineral deposits.

The water in the cave is cool but not deep, barely 4 feet in most places, but the floor below is slippery; PCs trying to move in the water must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity check each round or fall prone. Crabapple uses the ladder from area 6 as a makeshift bridge, fixing it to two raised stones so it lies as indicated on the map.

If Crabapple is chased into this area (or hiding here), she throws the ladder into the water and leaves the gate into area 8 open, though the creatures within don't like water much so stay there unless they hear potential prey.

Treasure. Most of the petrifying objects are mundane items with no value, but among them is a very large silver candlestick engraved with the image of a skunk eating bees (worth 300 gp) and a glass lampshade covered in pictures of bugbears playing harpsicords (worth 175 gp). Both objects are partially stone-covered, and a successful DC 10 Dexterity check is required to clean them; if an object is not cleaned, or the check to clean it fails, it is worth half its listed value.

8. CHICKEN COOP

Beyond a 5-foot-high gate with a simple latch, you see a large chamber with rough walls of natural stone, the floor of which is covered with straw and feathers, and the entire area reeks of feces and rot. Inside are a pair of enormous chickens with black and white plumage, though the white feathers are so covered in filth that the original color is like some long-forgotten memory. When the creatures see you, they both make quizzical squawks then rush forward to attack.

Two of Crabapple's chickens reside here. The birds are perpetually cross and hungry, and if the gateway into area 7 is left open, they rush out to attack anything that looks or sounds edible. The creatures ignore Crabapple as she feeds them well on moles, hedgehogs, and the occasional piglet.

The coop is a foul place of straw, half eaten things, and perhaps a huge egg. A ladder gives access 20 feet up to area 9. Again, a fleeing or hiding Crabapple draws the ladder up, necessitating a climb like the one at area 6.

Creatures. Two of Crabapple's Chickens. Use the statistics of **terror birds** (*Creature Codex*; or substitute **griffons** with the changes noted below).

Creature Change. If you use the statistics for a griffon in place of a terror bird, add pack tactics but remove the fly speed.

9. A HAG'S BOUDOIR

You climb up the ladder into what is a remarkably civilized space. The walls are rough and natural, as in the room below, but you see a small, rustic kitchen; a lit fireplace, before which is a fur rug; and a comfortable-looking bed. There are two side chambers; one, to the north, contains a cot, and the other, larger, chamber to the northeast has a wooden gate across it; it smells of farmyard, and you can see an enormous pig inside.

This is Crabapple's home, a very comfortable space indeed. The two side chambers are areas 10 and 11, described below.

Treasure. Inside a trunk at the foot of the bed, there is a tiny three-headed mermaid in a glass jar (worth 150 gp), and the central mermaid in the jar wears an incredibly dirty *ring of feather falling* around her neck. Also in the trunk, within an old leather glove, is a very fine opal (worth 1,500 gp). The rug in front of the fireplace is the fur of a dire wolf (worth 100 gp). In a very well-hidden recess just above the bed (requiring a successful DC 20 Wisdom [Perception] or Intelligence [Investigation] check to locate) is the *Horrid Fetish.*

The Horrid Fetish. The fetish is a revolting, leathery thing that looks a bit like a child's doll, but with a bloated, leering face surrounded by thick matted hair, which sits atop a long, thin bone onto which are carved a series of runes. Flaccid arms and legs made of hair dangle preposterously at its side. The entire foul object is very brittle and flammable.

The runes are very difficult to read and initially make no sense. However, a PC making a successful DC 12 Intelligence check notices the runes are stylized and reversed. Holding them before a mirror, or transcribing them in reverse, allows the words to be read:

We curse you foul sister
to forever wallow with swine
for your sloth we twist you
now our miseries shall be thine

shift from woman to beast
and when you can no longer abide
burn this, the curse shall cease
but remember the cost of pride

If the fetish is burned (which it does easily) Aunt Crabapple and her pig burn with it, immolating entirely in 3 rounds, leaving behind an unpleasant smell of sweat and roast pork. See Concluding the Adventure for more information.

Angry Locals

At various stages in the adventure, the PCs may anger the locals. The local mob is not a great fighting unit, but merely a group of angry commoners armed variously with clubs, pitchforks, and things they can throw like rocks or knives. This mob acts like a **bar brawl** (see appendix), but without the ***liquid courage*** ability. Unless PCs stipulate that they are not using lethal attacks, when the brawl reaches 0 hp, the battle results in 1d4 + 1 locals dead, and, out of sight, a similar number of pigs squeal and vanish, never to be seen again. The mob, once overpowered, are unable to form a coherent force again for the remainder of the adventure but still interact as NPCs (e.g., to shout disapproval, etc.). If any of the villagers are harmed, any future social interaction ability check with any local is made with disadvantage.

10. YOUNG TODGE'S COT

A foul-smelling, very unpleasant cot fills this tiny space. The cot is decorated with an upsetting array of daisy chains comprised of the tails of cats, mole paws, dead starlings, and piglet tails.

Young Todge often sulks here thinking up cruel things to do and wishing he had a friend.

11. PIGPEN

This chamber is full of straw, and an enormous pig lies within; the beast looks as if it could easily weigh more than a thousand pounds and is nearly six feet from snout to tail. Unlike the chicken coop, which was full of filth and rot, this pen is quite tidy and clearly well-cared for. The pig looks up at you curiously, tilting its head and wagging its tail.

The pig—Crabapple's pig alter ego—was brought here as a piglet and now nearly fills the entire chamber. She is not aggressive; in fact, she's quite a happy pig. Her statistics are those of a **giant boar,** but she won't attack unless she is attacked first. If Crabapple the hag dies, a new iteration of her appears here in its place—fully formed as an adult—and the whole sorry cycle begins again, with a new Crabapple pig appearing somewhere in the village soon after.

Two Curious Clues

Allow the PCs to learn the following during the party, to help them unravel the secret in Leer.

THE OLD SOW THAT REMEMBERS

The last time Aunt Crabapple was a person, she took a shine to a young girl called Charlock. Crabapple used to bounce young Charlock on her knee and tell her stories about the wicked sisters she had and how they cursed her. She even went so far as to let the child play with the *Horrid Fetish* the curse was bound to (see area 9). But Charlock was not so young and quite smart—she had read the odd words on the *Horrid Fetish*. She was too scared of Aunt Crabapple to say or do anything, but those tales and the object seared themselves into her memory.

Not long after this, Aunt Crabapple fell off her ladder and broke her neck, and everyone switched.

Charlock's memory is strong, however, and even her peopleswine self remembers being bounced on Crabapple's knee and reading the words on the fetish. And though she doesn't understand the words, she recalls their meaning—that if the fetish is destroyed the village curse is lifted.

The problem, of course, is that Charlock is now an old pig in the Great Sty (area 2) and though she really wants to tell the strangers in town what she knows, her thoughts—like those of all the peopleswine—are jumbled in her head, and she can't talk.

Give the PCs three chances during the party to spot Charlock squealing at them or scratching on a fence, staring straight at them. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices her; lower the DC to 12 if the PCs spend time looking around the Great Sty.

Approaching Charlock. If approached, it is clear to a PC who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check that she is afraid. She's also a *pig*, so the only way she can communicate with PCs is by drawing something with her trotters. She needs 3 rounds to draw each of the two objects below, but the PCs are interrupted on both occasions by a curious local who wanders over. Unless distracted—via a successful DC 12 Charisma check, by magic, or with superb or hilarious roleplay—the local sees something odd happening, jumps the fence, kicks the pig, and scuffs the drawing. Aunt Crabapple is subsequently told, and not long after, poor Charlock gets some juicy turnips laced with Beauteous Slumbercap. She falls asleep and remains so for the rest of the adventure . . . at least until she becomes bacon 24 hours later; Crabapple does love the occasional naughty treat.

The two drawings are not easy to make out—you might even crudely want to do the drawings wrong handed for fun—the first is a ladder (leading to area 5), the second is what might be a child's head on a stick but is actually the *Horrid Fetish* (area 9).

THREE LITTLE GIRLS

For three little girls, the impending gift-giving celebration is really, really scary. That horrible boy Dropwort has been telling them that every time a pig dies someone in the village vanishes. And with the three succulents this season being all little sows, he's told the three girls—Poppy, Woodra, and Raspberry—that when the sows are eaten, the girls will vanish too.

The girls are too frightened to ask the grownups, but they're wondering if maybe the kind strangers in town might know. However, they know that talking to strangers is a bad thing to do. They toy with the idea of freeing the succulents, too, but they know they would get into *terrible* trouble if found out.

The girls hang around the succulents, desperately thinking of a way to set them free. If the PCs watch the succulents, give them two chances in the evening to spot the girls fretting; a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) is required to notice.

Talking to the Three Girls. The girls each have a passive Perception of 10, and, unless the PCs sneak up on them, they try to flee, resulting in a simple chase; any PC who succeeds on a DC 10 Dexterity check can catch them. If PCs catch them or surprise them, the girls squeal and a grownup arrives to investigate soon after. Because of this, the PCs only have time to attempt a single DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get the story from the children. Soon after the check, a grownup arrives, looks suspiciously at the PCs, and leads the girls away.

If any of the PCs have a cute animal for a familiar or a cute animal companion (or perhaps are themselves a race that is animal-like, such as catfolk or bearfolk), the girls don't run away at all; two of them make to run, but one of them—Poppy—wants to pet the fur of the familiar, companion, or PC. If the PCs allow it, the girls all stay, allowing the PCs two attempts (as described above) to get the story before adults arrive and take the girls away.

Events

The events detailed below occur in the order presented.

MERRYMAKING

Upon first arriving in town, the PCs are led to Aunt Crabapple, who greets them warmly, offers them many blessings and asks them to join in the festivities, which begin with music. The PCs mustn't mind their strange country ways, she adds, apologizing for any odd behavior they might see, adding that our folk are set in their ways and have no desire for trouble. The locals are incredibly sociable, squealing and cavorting delightedly as the music starts, with bowls of pottage being passed around and the cider continuously flowing. The PCs are pulled into dances or are asked to sing or to play music. Any PC that succeeds on a DC 10 skill check or impresses with their enthusiasm are rewarded with kisses and delighted squeals of laughter and encouraged for more. Those who fail attract well-meaning playful laughter, but no kisses. Ensure each PC makes a skill check and takes part during the merrymaking.

GAMES AND PLAY AND FOOD AND DRINK

Allow the PCs to play games of chance with the locals throughout the party, perhaps simple throwing or eating games, with DC 12 checks. Ensure the PCs are kept in the thick of things so they are forced to sneak off if they wish to dig deeper. . . .

THE GREAT DANCE

Drums, whistles, and pipes are suddenly gathered and a great ruckus starts up. Everyone gets up for the Great Dance. The PCs are grabbed and hurled into the fray by snorting locals. The dance is mad, dizzying, and seemingly endless. Unless PCs escape—by making either a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or a Charisma (Performance) check if proficient in that skill—they are dizzily thrown about, jigged, and bounced until they must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or suffer 1 level of exhaustion. Whether they become exhausted or not, the locals insist on a second dance with similar checks and penalties, before the locals all finally drop, laughing.

THE WALLOW

The dance goes on until the pigs drop, wallowing and happy, at which point their piggishness may be easier to spot. Cider is gulped down, jokes are told, tongues are loose. At this stage, PCs making a DC 10 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check may learn something they have missed—perhaps a laughing local sings about the absence of mirrors, or Crabapple's poultry, or lets slip some other useful titbit.

The pigs' wallowing eventually transitions into sleep, and eventually the party field is covered in snoring locals.

It's at this time that Crabapple and the Olders move to poison any sleeping PCs. . . .

THE TROLLSTONE AND BIG BRIAR (AREA 12)

The trollstone appears just before dawn.

It stands nearly nine feet high, and once it appears the locals immediately start decorating it with flowers. Not long after, the Ravenous Troll effigy is lit by Crabapple, with great aplomb and with copious thanks for the coming Blessings. The **Briar Troll** arrives almost immediately once the fire is lit, and the locals back away, smiling, as the troll moves to inspect the succulents. Big Briar is similar in appearance to a standard troll, but her greenish-brown skin is covered in brambly thorns and briars.



Any PCs within the Ravenous Troll each take 1 point of fire damage and therefore awaken.

Pigs are not very good with knots. Any bound and gagged PCs can readily escape the thick ropes used to bind them in 3 rounds with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check, a DC 15 check accomplishes the same feat in 2 rounds, and a DC 20 in a single round. Each round the PCs are within the burning effigy they must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage.

The locals scream if they see the poor strangers burning, but Crabapple and the Olders keep them back shouting, "It's too dangerous to help those poor people. What if Big Briar put them there deliberately!"

If left alone, Big Briar examines the succulents, eats one immediately, and drags the other two away, both pigs squealing desperately. The troll then leaves the village. If attacked, she attacks back, with Crabapple shouting at the villagers: "Defend the troll! Or the Blessings will be ruined!" If the villagers remain loyal to Crabapple, they help the troll as a mob (see the "Angry Locals" sidebar) but are wary of her briars. The troll is an unthinking brute and fights until dead.

If the troll is slain, the locals jeer and spit at the PCs, horribly afraid of what will happen now that their benefactor is gone. Crabapple spits a *reconfiguring curse* at a PC, shouting at them, "Leave this village or face the consequences!" If attacked, she flees to her grotto. If she is unable to flee, she attempts to get away from the crowd so she can show her true face; whether she can or not, she fights to the death.

If at any point the PCs unmask Crabapple as a hag to the locals, the villagers may be convinced with a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check that the troll is evil and must be slain; if successful, the villagers help the PCs as a mob (see "Angry Locals" sidebar); otherwise they simply stand back aghast at events.

Concluding the Adventure

Depending on which choices the PCs make, the conclusion may play out in either of the ways described below.

AUNT CRABAPPLE DIES ONCE

Crabapple's death switches the locals: Pigs wallow in clothes, and locals rush off to grab them and cover their suddenly unclothed bodies. They are confused for a time, but soon after the switch, Aunt Crabapple—who has appeared anew, bright and naked, in her boudoir—calls out to them, "All is well! All is well! Aunt Crabapple is here." The new Crabapple remembers nothing of PCs or other recent events at first, but will soon enough. . . .

BOTH AUNT CRABAPPLES DIE

If the PCs burn the *Horrid Fetish* or kill both Crabapples within a reasonable amount of time (5 or 10 minutes), the curse is lifted. Again, the switch occurs, but this time the locals remember *everything*.

A great party—even larger than the Blessings party—is held that night, with the PCs as the guests of honor again, but this time there is no danger.

The villagers have no money to speak of, but the residents might recall a cache of magical goods hidden nearby and reward the PCs with them.



The Lost Treasure of Paletree Rise

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 5TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In the Whispering Plains, far to the North of Corremel, lies a range of rocky hills known as the Paletree Rise. Travellers avoid the monster-infested hills, where manticores hunt, shadows dance, and strange trumpeting cries rise at dusk.

The scholars of the Shuttered Tower know few of the hills' secrets. But the cloistered scholars, whose home sits at the border of the Queen's Wood and the Whispering Plains, have recovered a manuscript in nearby ruins that suggests a great treasure is buried somewhere in Paletree Rise.

A long-forgotten monarch (referred to in the manuscript only as "the banished Queen") commissioned a vault to be dug in secret, where it is said she buried ingots of magical steel made in cold forges in a place of great power. What arms might be made from this metal haunt the dreams of smiths across the Shadow Realm and beyond.

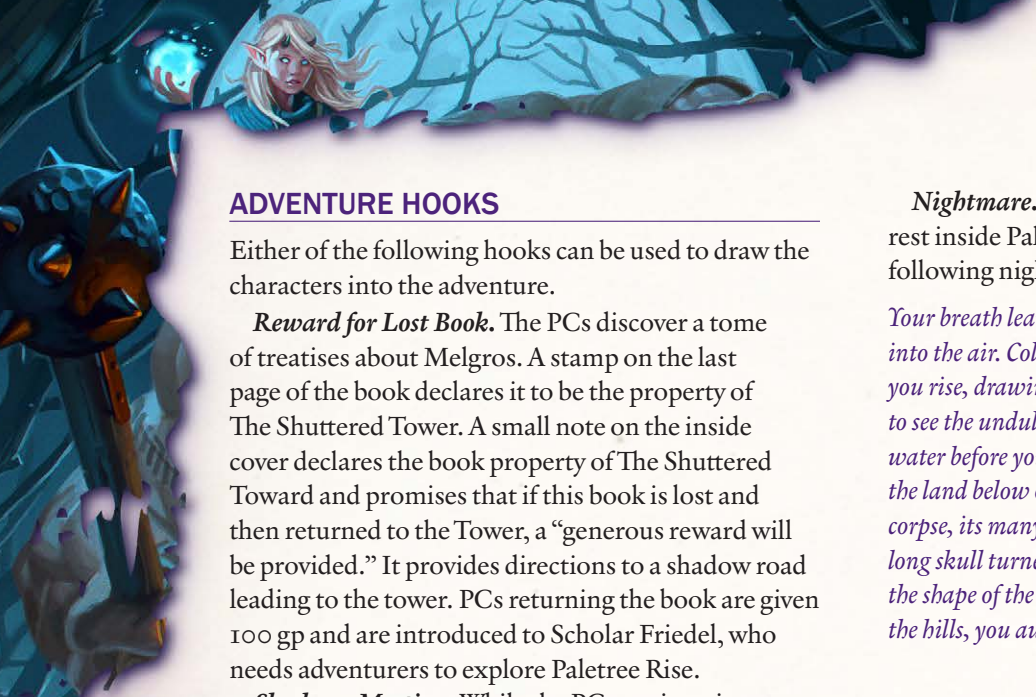
The manuscript's final pages refer to two magic lanterns being placed within Paletree Rise. Should the lanterns be lit, a trail will appear to whomever it be that illuminates them, guiding them toward the Banished Queen's hidden vault.

Deceiver. Several weeks ago, while studying a series of letters exchanged between long-dead sorcerers, Scholar Friedel was suddenly taken with the urge to write. Friedel believes the source of this inspiration was the dark will of the *Shadow Grimoire* (see appendix), believing it found a way to access the scholar's mind through this correspondence. Friedel now wishes to gain the favor the "grimoire's" patron, the powerful "Banished Queen." The "grimoire" has convinced him that the Queen will provide him a position in her court when she returns from her exile—if he can keep her pet, c'Naazo, fed, where it resides in its lair in the hills of Paletree Rise. Friedel faked a manuscript describing the "treasure vault" and has concocted a plan to convince heroes to willingly explore c'Naazo's lair under false pretenses; with their inevitable deaths, Friedel thinks his place in the Banished Queen's court is all but assured.

Burial Mound. The hills are a cursed burial mound for a nameless titan from a long-forgotten age. The hills follow the contour of the titan's body, its hideous shape only visible from high, high above. While in the hills, the PCs' sleep is troubled by the titan's curse, and the truth of the place is revealed in their dreams.

Giant Hand. The tree that sits atop the highest hill in Paletree Rise is not a tree at all; it is an enormous, clawed, skeletal hand that rises from the dirt, reaching inexorably toward the dark skies above.

The Banished Queen and c'Naazo. When she still walked the Shadow Realm, the Banished Queen was drawn to Paletree Rise, where she discovered the presence of the titan beneath the sands. As she sought the source of the curse and the region's magical power, she encountered c'Naazo, the remains of the titan's hand brought to a mockery of life by strange, ineffable magic. Rather than destroy the creature, she befriended it, offering it sacrifices from her dwindling court. In return, the aberration connected the Queen to the magic of the titan and the dark knowledge buried in its skull under the hills. The Queen became fond of the aberration and placed the lanterns to guide her minions to its lair if the need ever arose.



ADVENTURE HOOKS

Either of the following hooks can be used to draw the characters into the adventure.

Reward for Lost Book. The PCs discover a tome of treatises about Melgros. A stamp on the last page of the book declares it to be the property of The Shuttered Tower. A small note on the inside cover declares the book property of The Shuttered Toward and promises that if this book is lost and then returned to the Tower, a "generous reward will be provided." It provides directions to a shadow road leading to the tower. PCs returning the book are given 100 gp and are introduced to Scholar Friedel, who needs adventurers to explore Paletree Rise.

Shadowy Meeting. While the PCs are in a city on unrelated business, a minion (**shadow**) of the Shuttered Tower implores the party to meet with Scholar Friedel. If they agree, they are given a key made of pressed shadowstuff that opens the tower's heavy doors. Friedel greets them on their arrival with an offer of adventure in Paletree Rise.

The Titan's Curse

The nameless titan whose body lies under the hills of Paletree Rise has cursed the region. PCs with the ability to cast spells sense a magical presence as soon as they step within 100 yards of the place. Any spellcasting PC can make Intelligence (Arcana) checks to attempt to learn the effects of the curse. Use the "Curse Effects" table to determine what the PCs learn:

CURSE EFFECTS

DC	Information Learned or Known
5–9	Sleep will be troubled here.
10–14	The hills are cursed and spending too long here is dangerous.
15–19	The source of the curse is a powerful and ancient creature.
20	The creature who cursed the hills is dead but lives inside the dreams of those who sleep within its bounds.

Troubled. Creatures taking a long rest within the limits of Paletree Rise must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw; on a failure, the creature cannot gain any of the benefits of a long rest until after the next dawn. The DC of this saving throw increases by 1 each time the creature attempts a long rest inside the hills.

Nightmare. The first time the PCs attempt a long rest inside Paletree Rise, they each experience the following nightmare:

Your breath leaves your body as you are forcefully thrown into the air. Cold wind pierces your clothing and armor as you rise, drawing the heat from your bones. You look down to see the undulations of Paletree Rise, the hills rippling like water before you. Higher still you climb, until the shape of the land below offers up a dreadful vision. You see a titanic corpse, its many limbs stretching out in all directions, its long skull turned to face the east. The body's contours form the shape of the hills themselves. Once you grasp the nature of the hills, you awaken with a start.

Scholar Friedel

A stooped man of indeterminate age stands before you in thin, slate-colored robes. His face is half hidden in the shadows of a hood, whose trim is interwoven with moon-white thread. A wispy beard catches the light of a nearby sconce. The man leans heavily on a wooden staff, his arthritic fingers wrapped around the dry limb-like claws.

Friedel (NE umbral human **mage**) is a senior scholar in the Order of the Shuttered Tower. He spends most of his time alone among the tomes and scrolls. He is abrupt, awkward, and easily startled. Friedel looks to be in his seventieth year but seems hale and spry.

THE LIE

Friedel tells the PCs the following lie:

In those hills on the Whispering Plain, a great treasure is buried. Not gold, nor silver, nor the antiquities of history's heroes—no; I have found reference, in a newly rediscovered ancient manuscript, to a store of magical steel ingots, whose

Adjusting the Curse

For PCs whose class relies on long rests to remain effective and fun, feel free to adjust the curse so that, instead of preventing a PC from gaining the benefits of a long rest, it halves the number of spell slots or uses of class resources. If the party is struggling, you may also limit the effects of the curse further. The curse is intended to make staying in the hills unpleasant, but the adventure should still be fun for everyone.

properties are far too numerous to list. I have secured buyers for these ingots should we recover them! A fortune awaits us!

Friedel provides the following falsehoods as facts:

- The vault containing the ingots is hidden and can only be found through magical means.
- The vault's builder, a forgotten noble, had two lanterns placed within the hills of Paletree Rise. Should the lanterns be lit, their magic is released, and a path to the vault is revealed.
- If the party retrieves the ingots and returns them to Friedel, he will pay them 5,000 gp. As further incentive to returning the ingots to him, the scholar also offers a collection of onyx figurines carved to depict warriors in battle (worth 1,000 gp).

THE TRUTH

Friedel has researched the *Shadow Grimoire* for many years, and his desire to possess the tome has made him lose his grip on reality. Through accumulated fragments of knowledge, he has convinced himself the grimoire is speaking to him, but it's actually just him slowly going insane.

Scholar Friedel communicates with the "grimoire" via ink and paper. He writes his questions using a magical quill, and he believes the tome guides his hand to write a response. In this way, Friedel and the "grimoire" have concocted a plan to feed c'Naazo.

What the scholar wants most is to please the "grimoire". He imagines serving the Banished Queen as an advisor and scholar. Feeding the queen's pet, he thinks, is a sure way to accomplish this goal.

The scholar does not know of the Titan's Curse, or even the fact that the hills are formed upon the remains of the titan. He also does not know who or what the Banished Queen is; he's simply doing what he believes is the bidding of the *Shadow Grimoire*.

Friedel follows the party throughout the adventure, using a *ring of invisibility* to remain hidden. It is the scholar who seals the party into the lair of c'Naazo once they have entered it.

Friedel provides a map to the two lanterns if the party agrees to the work.

THE SCHOLAR'S MAP

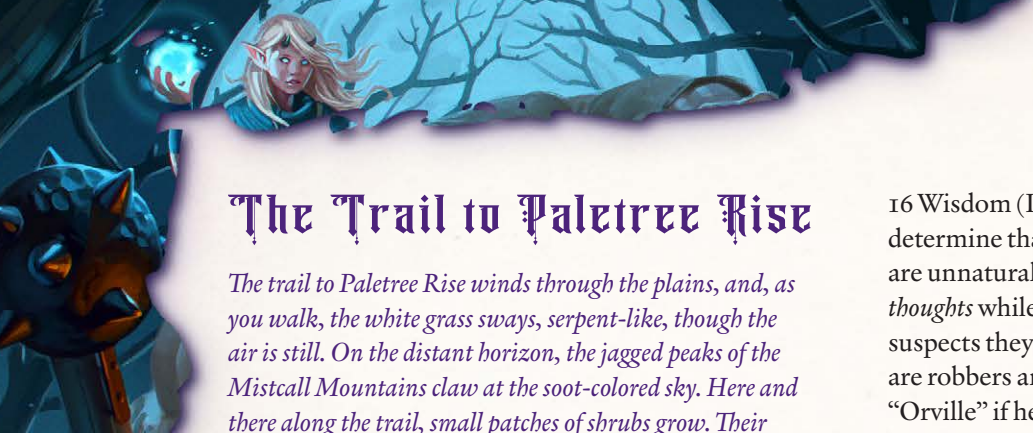
The map provided by scholar Friedel is crude but serves its purpose. It shows two locations in the hills of Paletree Rise, and the PCs are free to explore them in any order. The first location, marked "The Well," is at the bottom of a valley in the northern reaches of the hills. The other location, marked "The Lodge," is atop a hill in the west. The southern edge of Paletree Rise is fifteen miles north of the Shuttered Tower. The map can be used by any PC to navigate to the location without skill checks.



The Lie Must Remain

The PCs might be suspicious of the offer and may attempt to discern the trustworthiness of Scholar Friedel. They may employ skills or magic (*detect thoughts*, for example) to catch the NPC in a lie. Under the influence of the *Shadow Grimoire*, the scholar is magically shielded from such intrusive spells. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check may reveal that the scholar is keeping some information back, but the PCs are unable to detect any malevolent intentions.

You might wish to allow the PCs—perhaps with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check—to get a sense that someone is following them, but scholar Friedel should be allowed to shadow the party without being caught.



The Trail to Paletree Rise

The trail to Paletree Rise winds through the plains, and, as you walk, the white grass sways, serpent-like, though the air is still. On the distant horizon, the jagged peaks of the Mistcall Mountains claw at the soot-colored sky. Here and there along the trail, small patches of shrubs grow. Their leaves are sparse, and flightless birds dart between them, their button-eyes watching as you go.

Having accepted Friedel's map and its related quest, the PCs must ride fifteen miles north of the Shuttered Tower to begin their search.

PEPPER TRADERS

Ahead, you see three riders pulling a rickety cart overburdened with wooden barrels. Two women and one man, human, all similarly middle-aged, ride toward you on tired horses. The woman's hair is folded into braids tight against her scalp, stretching the skin of her forehead taut against her skull. Her face is sharp and severe with dark circles ringing dull gray eyes. One of the men is broad and boasts a large red beard and flattened nose. The reins of his horse are comically small in his ham-sized fist. The last man is clean-shaven and attractive, dressed in velvet finery soiled by the road. He grins at you as the trio approaches.

On the trail, the PCs encounter three traders heading toward Corremel. The traders come from Wormwood and have followed the trail running through the Whispering Plains for several days.

The severe-looking woman is named Netha (N umbral human **thug**); she handles the money-related dealings for the trio. She offers few words and seems antsy to move on. The large man is named Yorgen (CN umbral human **berserker**), and he serves as the group's muscle. He keeps a wary eye on the PCs but is not unfriendly. The smiling man was once named Orville but has been replaced by a **doppelganger** who killed Orville in his sleep and took his place to enter Corremel; Netha and Yorgen suspect nothing of him.

Trade. The traders' cart contains a load of black pepper (worth 500 gp). The pepper is mundane and of a high quality. The barrels bear the mark of the Ash Crow trading company, a stylized outline of a crow within a triangle.

The Doppelganger. The monster plays the part of a charismatic leader very well. He is friendly and greets the PCs with a smile. PCs with a passive Perception of 14 or higher note something is amiss with the man but can't quite articulate why. With a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check, a PC can determine that Orville's demeanor and movements are unnatural. Orville uses his innate ability to *read thoughts* while conversing with the PCs, and if he suspects they are going to reveal him, he claims they are robbers and attacks. Netha and Yorgen will defend "Orville" if he is attacked but quickly turn on him if the doppelganger's form is revealed through combat or other means.

How Fares the Road. If conversation is friendly, the traders warn the party they were followed by **wolves**—or perhaps something worse—for several miles. They did not catch good sight of the beasts, but Yorgen saw a canine form loping in the whispering grass nearby. Of Paletree Rise, the trio know nothing. Netha suggests the place is best avoided but offers little to back up her claim.

PAINTED STONES

To the right of the trail, you spy a flash of color in the grass. You discern a cluster of stones, each no bigger than a plum, sitting piled one atop the other. The stones are painted in several colors, and even from a distance you can see the paint looks fresh.

Scattered throughout the Whispering Plains are clusters of *painted stones* (see appendix). These ubiquitous artifacts come in eight colors: puce, indigo, violet, slate, mustard, juniper, umber, and bone. The stones were once members of a fey court, now fallen from memory, who were betrayed by their King—sacrificed in a plot only the stars can recall.

The King, cursed for his murderous treachery, now stalks the Whispering Plains, collecting the stones in his clawed hands. However, his work is never done, as each night while he rests, the stones tumble away from him and escape. And so, this strange cycle has continued for an age. Over time, the King has grown more and more monstrous, his despair twisting his body into an aberration.

The PCs discover a pile of these stones (one of each color) while travelling to Paletree Rise. If they keep one or more of the stones, the **Painted King** (see appendix) comes to collect them during their travels in the area. The King stalks the PCs and waits for the opportunity to surprise them, complicating their rest, or adding himself to an ongoing battle. The King abandons combat if the stones are offered to him, though he has no mind with which to bargain or reason. The King comes to collect the stones even if they have lost their magic.

Arriving at Paletree Rise

You see a range of hills before you. The grass becomes sparser there, giving way to great boulders churned up from below in quakes from another age.

Paletree Rise is a cursed place generally avoided by beasts and inhabited by creatures accustomed to the lingering evil below the ground. In addition to the previously detailed curse, the following hardships await those who travel through the hills.

Foul Springs. The few pools of water in the hills are fouled by the remains of the titan, whose marrow pollutes and corrupts. The water is undrinkable to all creatures except aberrations and monstrosities. A creature who drinks the water and who is not an aberration or a monstrosity must succeed a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 24 hours. A successful saving throw only prevents the creature from becoming poisoned; it does not allow it to gain the benefits of drinking water.

Creatures. A pride of 3 **manticores** serves as the region's apex predators. Under the roaring direction of the battle-scarred Akresh (**manticore** with 85 hp), the monsters control the skies and keep their lair in the ruins of a keep in the south of the hills. If the PCs are not attempting to move stealthily, they are easily spotted by the manticores; if they are moving stealthily, the manticores only fail to spot them if the PCs make a successful DC 18 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the PCs are spotted, the manticores attack, eager to bring Akresh fresh meat. The abandoned cargo and goods of countless traders sits unaccounted for in Akresh's foul lair.

The Overflowing Well

Arriving at the bottom of the valley, you see an area cleared of stones and stunted shrubs. Scattered at the edge of the clearing are the stone foundations of small buildings long ago crumbled to ruin. In the middle of the clearing is an unadorned stone brick well—its wooden cover long ago rotted and crumbled away. From the well's mouth, a steady stream of dust pours onto the surrounding ground.

The well was constructed by a small community of goblins who sought to establish themselves in the Paletree Rise hills. Despite their unrefined construction techniques, the goblins managed to cobble together the beginnings of a small village using stone, mud, and what little plant fiber the region provided. The well was dug where a pool formed from a now-dried-up aquifer that was tainted by the bones of the titan below. Over time, the goblins grew sick and developed strange and fatal diseases. The shaman of the community (the last one alive) threw the villager's remains into the well and fled the hills.

Centuries ago, the Banished Queen had one of the lanterns hidden in the dry cave below the well.

Traveling from Site to Site

The three sites of this adventure (the Well, the Lodge, and the Lair of c'Naazo) are roughly six miles from one another. The PCs should be able to travel to all three locales within a day. If you intend for the PCs to spend several days in Paletree Rise, be mindful of the stacking effect of the curse when planning encounters.

AMONGST THE STONES

The remains of the goblin village—now little more than rubble—form a circle 30 feet from the well. Only the vaguest shapes of walls remain.

Creatures. A colony of **gricks** (with the changes noted below) has established itself in the stones here, feasting on the insects and animals using the valley as a path through the hills. The colony's population is three, plus one grick for each party member beyond four.

Creature Change. The gricks have been altered by the corrupting presence of the titan; their *beak* attack is replaced by the following:

> ***Beak.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and 1 poison damage. Creatures who take poison damage from this attack are blinded until the end of their next turn.

Treasure. Any PC searching the rubble finds 150 sp scattered throughout. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a tattered leather apron with a pouch containing a crude but usable set of mason's tools. The kit's chisel, made of grick beak, is a *Goblin Chisel* (see appendix).

WELL MOUTH

The air around the well is dry and choking. The closer you get, the tighter your throat and chest become.

The well expels a flume of choking dust rising from the caves below. The well's opening is large enough to accommodate the passage of a Medium creature without squeezing. The well descends 20 feet into the ground. The sides of the well's walls are easily climbed and offer many hand- and footholds.

The Dust. The dust rises from below and spills out around the well in a 10-foot-radius sphere. The dust also fills the well itself and area 1 below. Creatures who breathe while in the radius of the dust must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw each minute or be poisoned until they leave the area. Succeeding on this saving throw renders the creature immune to this effect for 24 hours. The dust rises from a magical pool in area 1. Using *dispel magic* on the pool is the only permanent way to stop the dust from flowing upward. Spells that normally affect natural dust, like *gust of wind*, affect the dust normally.

BELOW THE WELL

The small cave system at the bottom of the well is entirely dark, and all passages connecting the caves require Medium or larger creatures to squeeze to get through. The bones of the afflicted goblins, thrown down the well by their shaman upon their deaths, lie scattered throughout the Hacking Pool (area 1). A creature with a passive Perception of 14 or higher who descends the shaft of the well notices traces of a foul, black, tarry substance on the rock walls. This is the residue of a black pudding that lairs in crevasses and hollows of the well shaft.

1: THE HACKING POOL

This oval-shaped natural cavern once hosted a pool of water. It is now the source of the magical dust which fills this area, the well shaft, and the area around the well above ground.



Pool of Dust. The pool is six feet deep and is magically enchanted to produce the poisonous dust. The magic of the pool can be permanently dispelled with a *dispel magic* spell.

Creatures. The **black pudding** emerges and falls onto any creature foolish enough to stand below the well's opening. It attacks from hiding, surprising any creatures (passive Perception of 18 or better notices the pudding) arriving via the well in area 1.

2: THE EXTINGUISHING CAVERN

Passing through the narrow opening to the north, you emerge into a wide cavern. The walls here are covered in sharply drawn words and symbols. Hanging from an oily chain affixed to the low ceiling is an iron lantern, unlit and swaying slightly in the still air.

This cavern contains one of the lanterns left centuries ago by the Banished Queen, the magic of which shows the way to c'Naazo's lair.

Dark Script. The writing on the wall is a powerful spell trap written in a forgotten language known as Old Umbral. Any PC with the ability to cast 1st-level sorcerer or wizard spells automatically discerns the dangerous nature of the writing. If a PC can read the writing through magical means, they learn the writing's trap triggers if the lantern is lit, though what the nature of the trap is remains a mystery. The trap functions as an 8th-level spell and can be dispelled using *dispel magic*. A PC who lights the lantern immediately suffers the effects of the *maze* spell for 10 minutes or until they escape.

Lighting the Lantern. The lantern may be lit using conventional or magical means. Once it is lit, it hovers in the air and a shadowy tendril forms and streaks off into the sky. If the matching lantern at the Hunting Lodge has been previously lit, the tendril stretches out to the entrance of c'Naazo's lair. Otherwise, it rises into the air beyond sight. The moment the lantern is lit, the following additional things occur:

- The dark script trap triggers.
- All sources of light, both magical and mundane, are extinguished.
- The bones of the goblins in area 1 assemble into 3 **ghasts** (plus one ghast for each PC beyond four) that attack the party.

Treasure. In the northwest corner of this chamber, there is a large amount of spell components (250 gp worth) in an old but well-made wooden coffer.

The Hunting Lodge

Built on the flat top of a gently sloping hill, a stone and wood lodge sits surrounded by crumbling outbuildings and patches of thistle-bound shrubs. The front door is missing, but the cabin is otherwise mostly intact. The thatch roof has all but disintegrated.

The derelict hunting lodge was built as a business venture by gnome brothers. Secreting their wealthy patrons along a short stretch of shadow road, the brothers promised rare and dangerous hunting for a discerning clientele. The monsters of the region had little patience for the gnomes' endeavors, however, and the lodge was quickly abandoned.

The place is infested with evil spirits drawn to the magic of the Banished Queen's lantern, which sits in the soot and dust of the lodge's cold hearth. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check—made with advantage if the PC is proficient with carpenter's tools—can determine the lantern seems to predate the lodge.

Ironically, the immediate region around the lodge serves as the hunting ground for a monstrous elephantine creature and its spawn. The ground around the lodge and outbuildings contains obvious tracks; the creature and its smaller spawn have well trampled this area. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check suggests the tracks were made by 4 four-legged beasts of an elephantine nature. One set of tracks is significantly larger than the others. (See the "The Lodge" section.)

The Outbuildings

These small shacks might once have served as skinning rooms and storehouses for the lodge's hunting endeavors. They now sit broken, exposed, and empty.

Journal Fragment. Buried under a few stones is a nearly destroyed leather-bound journal. The book is found by any PC who searches the buildings. It belonged to a client of the lodge who perished at the hands of Mahrax many decades ago. Flipping through the journal reveals an intact page with a crude drawing of a horrid, tusked creature crushing humanoids under its large feat. The words "we are now the prey" are scrawled in the gnomish script under the drawing.

Treasure. A PC who is actively searching and succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers a pile of

strange leathers hidden in the rubble. The leather is made from the hides of the few monsters the hunters managed to slay before being driven off. A creature proficient with leatherworker's tools can attempt to add the leather to any suit of light or medium armor. A successful DC 10 Dexterity check made using leatherworker's tools results in the armor receiving a +1 non-magical bonus to its armor class. A failed check results in the leather rendered ruined and worthless. Unworked, the leather is worth 200 gp.

The Lodge

The interior of the lodge consists of a foyer, a central chamber with a stone hearth, and four small sleeping chambers. The furnishings and decor have been ravaged by weather and time. Something glints dully in the black recess of the hearth.

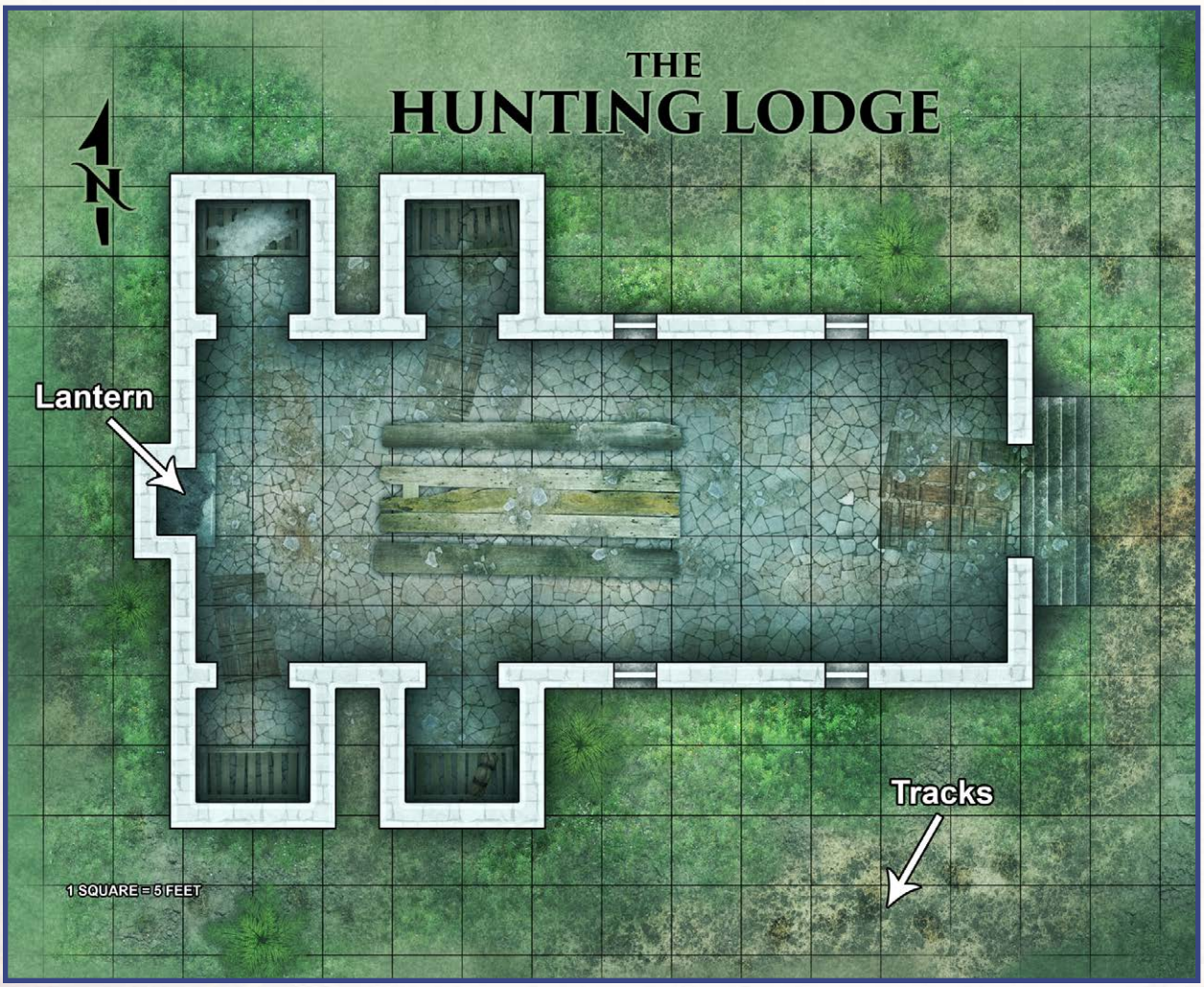
Spirits in the Lodge. The site of the lodge is infested with shadows who emerge from the corners and attack any living creature present. The unhappy souls are the victims of the mammoth of Paletree Rise, Mahrax, who begins its approach of the lodge as soon as any combat begins.

Creatures. There are five **shadows** (plus one shadow for each PC beyond four) dwelling here.

The Cold Hearth. The Banished Queen's lantern sits in the hearth, waiting to be lit. The lantern may be lit using conventional or magical means. Once the lantern is lit, it hovers in the air and a shadowy tendril forms and streaks off into the sky. If the matching lantern at the Overflowing Well has been previously lit, the tendril stretches out to the entrance of c'Naazo's lair. Otherwise, it rises into the air beyond sight.

The Trumpeting of Mahrax. During the battle with the shadows, the party hears Mahrax approaching. A great trumpeting sounds in the distance, drawing closer as the shadows are defeated.

Creatures. The mammoth of Paletree Rise appears when the final shadow falls. **Mahrax** (use **mammoth**



statistics with the phase spider's Ethereal Jaunt ability) appears directly beside a PC using his phasing ability. Mahrax's three spawn both look almost exactly like him but are the size of (and use the statistics of) a **boar;** the 3 spawn all appear next to another PC in the same manner as Mahrax. Mahrax and his spawn can fit in the lodge proper—and can move freely through its walls, destroying them in the process.

The Pale Tree

Having followed the churning tendril of shadow, you climb a steep rise and arrive near a pale-barked tree reaching toward the sky. Approaching the tree, you soon discern the limbs and trunk are in fact the bony segments of an enormous, skeletal hand; it points to a spot on the horizon. But the tendril of shadow delves into an opening near the wrist of the hand.

The party has arrived at the "vault" described by Friedel. The scholar is hidden nearby, waiting for the party to enter c'Naazo's lair. He plans to use a *scroll of shatter* to seal the entrance behind them.

THE SLOPING STAIRCASE

A tunnel descends before you, the variable height and shape of its steps challenging your balance. The air here stings the nose and turns the stomach.

The smell is emanating from the poisonous body of the aberration c'Naazo sleeping below. The tunnel narrows occasionally, forcing Medium creatures to squeeze for short stretches. A faint clattering sound can be heard in the depths of the lair.

THE LAIR OF C'NAAZO

You emerge into a great cavern. No trace of workmanship is found in the rough walls and floor of this place. No locked door stands before you. The shadow tendril evaporates as you reach the chamber.

As you briefly take in the features of the cave, a booming, menacing voice sounds from a stony recess nearby and to the east of the entry tunnel—"DALDAR DARATH AJGAR OMOOKOM," it says.

From behind you, up the tunnel, you hear a sudden loud ringing noise and then the sound of stone shattering and collapsing into the tunnel.

C' Naazo the Devourer. **C'Naazo** (see appendix) appears from its resting place and skitters forward into the chamber. It is a large, four-legged



aberration with a chitinous, crab-like shell and three long, segmented, chitin-covered tentacles. Its legs and tentacles are bone white with flecks of phosphorescent green. Its shell, which has a large and obvious fracture in it, is midnight black with phosphorescent green striations running over its surface. The ancient horror takes little time to begin its attack, and it fights to the death.

Lingering Syllables. The words c'Naazo uttered are in Void Speech and translate roughly as, "Bleeding wounds soak hungry stone," and its speech seems to have a deleterious effect on reality. On initiative 20 (losing all ties), one syllable from c'Naazo's utterance returns as a sonic assault. Any creature inside the lair who can hear the syllable that is concentrating on a spell must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or lose concentration.

Shattered Entryway. Friedel's *shatter* spell has created an obstacle that will make it difficult to leave the lair. The PCs can simply take 1 hour to clear the rubble, allowing them to escape, or a PC can attempt to hurry the process along with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) ability check. For each PC who succeeds on such a check, reduce the time it takes to clear the rubble by fifteen minutes.

Treasure. C'Naazo has little need for valuables and has had very few chances to acquire them. Upon its death, the segmented tentacles of the creature fall loose upon the floor. Two of the three crack and become useless, while the third remains intact. The segmented tentacle—the *Chitinous Club of c'Naazo*—can be used as a magical weapon (see appendix) and serves as the only treasure to be found in the lair.

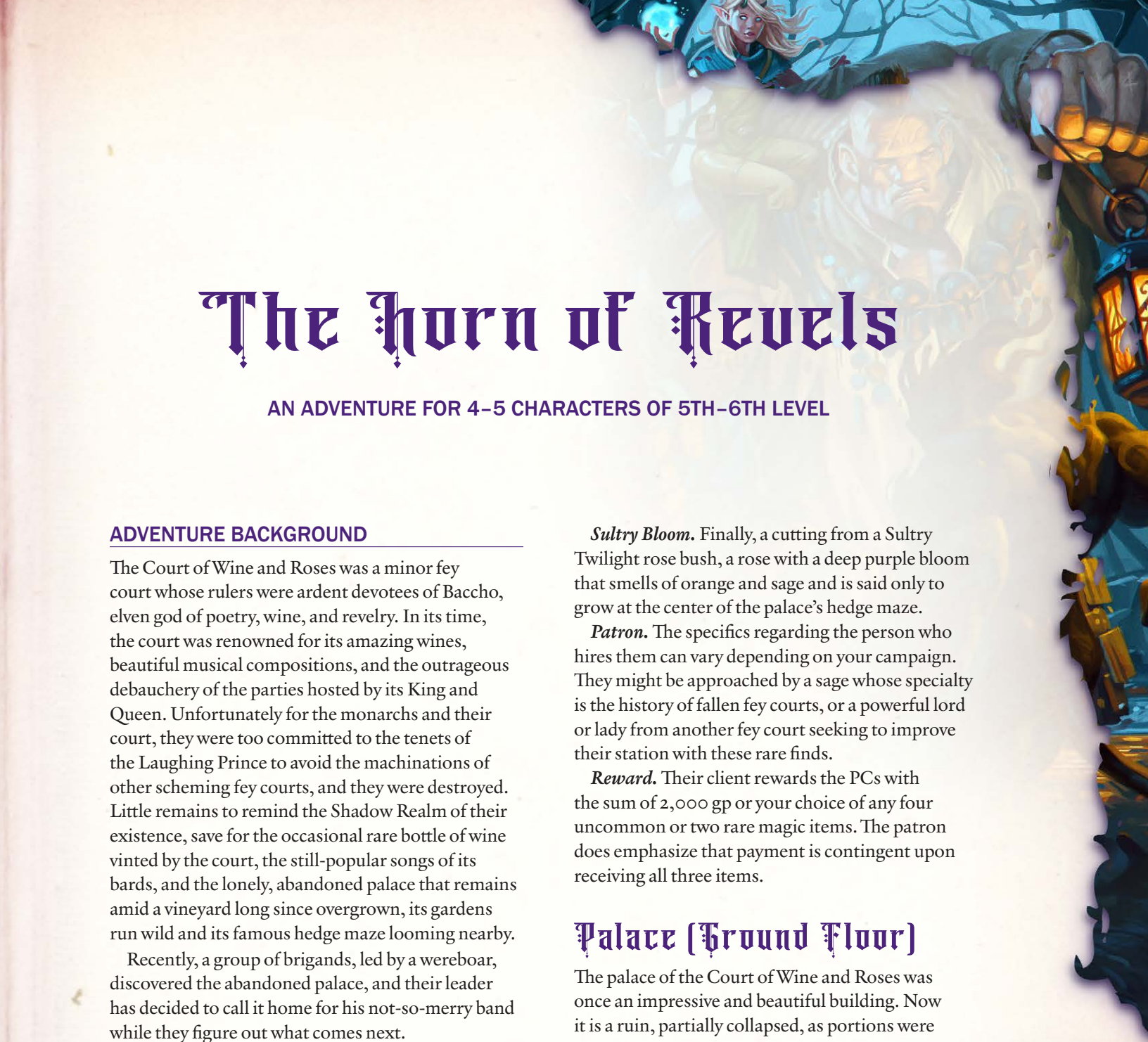


Conclusion

Scholar Friedel flees the scene when he hears the party attempting to free themselves from the lair. He might be tracked by the party, or even captured, though he uses every means at his disposal to escape undetected. Otherwise, the scholar returns to the Shuttered Tower where he spends two days preparing to leave the tower and plead his case to the Banished Queen as suggested by the *Shadow Grimoire.*

If confronted at the Shuttered Tower, Friedel summons its guardians (two **flesh golems**) to defend him against the party while he attempts to flee.

If captured, he begs to be spared and confesses his plot, admitting to being under the influence of what he thinks is the *Shadow Grimoire.* He is unable to help the party locate the magical book. However, he reveals that, "The Banished Queen will soon awaken."



The Horn of Revels

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 5TH–6TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Court of Wine and Roses was a minor fey court whose rulers were ardent devotees of Baccho, elven god of poetry, wine, and revelry. In its time, the court was renowned for its amazing wines, beautiful musical compositions, and the outrageous debauchery of the parties hosted by its King and Queen. Unfortunately for the monarchs and their court, they were too committed to the tenets of the Laughing Prince to avoid the machinations of other scheming fey courts, and they were destroyed. Little remains to remind the Shadow Realm of their existence, save for the occasional rare bottle of wine vinted by the court, the still-popular songs of its bards, and the lonely, abandoned palace that remains amid a vineyard long since overgrown, its gardens run wild and its famous hedge maze looming nearby.

Recently, a group of brigands, led by a wereboar, discovered the abandoned palace, and their leader has decided to call it home for his not-so-merry band while they figure out what comes next.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The PCs are hired to explore the palace of the Court of Wine and Roses to find and return with three items desired by the NPC who hires them.

Lost Ballad. The first is a lost ballad by Eilshaera—a famous sable elf bard who was an attendant of the Court of Wine and Roses—which was never publicly performed before her untimely death.

Rare Vintage. Second is a barrel of the King's Prize, a rare wine vintage grown and vinted by the court, where barrels of it were only tapped for revels at the palace.

Sultry Bloom. Finally, a cutting from a Sultry Twilight rose bush, a rose with a deep purple bloom that smells of orange and sage and is said only to grow at the center of the palace's hedge maze.

Patron. The specifics regarding the person who hires them can vary depending on your campaign. They might be approached by a sage whose specialty is the history of fallen fey courts, or a powerful lord or lady from another fey court seeking to improve their station with these rare finds.

Reward. Their client rewards the PCs with the sum of 2,000 gp or your choice of any four uncommon or two rare magic items. The patron does emphasize that payment is contingent upon receiving all three items.

Palace (Ground Floor)

The palace of the Court of Wine and Roses was once an impressive and beautiful building. Now it is a ruin, partially collapsed, as portions were gutted by fire before it was abandoned. Time and the elements have taken their toll, but much of it remains standing. The habitable parts have been occupied by a wayward wereboar and his band of outlaws.

Outlaw Occupation. A ferocious band of outlaws and brigands, the Tusks are strangers in a strange land. While fleeing a force of soldiers bent on capturing the band, the Tusks passed from their world through an open portal into the Shadow Realm. Their leader gambled on the soldiers not being willing to follow them. He was right; however, the portal closed before the Tusks could return home, and now they find themselves trapped in the Shadow

Realm. They eventually stumbled upon the abandoned palace of the Court of Wine and Roses and decided to make it their home until they figured out a way home or how to make their way in this strange, new land.

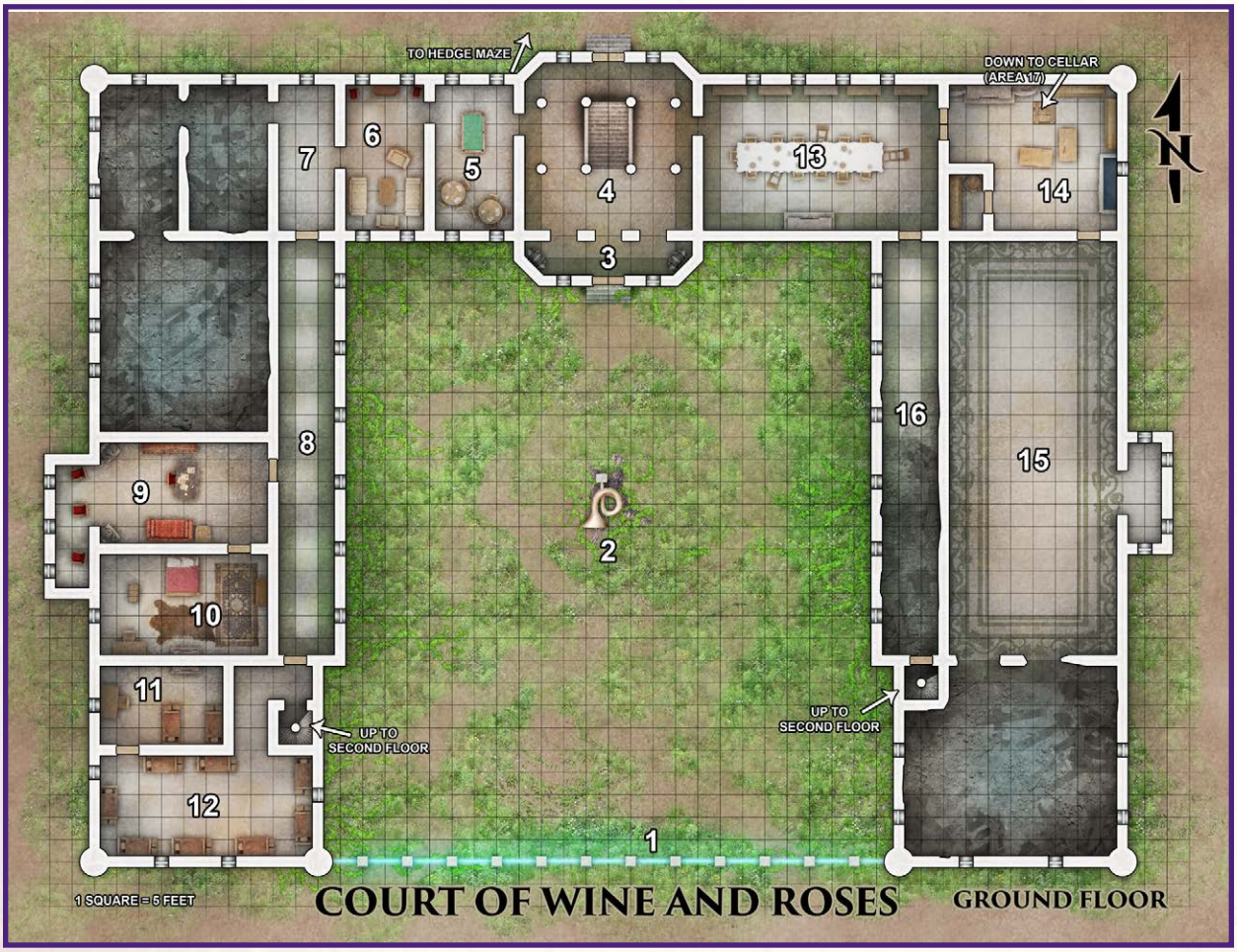
Wereboar Beware. The leader of the Tusks is Fergus ap Hywell (NE **wereboar**). Fergus is a barrel-chested, hairy man with muttonchop sideburns, bristly black hair, and a scar that runs down the right side of his face from his hairline, through the left eye (which is blind), and down to the corner of his mouth. In boar or hybrid form, the scar is still visible, running down the head through the eye and across one side of his snout. Fergus is a gruff and dominating leader, brooking no dissent from his band. He is also more discriminating than most wereboars regarding spreading his curse. Once his followers have proven loyal and worthy in his eyes, Fergus plans on gifting them with lycanthropy, turning a simple band of brigands into a clan of wereboars. Should they find no way home, or simply determine it is better to stay, Fergus has decided the abandoned palace will be their permanent encampment.

Bandits on Patrol. While on the palace grounds, there is a 25% chance of encountering a patrol of four brigands (**thugs,** armed with longswords instead of maces). The brigands fight until half their number are lost then attempt to flee to area 12 to alert the rest of their band, sending one of their number upstairs to area 18 to inform Fergus of the intruders. Once two such patrols have been encountered, the PCs encounter no others, unless you decide Fergus sends out more of his men from areas 11 and 12.

1. MAGICAL FENCE

Several tall stone posts stand in a line between the two wings of the palace, enclosing the courtyard. Spidery runes engraved on the posts flicker with a bluish glow. A weave of transparent, bluish energy stretches between the posts, blocking access to the courtyard beyond. As the runes flicker and dim, the weave of energy flickers in and out of existence with a faint humming noise.

This magical fence once provided the primary means of defense for the palace. Decades of neglect



have caused the magic to malfunction; as a result, the fence now flickers in and out of existence at random intervals. During the periods it stands, it functions as a *wall of force*, except it is translucent (rather than entirely transparent), and there are strategically-placed gaps in the wall through which defenders could make ranged attacks. Any creature standing adjacent to the fence has three-quarters cover against attacks at a range of 10 feet or more from the other side.

Dash It. If the PCs attempt to cross into the courtyard, they must rush through while one of the sections of the fence is down. A successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw allows safe passage past the fence. On a failed save, a creature takes 22 (4d10) points of force damage and is thrown back 5 feet and falls prone.

Smash It. If one of the posts is destroyed, any sections of fence it connects to cease to function altogether. Each post has AC 17 and 18 hp and a damage threshold of 10. However, any damage dealt to a post that does not reduce it to 0 hp releases a surge of energy. All creatures within 5 feet of a post when it surges take 11 (2d10) points of force damage. A successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw reduces the damage by half.



2. GRAND COURTYARD

This once immaculate lawn is now overgrown with creeping vines, brush, and wildflowers. To the north, a staircase leads up to a pair of carved, wooden double doors that appear to be the main entrance into the palace. There are also single doors leading into the east and west wings. Near the center of the courtyard, an immense tree trunk supports a large object, though at a distance it is unclear what it might be, as the vines here have overgrown it, obscuring its true nature.

The main doors to the north open into the antechamber (area 3). The door to the west enters the Western Gallery (area 8), but Fergus' men have barricaded the door (requiring a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to force it open). The eastern door opens into the Eastern Gallery (area 16).

The Horn of Revels

As you get closer to the center of the courtyard you can see that what the vegetation was masking is an enormous, curling horn. This massive, ram-like horn has a mouth wide enough for a tall human to stand inside upright. The mouthpiece is crafted of silver, fashioned in the shape of a head of a female elf, her lips pursed as if ready for a kiss. The horn sits on an ancient tree stump, easily twelve feet across, overgrown with heavy vines that fix the horn in place. A steppingstone can be found on the ground beside the trunk, allowing one to step up to the mouthpiece.

This ancient relic was one of the prized possessions of the Court of Wine and Roses, supposedly gifted to the royal family of the court by the great god Baccho himself. It has remained where it currently stands, neglected, since the fall of the court. Members of the Tusks who wished to blow the horn upon their arrival were quickly and violently dissuaded of the notion by Fergus, who chastised them for fools, as the sound of such a horn could alert potential enemies within miles of the place of their presence here. None of the bandits has since risked defying Fergus in this matter.

Blowing the Horn. If a creature blows the horn, the instrument lets out a deep, resonant sound that shakes the very ground and can be heard clearly in any area of the top two levels of the palace or the hedge maze.

Fey Party. The horn also serves to summon several fey from the surrounding area to the palace, magically enhancing their mood and making them inclined to make merry and celebrate. This summoning and "mood" magic only affects creatures of the fey type. Sounding the horn also dispels the palace's magical fence, allowing the summoned fey entry to the grounds, where they immediately begin their revels upon arrival.

Glamorous Glamor. Finally, if the horn is blown, the entire palace is affected by an illusory glamor, which causes any creature who can see to perceive everything in the palace as polished and gleaming, with decorations—fine tablecloths, beautiful woven tapestries, immaculate carpets, and the like—disguising completely its damaged and timeworn reality.

Return to Normal. After 24 hours, the magic of the horn ceases. The fey return to wherever they came from, the glamor no longer masks



Regarding Sexual Content and Overtones

The Court of Wine and Roses was famous in its day for its excesses, including lavish parties that were often orgiastic affairs of legendary proportions. Most of the references to this are subtle, mainly occurring in descriptions of rooms, pieces of artwork, and the like. However, there is the possibility that the Horn of Revels, a relic of the Court, will be used by your PCs, which brings a whole new level to the fore as the magic of the Horn summons a band of fey folk in the mood for, well . . . *revels*. This introduces a different group of encounters, one of which involves some sexual situations.

Though what we have presented here should be appropriate to a "PG-13" rating, as GM, you should determine your group's comfort level with these topics in their games prior to running the adventure and provide only as much detail as is agreed upon with your players. Be ready to tone things down by only alluding to such activity, or you can simply end scenes by fading to black and moving on if too much interaction or description might be problematic. The important thing is that everyone at the table can enjoy the game. If you decide you'd rather not include an encounter, simply remove it.

You could also choose to have the magic of the Horn of Revels no longer function, that blowing it would make a cacophonous noise that alerts the occupants of the palace to the PCs' presence and nothing more. If you choose this option, consider adding more brigands to Fergus' band and place them in areas where any encounters were removed, or add other creatures you deem appropriate for the setting.

the decrepitude of the palace, and the magical fence becomes active once again. Spells such as *dispel magic* have no effect on the horn's magic.

Revised Descriptions. If the PCs are exploring the palace after the horn is sounded, certain encounters and descriptions change significantly. In such cases, there is supplementary text provided in the area description preceded by the word "Revel." In such cases, refer to the Revel text rather than the boxed text when setting the scene for your players.

Discretion vs. Valor. Given the sudden "invasion" of fey into their new home, Fergus and the Tusks deem it wise to hunker down and wait out the situation, except where otherwise noted in the individual area descriptions.

3. ANTECHAMBER

A series of arches open onto a grander room beyond the entranceway here. To the left and right of the door stand two suits of plate armor, dusty and cobwebbed. An inscription in flowing script is painted above the main archway across from the double doors.

The inscription above the door is in Sylvan and reads, "Baccho's blessings and good fortune upon the lord and lady of this house. Long may they reign."

Creatures. Should anyone attempt to enter through the archways without reciting the above inscription, the two suits of **animated armor** step down off their bases and attack. They fight until destroyed. The two suits pursue intruders anywhere in the palace but do not follow them outside.

Revel. Should the PCs observe the summoned fey entering the palace, they note all of them repeat the inscription in a loud voice as they enter.

4. GRAND FOYER

A large staircase rises from the center of the room, leading to a second-story balcony and the upper level. Decorated arches allow egress from the hall to the east and west. The marble tile floor is thick with dust, and the number of sculptures that adorn the hall are veiled in cobwebs. An extensive fresco covers the ceiling high above, but its subject matter is difficult to discern from below in the dim light. The air carries the smells of dust, damp, and smoke.

The statues, made of both carved marble and cast bronze, are nudes of various types of fey, caught in poses of dance or merriment. If better lit, or if the PCs move up the stairs for closer examination, the fresco, though darkened from smoke damage, still shows a massive revel, with myriad fey dancing, drinking, feasting, and engaging in various erotic entanglements.

Discovery. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a discarded note on the floor amid the dust. The note reads:

Lil,

I look forward to seeing you for dinner this evening and having you for dessert. I shall bring my new ballad for you to hear. It's only right the one who inspired it should hear it first. See you in the Red Room.

Eilshaera

5. GAME ROOM

Targets hang along the eastern wall. A pair of round tables littered with scattered cards and surrounded by overturned chairs stand beside the southern windows, and a billiards table is to the north.

Treasure. This room remains as it was when it was first abandoned. The Tusks have already made a pass through and collected most anything of value, but a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers 3 cp, 2 gp, and 1 pp on the floor under and near the tables, as well as a hidden compartment under one of the card tables where someone seated could pull out cards to put in their deck. One of the cards in the compartment is a lich card from a *deck of illusions*.

6. PARLOR

Several padded chairs and a pair of sofas are scattered around the room near low tables, their coverings torn and sprouting stuffing. A cabinet stands open and empty against the wall between the northern windows.

The cabinet once held liquor, its remaining contents long since taken and drained by the Tusks, who have also scavenged the room for anything else of value.

Discovery. Scratched into the surface of one of the tables is a series of lines, like a portion of a maze, apparently showing a path to its center. This can be noticed with even a cursory examination of the room. Supposedly a remembered path into the center of the hedge maze, it is incorrect and instead brings those that follow these directions to the small garden (area 2) on the northeastern side of the maze.

7. NORTH HALL

This high-ceilinged hall runs north and south, with a door at its southern end and a window looking out to the grounds to the north. An archway opens in the east wall, while a similar portal to the west is blocked off by charred timbers and rubble.

The hall is empty and contains nothing of interest. The exit to the east leads to the parlor (area 6), and the door to the south opens into the western gallery (area 8).

8. WESTERN GALLERY

This long hall has several tall, narrow windows along the eastern wall, their soot-stained glass or empty, broken frames offering an expansive view of the courtyard. Along the western wall, several smoke-darkened paintings in gilded frames adorn the walls.

The paintings along the wall are portraits of members and relatives of the royal court, as well as a few favored friends and companions. Each portrait has a brass plaque affixed to it bearing the subject's name and affiliation to the court. One is labeled "Eilshaera, Royal Bard" and depicts a sable elf regarding the viewer with a sultry gaze as she leans upon a large harp. She stands in a room draped in crimson tapestries, with furniture in varying shades of burgundy, carmine, and vermilion. It hangs near a portrait of "Liliana, Heir to the Crown," a statuesque female sable elf in a gown of emerald green.

9. CHAMBERLAIN'S LIVING ROOM

A large, ebony desk faces the door when you enter, with a high-backed chair behind it; a bookshelf stands just past the chair along the north wall, empty but for a few worm-eaten volumes. To the south, a torn couch sits against the wall with a small table before it. In the corners stand two statues, one of a beautiful elf in a dress carrying flowers, the other a shadow fey playing a fiddle. An enclosed veranda to the west has several windows looking out onto the grounds.

Once the living area and office of the majordomo, this room has been long abandoned, though it has recently been rummaged through by the Tusks.

Discovery. Among the old papers in the drawers of the desk is a letter mentioning the breeding of the Sultry Twilight rose. The letter notes the new roses will be grown and tended at the center of the hedge maze until the King and Queen give the order to have them placed in the garden proper. There are also records for the royal wine cellar, showing four barrels of King's Prize stored there. The letters and records are from several decades ago.

10. CHAMBERLAIN'S BEDROOM

Once a well-appointed bedroom, this chamber is dominated by a large, canopied bed. A bearskin rug is on the floor before the fireplace, and a thick, woven carpet covers the floor between the bed and a low wardrobe with a padded leather top. A desk and chair occupy the east side of the room.

This room has long since been looted of anything of value or interest. The fireplace here is connected to the one in area 11. Small or smaller creatures can move through this area from room to room, while Medium creatures must squeeze through the opening.

Revel. A magical glamor gives the illusion that the room is much more sumptuous, clean, and comfortable than it actually is. A small fire crackles merrily in the hearth, alongside the sound of joyous giggling. A pair of **nymphs** (see appendix) and four **satyrs** are lounging on the bed and the bearskin rug. When the PCs enter, the creatures make pleasant greetings and encourage the PCs to join in the fun. Should the PCs refuse, a successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check is necessary to gracefully decline without giving insult to the fey folk. On a failed check, one of the **nymphs** and a **satyr** take it personally enough to leave their frolicking and engage the PCs in combat. Neither is willing to die over hard feelings, however, and beg off to go nurse their wounds if reduced to half of their hit points or fewer. Should the PCs not accept their surrender, the rest of the fey join the fray to save their friends.

11. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

A large fireplace dominates the northern wall, its coals banked and warming the room. A pair of bunkbeds are set against the southern wall, while another single bed is to the east. To the west of the fireplace is a large wooden desk and a leather chair.

Creatures. Once the quarters of the captain of the guard, this room is now where the lieutenants of the brigand band sleep. At any given time, two of the band's four lieutenants (**bandit captains**) can be found here. They respond to intruders with violence.

If combat breaks out in area 12, the lieutenants open the door that connects the rooms to assess the

situation. Each time a bandit falls, one lieutenant enters the room to provide additional support.

Treasure. Five footlockers in the room contain the lieutenants' spare equipment and monetary wealth. A total of 210 sp and 70 gp can be found in these containers.

12. BARRACKS

Just beyond the doorway, a spiral stone staircase ascends to the upper level of the palace. Past the stairwell, bunkbeds line the walls, a pair of footlockers at the end of each.

This room was once the quarters of the palace guard. Now it serves as the sleeping area for the Tusks.

Creatures. The lesser members of the Tusks bunk here. At any given time, eight of the brigands (**thugs,** but armed with longswords instead of maces) can be found resting here. They respond to non-fey intruders with violence, attempting to fall back to area 11 if at least half their number have fallen in combat and they have no lieutenants from that room for support.

13. DINING HALL

Two elaborate, brass chandeliers hang from the ceiling here, tarnished from neglect, with their candles burnt to nubs. A long table runs down the middle of the room, bearing a tattered tablecloth and scattered tableware. Chairs ring the table, some askew, some fallen to the floor. A large hearth takes up a portion of the southern wall. Long, wooden benches line the northern wall.

This hall once was used for smaller and more intimate feasts. For large revels, spare tables and chairs would be brought into the ballroom (area 15). This room has nothing of value remaining in it.

Revel. The dining hall is clean, its chandeliers polished and aglow with fresh candles. The table is laden with a great feast, and the chairs are all occupied by shadow fey or sable elves (*Book of Ebon Tides*). PCs that approach in a nonhostile fashion are given a hearty welcome and encouraged to partake in the celebration and join the feast. Should the PCs refuse, a successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check is necessary to avoid insult or arousing the ire of the fey. If the check fails, one of the shadow fey in attendance orders his shadow fey **gladiator** to teach the rude party crashers some manners.

If the PCs accept the invitation, they are given heaping plates of food and full flagons and are sent to the servants' benches to eat. As they've willingly accepted the magic of the Horn of Revels, they spend the next hour eating, drinking, and making merry. At the end of the hour, they gain the benefits of the spell *heroes' feast.*

14. KITCHEN

A massive hearth, flanked by a pair of ovens, takes up most of the northern wall. Shelves, counters, and sinks cover most of the rest. A couple of well-used chopping blocks stand in the center of the room, near a trapdoor in the floor.

The door in the southwest quadrant of this room leads into a pantry, now overrun with vermin and mostly bare. The other doors lead into the dining hall (area 13) and ballroom (area 15) respectively. The trapdoor leads down to the wine cellar (area 17).

Trap. The trapdoor leading to the cellar has a *glyph of warding* cast on it. Opening the door without saying the phrase, "Wine for m'lady" causes a blast of magical energy in a 20-foot radius, forcing each creature in the area to make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 22 (5d8) fire damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one. The glyph can be discovered with a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check.

Revel. The kitchen appears much the same, only cleaner, and there is a shadow fey **gladiator** (current hit points 88) sitting on the trapdoor. He is drinking wine from a keg and nursing what appear to be burns that have reddened and blistered his hands and face. Appointed to fetch wine for the revel, the guardian set off the glyph on his first trip down. Now he's drinking to take the sting off.

If the PCs ask to be let into the cellar, he informs them there's only one barrel left down there, untapped, and he's saving it for his master. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check convinces him to let them down to collect it themselves. Otherwise, he says he'll move only if one of the PCs defeats him in a drinking contest. The guardian has already drunk a significant amount from his keg. If a PC can succeed on three out of five DC 14 Constitution saving throws, they win the contest. The guardian passes out on the floor, removing him as an obstacle to the trapdoor.

15. BALLROOM

This large, empty room has floors of marble tile set with mosaic images of grapevines, musical notes, and wine goblets. A half-dozen ornate, brass chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling. A large alcove with windows viewing the grounds is accessible through an archway to the east.

Revel. Several fey, mostly shadow fey and sable elves, are in the ballroom, dancing to the music of a fey quartet. The PCs are asked to dance. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check allows a PC to beg off, but those who fail their checks are offered a different sort of dance, with bared steel. Eight shadow fey **thugs** challenge the PCs to a fight as the dancers clear the center of the room to give them space.

16. EASTERN GALLERY

This long hall has several tall, narrow windows along the western wall, their soot-stained glass or empty, broken frames offering a view of the courtyard. Along the eastern wall, several smoke-darkened paintings in gilded frames adorn the walls. The southern portion of the hall has collapsed and is choked with rubble.

The collapsed portion of the gallery is inaccessible. The paintings here are landscapes from various planes, but all are heavily damaged by smoke and difficult to make out their subject matter.

17. WINE CELLAR

A ramp descends from the trapdoor to a large cellar. Wine racks line and fill the northern half of the room. Barrels and kegs of various sizes are stacked against the walls to the south. Long tables and numerous chairs are stacked in the center of the room.

Treasure. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) finds a single remaining barrel of King's Prize wine, hidden away behind some barrels in a corner. If the result of the check is 14 or higher, examining the remaining bottles of wine on the racks also uncovers six intact bottles of fine wine (worth 25 gp each).

Palace (Upper Floor)

Very little remains of this level of the palace, as it sustained most of the damage from the fire that ravaged the building many years ago.

18. UPPER GRAND FOYER

Stairs rise from the floor below to a walkway that encircles the room. Halls lead off to the east and west wings, but the one to the east has collapsed. Charred timbers and broken stone block access in that direction.

The upper level of the eastern wing was demolished in the fire. The other hall connects to what little remains of the upper level of the western wing.

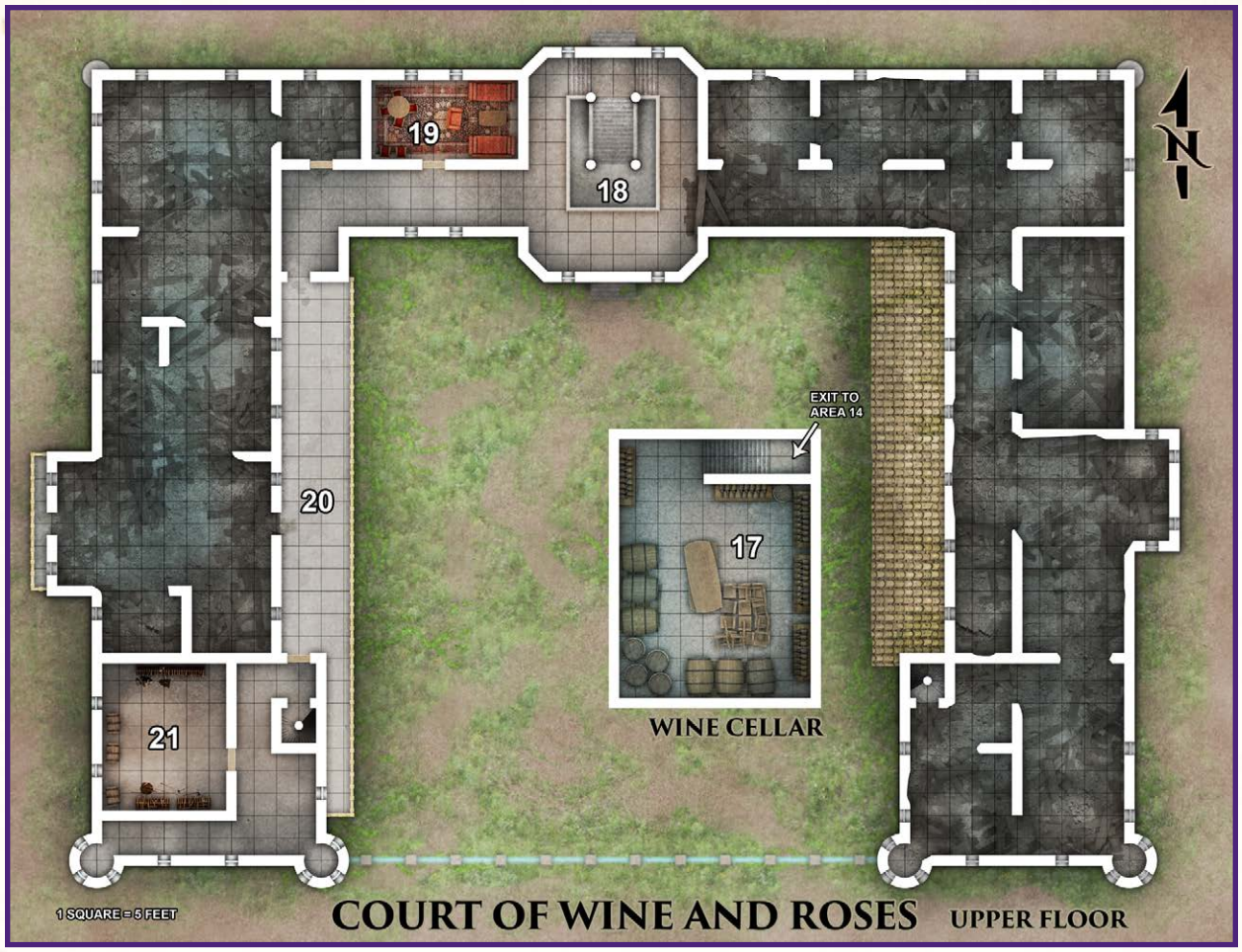
19. THE RED ROOM

The furniture, carpeting, and draperies of this room are all varying shades of red, once vivid, now darkened by smoke and soot.

Creatures. This room is now occupied by Fergus ap Hywell, the **wereboar** leader of the Tusks. He prefers to fight in hybrid form so he can gore opponents while he cuts them down with his greatsword.

Treasure. Fergus carries a sack that holds a jade mug (worth 25 gp) and three bloodstones (worth 50 gp each). A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a silver scroll tube (worth 10 gp). Inside the scroll tube is the final ballad written by Eilshaera, entitled, "Drowning (In Your Wine-Dark Eyes.)" Hidden in the lining of the underside of one of the couches is a small, polished wooden box, which can be discovered with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check. Engraved on the lid is an inscription: *To my silver-tongued love, from your muse.* Inside the box is an exquisitely beautiful crystal rose. This is *Liliana's Rose* (see appendix).





20. WESTERN BALCONY

A bronze railing encloses this balcony that stretches across the upper story of the west wing.

This balcony is the only reliable route to travel the upper floor of the west wing.

21. ARMORY

Empty weapon and armor racks line the north and south walls of this room, while several chests rest against the western wall.

The door to this room is locked, requiring a successful DC 15 check using thieves' tools to open. The former palace armory now serves as the treasury for Fergus and his brigands. Fergus carries the key to the room.

Treasure. Inside the chests against the wall is the collected treasure of Fergus and his bandits: 500 cp, 2,000 sp, 600 gp, and 30 pp.

The Hedge Maze

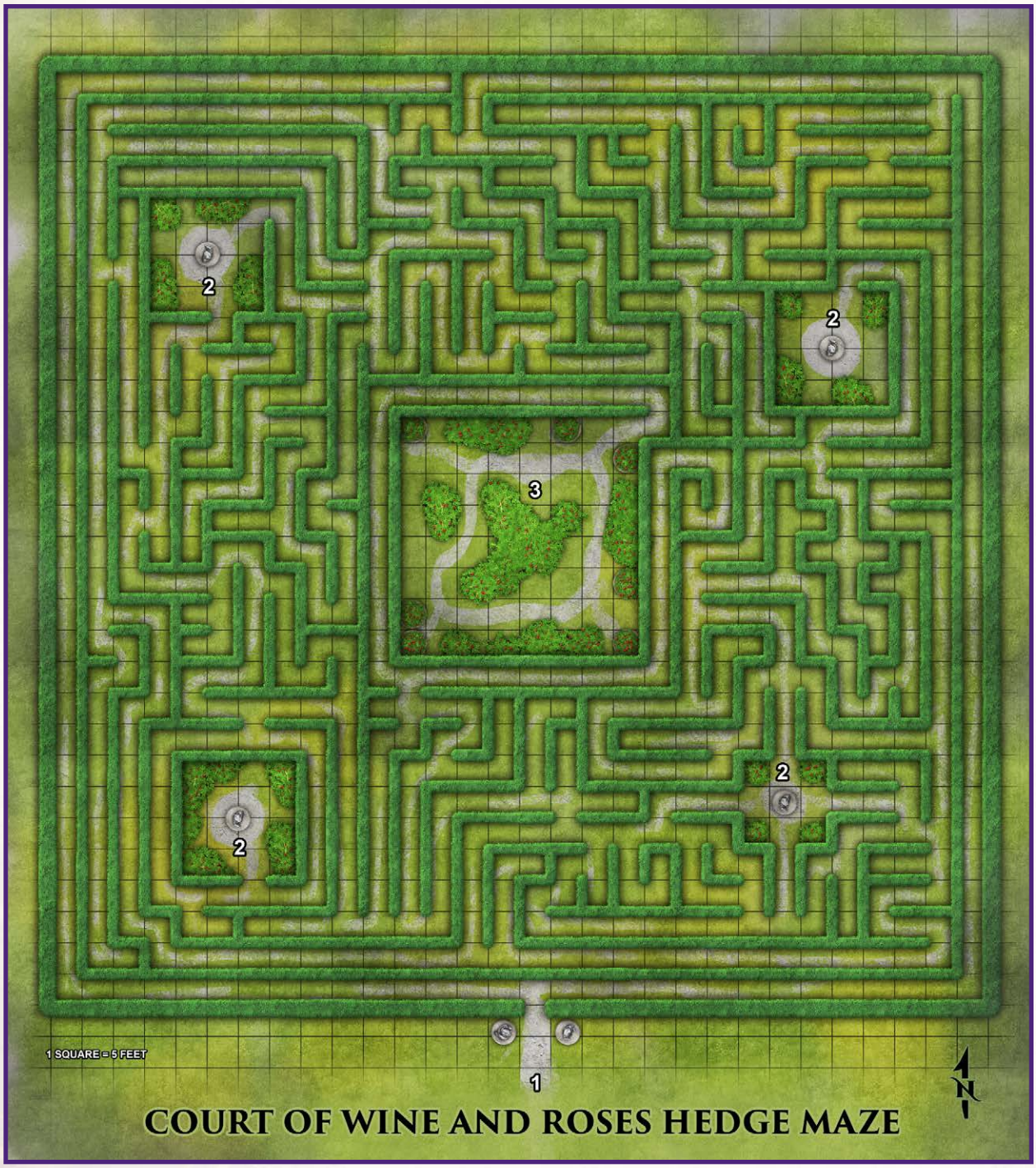
The maze was a favored distraction in the Court of Wine and Roses and where their rarest and most prized blooms were cultivated at its hidden center. Magic was used to keep the hedges in check and to preserve their health and vigor, as well as the rare roses kept in its central, hidden garden. The spells used here are still mostly intact, keeping it in much better form than the rest of the grounds.

1. ENTRANCE

Much of the gardens that occupied the land north of the palace have grown wild or been choked out by the natural vegetation of the area, unable to thrive without tending. Standing tall among the undergrowth are the verdant walls of a great hedge maze—which, if you didn't know any better, you'd say had been recently trimmed and tended. The entrance is at the end of a gravel pathway leading from the north doors of the palace, flanked by a pair of marble

statues: to the right, a shapely nymph running, her laughing face looking back over her shoulder; to the left, a lithe satyr, apparently in pursuit with a determined look on his face.

Revel. Before the PCs can enter the hedge maze, a female figure with slate gray skin, wearing a garment of vines and leaves, steps from the nearby undergrowth. This is a **dryad** (with changes noted below) named Smilax. She is rather perturbed, as she has been called to the palace by the magic of the Horn of Revels. However, her tree, while on the former property of the palace, is more than 300 yards away. She cannot enter the palace without suffering the effects of being too far from her tree, yet she feels compelled to join the revel in some way, yet not wanting to suffer for it. She demands that the PCs return to the palace and bring her some



wine to drink and someone who can entertain her with conversation or dance (or some other form of amusement) before they head into the hedge maze.

If the PCs assist Smilax, any of the alcohol currently being drunk by the revelers in area 13 or 14 suffices; likewise, any of the contents of the wine cellar (area 17) is acceptable. As for conversation, dance, or amusement—a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check can convince any of the fey to take pity on Smilax and come keep her company for a time.

Creatures. If the PCs refuse her demand, Smilax casts *wall of thorns*, blocking their entry into the maze and refusing to let them in until they bring her what she desires. If they attempt to destroy or bypass the wall, she attacks, summoning eight vine-wrapped **skeletons** that guard her tree to assist her. The **skeletons** arrive in 2 rounds. If Smilax is reduced to half her hit points or fewer, and all her minions are defeated, she ceases concentrating on the *wall of thorns* and flees back to her tree.

Creature Change. Smilax can cast *wall of thorns* 1/day.

Discovery. Should the PCs assist Smilax without any initial refusals or combat, she is grateful enough that she gives them directions to the center of the hedge maze and warns them about the guardian there (see area 3). If the encounter does not come to violence, but the PCs show any sort of hesitancy to assist her, are openly annoyed, or otherwise insult her, she gives them the path through the maze but neglects to warn them about the guardian.

2. SMALL GARDEN

The hedges open into a small area lined with fragrant rose bushes. In the center of this little garden stands a marble statue of a female elf, smiling, with her hand extended as if offering a greeting or aid.

Statue. This is one of a few small garden areas in the maze. The statue is magical. If a creature reaches out and grasps the statue's hand, the creature is teleported back to the entrance of the maze. This only happens once per creature, per statue, in a 24-hour period.

3. CENTER GARDEN

The maze opens into a square area. Roses of wondrous colors and aromas are planted here, some in the ground, others in large, glazed pots around the perimeter.

Treasure. A rose bush at the center of the area is notable for its lush, purple blooms. This is the Sultry Twilight rose the PCs' patron is seeking.

Creatures. Planted next to the Sultry Twilight bush is a **rose golem** (*Book of Ebon Tides*) tasked with guarding the rare roses grown here. If anyone attempts to damage or steal its charges, the golem rises and attacks. Once all its opponents fall or flee, it takes any sleeping foes and carries them out of the maze, depositing them outside the entrance.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the PCs have collected the three objects of their search, the adventure is ended. They may have loose ends to tie up with the Tusks or any of the fey that attended the Revel first. Otherwise, they can return to their patron with the items to receive their promised reward.



The Sodality of Silent Rites

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 6TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The decline of the Winter Court was a planned and gradual fall, as enemies sought to weaken its increasingly mad Moonlit King over time. Members of the Court were killed in duels, met deadly accidents, fled, or simply found themselves new patrons.

A group of the Moonlit King's servants called the Order of the Sovereign's Circle once kept dangerous and esoteric knowledge for the Winter Court. Nearly a century ago, the Demon Lord Akyishigal orchestrated a grave insult to the Queen of Night and Magic to frame the Order. The Queen commanded the Order's founder, Mesina d'Bruna, turned to stone and used her magic to strike d'Bruna's name from all records and living memory. The statue was gifted to the Demon Lord for his service.

The remainder of the Order fled with what archival materials they could spirit away and covertly reestablished themselves in pockets around the Shadow Realm, including in Corremel. The Order disguises itself as a sect of Hecate worshippers, calling themselves the Sodality of Silent Rites.

Struck from Memory

When running the adventure, keep in mind that no one the PCs speak to remembers the name of Mesina d'Bruna, since the Queen of Night and Magic has magically struck her name from living memory. The only ways the PCs can learn d'Bruna's name are via a book in area 15 and via a ghost in area 17.

Akyishigal gifted the statue of d'Bruna to the Court of Sparrows several decades ago, where it sat outside in a courtyard to be forgotten. The Order of the Sovereign's Circle took advantage of a recent shift in power in the Court to steal the statue with the hope of restoring their founder, but they've encountered difficulties in their attempts to restore d'Bruna to life and seek assistance.

The current ruler of the Court of Sparrows, the trollkin chieftain called Undefeated King Marrow, would lose status if the theft were discovered by the greater courts. His agents have tracked the thieves to Corremel. They are unwilling to risk attention from the city's ruler, the Black Prince, and seek a competent group to retrieve their stolen property.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The PCs are near Corremel when they're approached by two opposing factions.

Statue Retrieval

Upon arriving at the outskirts of the city, the PCs are greeted by agents from the Court of Sparrows.

A gray-skinned trollkin accompanied by a well-dressed halfling calls out a greeting to you. The halfling clears his throat to speak. "Your reputation precedes you," he says, and in a lower tone adds, "and we could use your assistance."

Each of the pair wears a cloak held closed by a sparrow-shaped clasp. The trollkin ranger Gwana Snapbone (N **trollkin raider** [see appendix]) and halfling courtier Pritha Trerend (N halfling **spy**) are hunting thieves who stole a statue from the Court of Sparrows. The statue has little monetary value, but it is important to Undefeated King Marrow, and he

wants it returned. The pair has tracked the thieves as far as Corremel, but Pritha delicately explains that King Marrow does not have the Black Prince's favor and would prefer to use intermediaries to discretely retrieve the statue. The pair offer to pay 400 gp per PC for successful retrieval and an additional 100 gp per PC if the group can return it undetected.

Based on accounts of the theft from witnesses in the court, the pair believes the thieves are members of an esoteric Hecatean cult known as the Sodality of Silent Rites that's based in Corremel. Members of the cult wear distinctive bird-shaped masks and take vows of silence. They do not know why the Sodality would steal the statue but suspect that some malefactor has reason to try to embarrass their king.

The pair paid a goblin named Melkar (N shadow goblin **spy**) to chase rumors about the Sodality and return with what information he found. The Sparrow Court representatives would like the group to meet with Melkar at his stall in the Sheltered Market and continue the investigation. The pair will wait outside the city for the statue's return.

If the PCs have spent some time in the Shadow Realm prior to this adventure, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (History) check reveals that the Court of Sparrows is a minor court once dominated by courtfolk halflings. A few years ago, the Court was conquered by a trollkin warlord who seeks to retain the court's legitimacy.

A Counteroffer

A short time after the PCs' encounter with the Court of Sparrow representatives, as they near the city gates, an umbral human intercepts the group.

"Your pardon, gracious ones," a ghostly pale human man calls out, approaching you from the direction of the city. His body is mostly hidden by a well-made dark cloak. "I have heard whispers that you have been recruited for an errand by a minor court, but I beg you to listen to my counteroffer; I bring you a vastly more profitable alternative."

He introduces himself as Vacer and says he represents a group that does not want the statue returned. He will pay the PCs double what their current employers promised them if the group destroys the statue, citing a figure that is exactly double the amount the PCs and the Sparrow representative agreed upon. Vacer speaks of the Court of Sparrows with disdain and says that destroying the statue will earn them favor with those far more powerful than the Court of Sparrows.

Vacer reveals his master with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check: the Demon Lord Akyishigal, a powerful figure in the Shadow Realm.

If the PCs do not agree to the request, he shakes his head sadly. He tells them that if any members of the group destroy the statue before it is returned, he will provide the rewards to those members.

The Sheltered Market

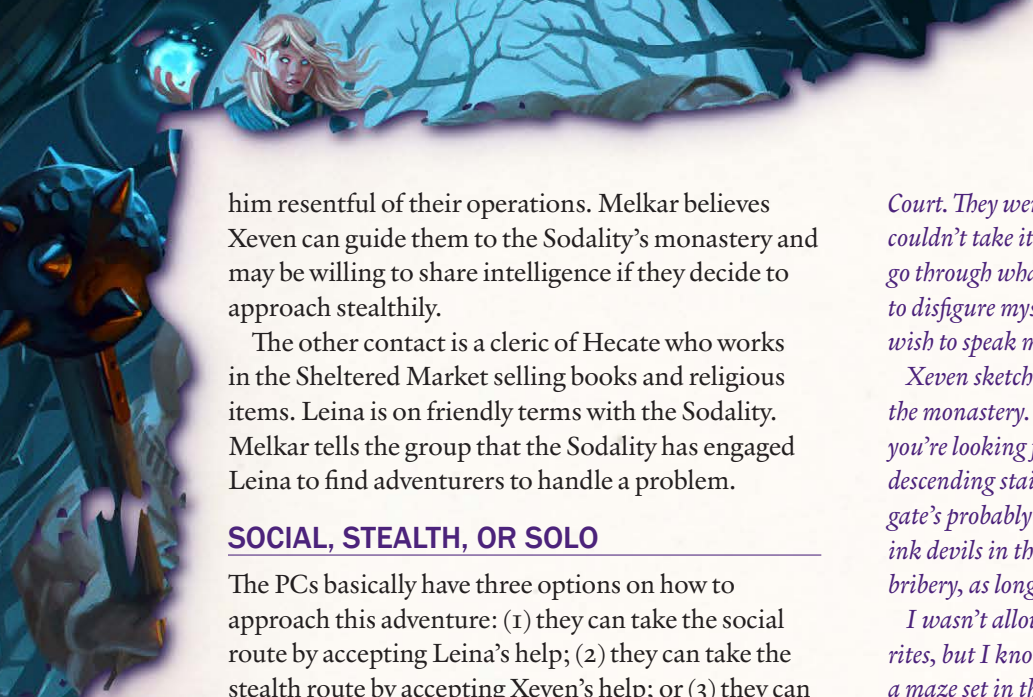
The famous Sheltered Market of Corremel is housed in a massive obsidian structure. Inner walls and ceilings are covered by friezes showing shadow fey interacting with members of other races. Once inside, ambient chatter and haggling are loud enough to make listening to others' conversations difficult. Edicts posted on walls and between the equally sized merchant stalls bear the elaborate signature of "Mistress Twylla Yoop" and list the rules of the market and associated fines levied when these rules are broken. Today's offenses include wasting another's time (25 gp fine); failure to praise the Black Prince upon completion of a purchase (50 gp fine); insulting a merchant or damaging their reputation (150 gp fine).

Given enough time shopping, almost anything can be found and purchased at the Sheltered Market. Most mundane items can be found within an hour, and magical items may be available as allowed by the GM. If the PCs need items that would be useful in transporting a statue, for example, there is a chance they are available at the market. Any merchant can easily (and gladly) direct the PCs to Melkar's stall.

Hunting the Sodality. The PCs can also choose to hunt for rumors about the Sodality. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check reveals the Sodality recently attempted to purchase a basilisk at the Market. Failure on this check may draw the attention of the Market guards, who fine the PC for wasting another person's time unless a PC succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidate or Persuasion) check to convince them otherwise.

Melkar's Stall. The goblin Melkar is found working at a weapons stall near the center of the market. He cackles gleefully when the PCs reveal who they are. He informs them he has found two solid contacts.

The first potential contact is a member of the city watch, the Lanternkeepers, by the name of Xeven (N shadow fey **guard**). Xeven apparently has a complicated history with the Sodality that has left



him resentful of their operations. Melkar believes Xeven can guide them to the Sodality's monastery and may be willing to share intelligence if they decide to approach stealthily.

The other contact is a cleric of Hecate who works in the Sheltered Market selling books and religious items. Leina is on friendly terms with the Sodality. Melkar tells the group that the Sodality has engaged Leina to find adventurers to handle a problem.

SOCIAL, STEALTH, OR SOLO

The PCs basically have three options on how to approach this adventure: (1) they can take the social route by accepting Leina's help; (2) they can take the stealth route by accepting Xeven's help; or (3) they can proceed solo without anyone's help. Several parts of the adventure have different text depending on which lead the PCs choose to follow. In such cases, there will be supplementary text provided in the area description preceded by the word "Social," "Stealth," or "Solo."

Stealth Approach

If the PCs elect to speak to Lanternkeeper Xeven, Melkar makes arrangements for the guard to meet the group in Melkar's home. Xeven is aware the PCs seek to retrieve the statue.

Lanternkeeper Xeven knocks on the door at the appointed time. He appears nervous when he enters and displays his badge of office, the distinctive oval lantern of the Lanternkeepers. He begins speaking immediately. "I'll get you inside that cursed place. I'll tell you what you need to know to get in and out without a fight."

If the PCs demur, he tells them he is their best chance to enter the Sodality's sanctum. He explains that the Sodality has an arrangement with the Black Prince: The Prince allows them to stay in Corremel provided the Sodality gives him or his servants access to their archives. Due to this, the light of a Lanternkeeper reveals the hidden entrance to their monastery.

If the PCs appear as if they might resort to violence against him and try to steal his lantern, he reminds them that being caught with a Lanternkeeper's lantern is punishable by death. If the PCs take the lantern, dozens of Lanternkeepers swarm Corremel to retrieve it once they realize it is missing (1d4 days).

Xeven touches his mouth anxiously as he speaks. He shares that he was once a member of the Sodality and that the group is not who they claim to be. "Some are Hecate worshippers, but their true loyalty lies to the Moonlit King of the Winter Court. They were my brothers once, but they became zealots. I couldn't take it anymore. They threw me out when I wouldn't go through what they call their 'higher rites.' I wasn't about to disfigure myself." He appears uncomfortable and does not wish to speak more on that subject.

Xeven sketches out a rough layout of the ground floor of the monastery. "You'll need to be swift and silent. The statue you're looking for is probably in one of the archives below. The descending stairs are on the south side of the east library. The gate's probably locked. Your best bet is probably to hit up the ink devils in the scriptorium to the north. They're not above bribery, as long as they fulfill the terms of their contracts.

I wasn't allowed downstairs since I didn't take the higher rites, but I know there's a trick to opening the doors—there's a maze set in the floor. Start in the middle, figure it out and you should be good. You figure out how you're going to move a statue yet?"

He'll answer basic questions about the Sodality but has largely exhausted his desire to share his knowledge. He does not discuss his reasons for assisting the PCs, but he is bitter about being kicked out of the Order. When the conversation is over, he tells them to meet him at the southern end of Shady Lane when evening falls tonight, and he'll accompany them to the entrance.

Social Approach

If the PCs elect to speak to Leina (N shadow fey **priest**), Melkar sends them to her stall in the Sheltered Market.

Leina sells items related to worship and study of the goddess Hecate. These items include amulets (1 gp) and pins with symbols representing Hecate's different aspects (5 sp). She sells copies of *Hecate's Book of Mysteries* (25 gp) and scrolls of theology (25 gp each). Worshippers of Hecate and those that purchase items from the stall have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks with Leina.

Leina has a profitable relationship with the Sodality of Silent Rites. She sells their scrolls and makes use of their library. If a character mentions they are investigating the group due to a theft, she replies that such an action is unlikely.

Leina recently received an urgent message from the Sodality requesting her assistance in recruiting adventurers to help them deal with a basilisk problem in the caverns underneath the Scriptorium. She believes the PCs are the right group to answer the call. She tells the PCs to meet her at the southern entrance of Shady Lane the following evening if they want to meet the Sodality to discuss the job.



Solo Approach

If the PCs speak to any of the above but proceed without any assistance, their way forward is more difficult, but completing the adventure is still possible, provided they can find the location of the monastery.

The Monastery

Most members of the Sodality are neutral **cultists, cult fanatics,** or **knights** that wear dark robes over their armor. Many wear bird masks that hide their faces, as they have magically disfigured themselves to show their devotion to the Moonlit King. Most have replaced their mouths with an owl's beak and are paired with one of the Moonlit King's human-mouthed **stryx** (see appendix), who serve as their companions and occasional voice. These members cannot speak normally but can cast spells with verbal components using unusual vocalizations.

Creatures Present. Some of the monastery residents are away searching for methods to restore their founder, but members present include 4 **cult fanatics** (with the changes noted below), 2 **cultists,** 1 **knight** (with the changes noted below), 1 **guard,** 1 **priest,** and 1 **mage.**

Creature Change. Add the following to the list of actions for any cult fanatic or knight:

> ***Painful Screech (Recharge 6).*** The cult fanatic (or knight) lets out a loud, screeching cry. Each creature within 30 feet that is not a worshipper of the Moonlit King must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage and has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the end of their next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and suffers no additional effect. This action replaces **Multiattack** for the cult fanatic and **Leadership** for the knight.

1. ENTRANCE

Shady Lane is not far from the Sheltered Market. Anyone you speak to in Corremel knows at least a little about Shady Lane: it's the one area of the city that is shrouded. It's the bane of the Lamplighter's Guild. Even their magical light seems dimmer there. It attracts suspicious people who keep to themselves.

The entrance to the monastery is magically hidden, normally appearing as a featureless wall. Beyond the hidden door, a set of stairs descend to the lobby.

Moonlit Connections. A PC with a connection to the Moonlit King—for example, a warlock with the Moonlit King as their patron—can always see the door.

Stealth. If Xeven guides the PCs, or if they have a Lanternkeeper lantern, the lantern's light reveals the door. He opens it, wishes them luck, then departs.

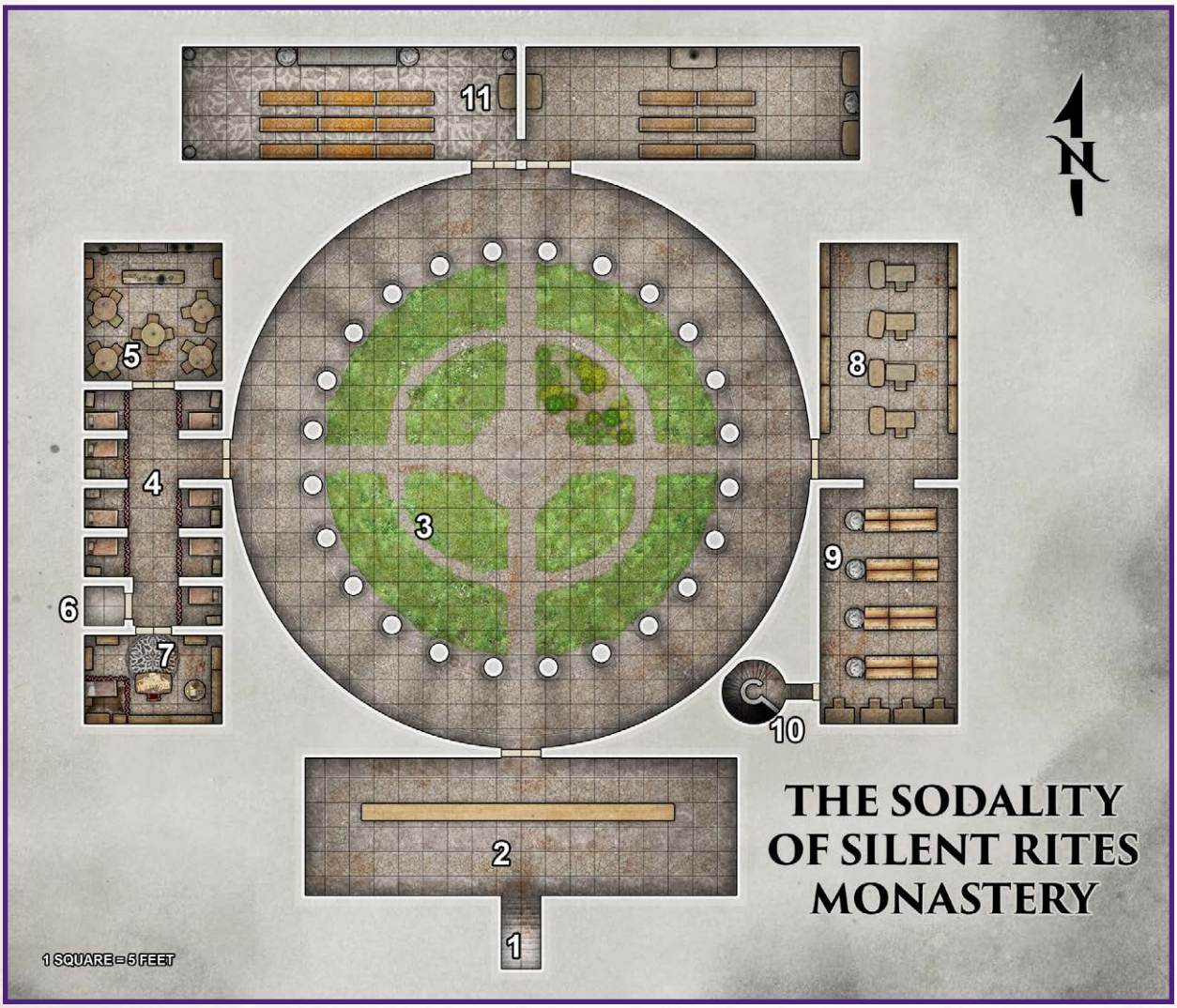
Social. If Leina guides the PCs, she casts a *light* spell on her holy symbol, which reveals the door. She opens it and escorts the characters inside.

Solo. If the PCs do not have a guide but have somehow discovered how to locate the monastery's door, a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves tools' can be used to open the door. The door has AC 15, 25 hp, and a damage threshold of 10. If characters destroy the door, those inside hear the noise and are prepared for combat, as described in area 2.

2. LOBBY

This mostly featureless room has a long desk near its northern side. A small bell sits in the center of the desk. Open doors to the north behind the desk lead to a large, round courtyard surrounded by a cloistered walk.

Stealth. If the PCs have successfully entered the building using stealth, the room is currently empty.



Social. If the PCs were brought in by Leina, she rings the bell. A robed member of the Sodality wearing an owl mask approaches and gestures for the group to follow her to area 3; a stryx sitting on her shoulder introduces her, in first person, as Sister Iebra (N umbral human **cult fanatic**). Leina takes her leave at this time.

Solo (or Failed Stealth). If the PCs have forced their way inside or have otherwise been found or detected, the Sodality have a group ready to engage them here. Their group includes 2 **cultists,** 1 **cult fanatic** and 1 **mage.** The remaining members of the Order (3 **cult fanatics,** 1 **guard,** 1 **knight,** and 1 **priest**) are elsewhere in the monastery and arrive in 6 rounds.

3. COURTYARD

A large, grassy courtyard acts as the centerpiece of the monastery, surrounded by a cloistered walkway held up by a series of columns. The area is brightly lit by an unseen source. A small area to the northwest features a small food garden.

Stealth or Solo. There is a 50% chance the PCs encounter two **cult fanatics** and a **knight** training in the courtyard, engaged in mock combat. Otherwise, there is one **cult fanatic** and one **cultist** tending to the garden in the northwest, accompanied by a **stryx** giving them poor advice on how to grow larger vegetables. If the knight's group is present, characters can attempt an opposed Dexterity (Stealth) check against the cult fanatic's passive Wisdom (Perception) of 11 to sneak by. If the gardeners are present, the characters can make the check against the stryx's passive Wisdom (Perception) of 14. Failure results in combat. The cultists in area 4 arrive in 2 rounds and the cultists in area 11 in 4 rounds.

Social. If Sister Iebra is with the PCs, they pass through this area without incident, though they do observe the stryx giving the gardener its bad advice as they're passing through.

4. LIVING QUARTERS

This large area features several 10 x 10 curtained cells that act as the monks' living spaces. They are all spartan, and inside each is only a plain cot and small chest in which they keep their few belongings and vestments. A refectory and kitchen are visible beyond open doors to the north. Closed doors lie directly to the south and to a small room to the southwest.

Stealth. If the PCs have entered this room stealthily, two **cult fanatics** are resting in their curtained-off cells, and a **cultist** is eating at a community table in the refectory to the north. They attack if they discover the PCs, joined by the **mage** in area 7 in 2 rounds, and the remainder of the members in 8 rounds. PCs can make a Dexterity (Stealth) check with advantage against the cult fanatics' passive Perception (Wisdom) of 11 to pass through the room unobserved.

Social. If Sister Iebra is with the PCs, they pass through this area without incident.

5. REFECTORY AND KITCHEN

The northern end of the room is occupied by a kitchen and prep area, including a long, wooden table for preparing food; a woodburning stove and a pair of wooden counters on the north wall; and two cabinets holding dishware and cutlery or food supplies. There are five large, round tables in the room, with eight chairs around each; all are simple and utilitarian.

6. SHADOW ROOM

Social. Sister Iebra leads them to the small room in the southwest of area 4.

The bright light of this room throws stark shadows against each wall. It is empty of any objects or furnishings. The walls, floor, and ceiling are all pristine white, making it a pure canvas for light and shadow. Sister Iebra positions herself so that her shadow stands out as the dominant one in the room. Shortly after you enter, her shadow begins speaking. While Iebra herself is still, her shadow animatedly gestures and swings its arms wide, gesticulating more wildly as the conversation proceeds.

Iebra looks at you as her shadow speaks her words. "The Sodality requires your services and discretion," she says. "We must avoid the notice of those that would seek to steal or destroy the knowledge we've accumulated and stored here, and so we find ourselves in the position to beg the aide of our honored guests."

She pauses for a moment, and her shadow puts its hands on its hips as if impatient for her to continue. "We need your help dealing with a pair of basilisks located in our archives below the monastery."

She goes onto explain that they have a statue in the basilisk room that is not merely a statue—it is the founder of their order, turned to stone decades ago after a cruel betrayal orchestrated by their enemies; because of this betrayal, their founder's name was struck from living memory, so they don't even know the founder's name anymore. Their mage, Risa d'Ruvek (N shadow fey **mage**), discovered, after years of research, a way to restore their founder to flesh using an arcane ritual requiring a basilisk's gullet. Having recently reclaimed the statue, the Sodality

had tasked one of their best to oversee the restoration, as it was their belief that only the worthy may fulfill such a holy quest. While this brother was successful at procuring the basilisks and hiding them away, he was found to be unworthy, as the basilisks ultimately turned him into a statue as well.

The PCs are offered 400 gp each if they agree to kill the basilisks and not reveal any of what they see here to outsiders. Iebra also offers the PCs a *+1 dagger*, a *periapt of health*, and a *cloak of elvenkind* prior to facing the basilisks. The items are currently in area 7.

If the PCs can prove they are worthy, the Sodality offers them an additional 400 gp each to retrieve the statue and complete the ritual. Iebra tells the PCs they can prove their worthiness by correctly choosing the path to the statue and bringing the Founder's statue to the Chapel (area 11). They will be rewarded for slaying the basilisks even if deemed unworthy.

Once they are ready to proceed, Iebra provides keys to the stairwell gates and guides them to area 10. She tells them their trial to prove their worthiness begins as soon as they set foot on the stairs and leaves them with the hint that the one true sacred path begins at the center.

Stealth. The bright light of this room throws stark shadows against each wall. It is empty of any objects or furnishings. The walls, floor, and ceiling are all pristine white, making it a pure canvas of light and shadow.

7. OFFICE

When you step into this large room, the first thing you see is the vast number of books on the bookcases that cover every wall. On the floor immediately in front of the doors is a large, round, black and white woven rug bearing an intricate, stylized snowflake pattern. Beyond the rug is a large desk covered in scrolls, quills, and stacks of books. In the southeast corner, there's a large table with more stacks of books on it, and in the southwest corner, there's a 10 × 10 area that's been cordoned off with floor-to-ceiling violet curtains. Behind the desk, a serious-looking female shadow fey sits, left hand on a tome, right hand copying something down with a quill.

The office is the living quarters and study of the Sodality's mage, Risa d'Ruvek. While devoted to the Moonlit King, she has not undergone the disfiguration that many members of the Order have, as she believes it would affect her spellcasting. She spends most of her time in this room doing research.

Stealth. If the PCs stealthily enter the room, they spot Risa at her desk before she sees them. They have the option to leave or remain to engage the mage. Risa does not attack immediately if the PCs approach her. She notes that she could raise an alarm, but she wants to know why they are there. If the PCs tell her they are there to recover or destroy the statue, she angrily tells them the statue is a living being. Risa makes the PCs the same offer described by Iebra in area 6. If the PCs decline, Risa simply states, "So be it" and initiates combat. She is joined by 3 **cult fanatics** in 2 rounds and the rest of the Order (1 **cult fanatic,** 2 **cultists,** 1 **guard,** 1 **knight,** and 1 **priest**) in 6 rounds.

Treasure. If the PCs fight and kill Risa (or force her to flee), inside a chest beside the desk, they find a *+1 dagger*, a *periapt of health*, and a *cloak of elvenkind*. Otherwise, they gain these items from Iebra or from Risa directly as described above.

8. SCRIPTORIUM

Bookcases full of large tomes chained to the walls line the perimeter of this room. In the center are four long, wooden tables with scriptorium desks abutting them. The entire room is illuminated by magical light. The high ceiling is painted with scenes from Hecate's Book of Mysteries, *depicting the goddess in her three forms. Two of these desks are occupied by chained ink devils that appear to be working on copying pages with the occasional satisfied grunt.*

The **ink devils** (see appendix) ignore the characters unless the characters attempt to interact with them. Some of the tomes have illusory magic upon them, making them appear as mimics chained in place (a result of the ink devils' odd sense of humor).

The book chains can be removed by a member of the Sodality with an appropriate key, or with a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the PCs study relevant books for 1 hour, they have advantage on their next Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Religion check); the PCs can find such books by succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, or if they are directed by a representative of the Sodality.

A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the chains on the ink devils are decorative. The ink devils visibly wear a key ring at their belts. A PC who wishes to obtain the keys—and can remain hidden using *invisibility* or other creative means—can attempt to succeed at a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the ink devil's passive Wisdom (Perception) of 9. A success allows the PC to then attempt a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check; a success retrieves the keys. Failure alerts the ink devil to the PCs' presence; it turns invisible and attempts to flee



to warn the cultists. If the PCs threaten or attack the ink devils, they turn invisible at their first opportunity and flee to warn the cultists, who immediately proceed to area 2.

If the PCs speak to the devils, they initially appear annoyed at the interruption. They grow curious if a PC indicates they are looking for a key to the stairwell gate. While contractually bound to the Sodality, they are amenable to bargaining; they provide the keys in exchange for a magical scroll, a common magic item, or 25 gp. If the characters don't explicitly negotiate to keep their presence a secret, the ink devils eventually inform the Sodality of their presence. If that occurs, members of the Sodality wait for the characters in area 2 once the PCs return upstairs.

If the PCs remember to negotiate secrecy, the ink devils are impressed. They offer to trade additional information to the characters under the same terms as the key. If the PCs pay, the ink devils explain that the downstairs archives are locked and trapped, but that following the appropriate labyrinth path from the center opens the doors safely. They say that appropriate path is the one most appropriate to the Sodality's true patron but refuse to be more specific than that.

9. STACKS

The space in this room is largely filled with shelves burdened by books, scrolls, and pamphlets, with desks along the outer walls. Stone busts of shadow fey are arrayed on tables next to each row of shelves. A spiral staircase leading down is visible through a locked gate to the southwest.

If a PC stands next to one of the busts for more than 1 round, the statue animates and says the following:

"I am the Catalog and can guide you to the work you are looking for. What do you seek?"

If the PCs are attempting stealth, they have 4 rounds to act before a member of the Sodality comes to investigate. If the **cult fanatic** finds the PCs, they emit a loud screech and retreat to area 2 as described. If they do not find the PCs, they attribute the noise to one of the devils.

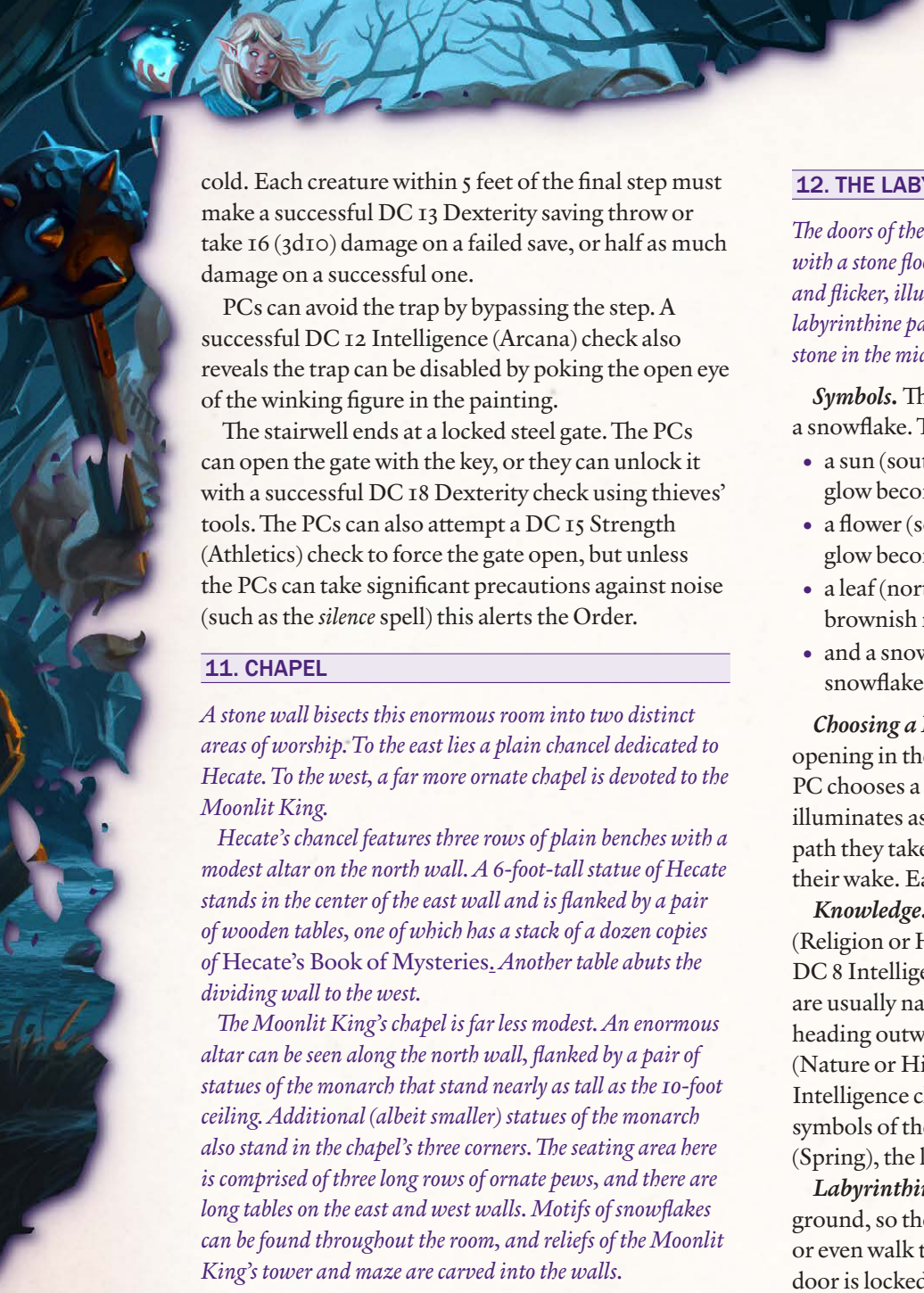
If a PC does not respond to the statue, it grows silent. If a PC mentions religion, history, or arcana, the statue informs them where to find such works. If a PC mentions the Order of the Sovereign's Circle, the statue begins laughing quietly, then louder and louder, warning of intruders.

10. STAIRWELL

The PCs can unlock the gates to the stairwell if they have keys provided by the ink devils or cultists. Alternatively, a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools unlocks the gate. PCs can also attempt a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check to force the gate open, but this noisy process alerts the Sodality.

A staircase is cut into stone here, spiraling downward. The outer wall of the stairwell is lined with a series of illustrations of the same figure, painted with considerable skill on the black stone. The first painting shows a bearded shadow fey in silver finery with ice blue eyes and well-coiffed hair partly hidden under a fancy hat. His form radiates dignity and gravitas. Each painting that follows illustrates the same figure in almost the same pose, with subtle changes that grow less subtle as you descend. The man's expression turns angry, then confused. He stares at his hand, which gradually takes on a bestial appearance. He looks alternately angry, amused, then confused the closer you get to the foot of the stairs. The man offers a bemused wink in the final painting above the final step.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the final step is trapped. If more than 10 pounds are placed on the step, the figure in the painting opens its mouth and releases a blast of frigid



cold. Each creature within 5 feet of the final step must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 16 (3d10) damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

PCs can avoid the trap by bypassing the step. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check also reveals the trap can be disabled by poking the open eye of the winking figure in the painting.

The stairwell ends at a locked steel gate. The PCs can open the gate with the key, or they can unlock it with a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. The PCs can also attempt a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to force the gate open, but unless the PCs can take significant precautions against noise (such as the *silence* spell) this alerts the Order.

11. CHAPEL

A stone wall bisects this enormous room into two distinct areas of worship. To the east lies a plain chancel dedicated to Hecate. To the west, a far more ornate chapel is devoted to the Moonlit King.

Hecate's chancel features three rows of plain benches with a modest altar on the north wall. A 6-foot-tall statue of Hecate stands in the center of the east wall and is flanked by a pair of wooden tables, one of which has a stack of a dozen copies of Hecate's Book of Mysteries. *Another table abuts the dividing wall to the west.*

The Moonlit King's chapel is far less modest. An enormous altar can be seen along the north wall, flanked by a pair of statues of the monarch that stand nearly as tall as the 10-foot ceiling. Additional (albeit smaller) statues of the monarch also stand in the chapel's three corners. The seating area here is comprised of three long rows of ornate pews, and there are long tables on the east and west walls. Motifs of snowflakes can be found throughout the room, and reliefs of the Moonlit King's tower and maze are carved into the walls.

Stealth. If the PCs are moving stealthily, the Moonlit King's shrine is attended to by two **cult fanatics.**

The Dark Archives

The air is cooler here, and the walls are made of a black stone.

If the party is trying to prove they are worthy enough to perform the ritual to restore the founder, they must do so by succeeding in two tasks: They must select and follow the correct path on the labyrinth floor to reach the statue room. Then they must identify which statue belongs to the founder and bring it to the chapel with a basilisk gullet.

12. THE LABYRINTH

The doors of the stairwell open on an enormous circular room with a stone floor. Silver lines etched into the floor gently glow and flicker, illuminating this immense room, displaying a labyrinthine pattern. Four stylized symbols carved into the stone in the middle of the room shine with a golden glow.

Symbols. The symbols are a sun, a flower, a leaf, and a snowflake. They are arrayed as follows:

- a sun (southwest). If stepped on, the sun's golden glow becomes brighter.
- a flower (southeast). If stepped on, the flower's glow becomes a deep violet.
- a leaf (northwest). If stepped on, the leaf turns a brownish red.
- and a snowflake (northeast). If stepped on, the snowflake glows bright white.

Choosing a Path. Each symbol stands before an opening in the floor's labyrinthine pattern. Once a PC chooses a path and begins following it, the symbol illuminates as described above and, as they walk, the path they take is illuminated in the symbol's color in their wake. Each path ends before a closed door.

Knowledge. Any PC proficient in Intelligence (Religion or History), or one who succeeds on a DC 8 Intelligence check, knows such labyrinths are usually navigated starting from the center and heading outward. Any PC proficient in Intelligence (Nature or History), or one who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence check, knows the symbols are traditional symbols of the seasons: the sun (Summer), the flower (Spring), the leaf (Autumn), the snowflake (Winter).

Labyrinthine Path. The labyrinth is etched in the ground, so the PCs can simply walk to the center or even walk to each of the doors in the room. Each door is locked and trapped with an enhanced *glyph of warding*; however, following the path from the center of the labyrinth to a door unlock the door and disables the trap.

Doors. The labyrinth doors cannot be unlocked from the outside. Unless a PC follows relevant the path, the door must be destroyed to enter. The doors have AC 18, 30 hp, and a damage threshold of 10. The loud process of destroying the doors (unless the PCs can cast *silence* or otherwise mitigate the noise) alerts the order if they are as yet unaware of the PCs' presence.

Enhanced Glyphs. Any active glyphs on the doors can be found with a successful DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check can

be used to disable a glyph. Destroying the door, or a failed check to disable the glyph, causes the glyph to explode in a 20-foot radius; creatures in the area of effect must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 27 (6d8) cold damage, or half that much damage on a successful one.

13. ARCHIVE OF THE NEW MOON

This room is filled with books and scrolls that appear to be filled with gibberish that almost makes sense—words are misspelled, written backwards, or just missing. Elaborate rugs surround a table in the center of the room covered in open blueprints of impossible structures.

Creatures. A **barbed devil** is standing inside just west of the door when the PCs enter and attacks immediately. The southeast rug is a **rug of smothering** and attacks whomever steps on it.

14. ARCHIVE OF THE CRESCENT MOON

The books in this room lie stacked in haphazard piles. Broken tables and chairs litter the floor. Strange sounds, including the occasional giggle and eerie strains of music, occasionally escape the pages of the books.

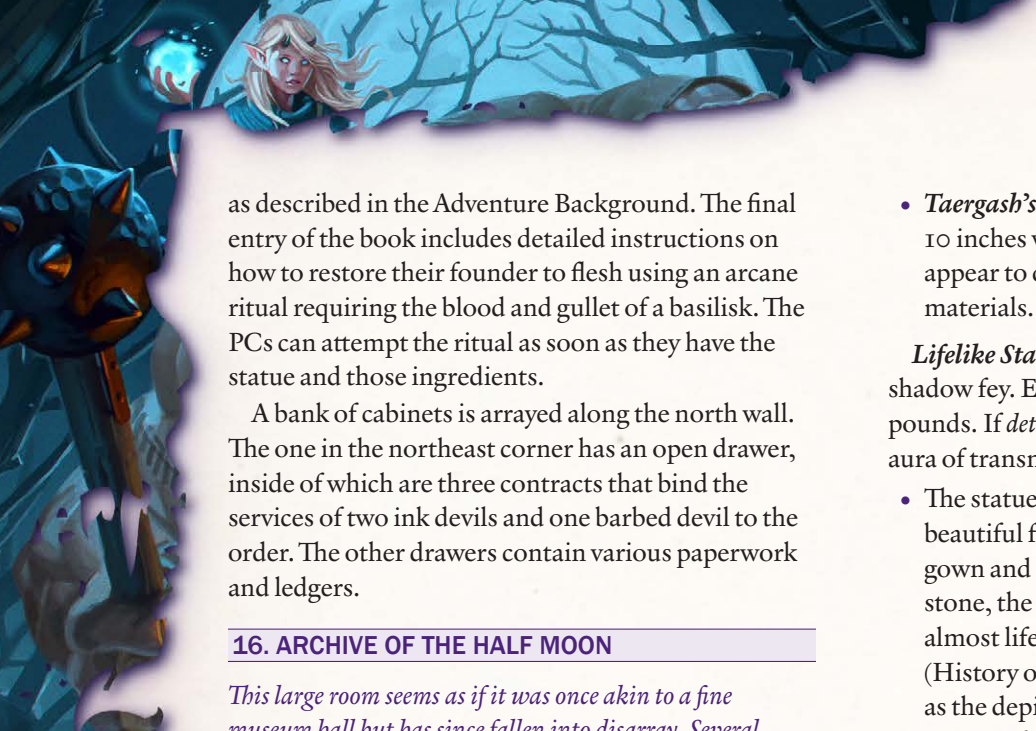
A PC attempting to read a book from this room must succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the secret door in the north wall.

15. SECRET ARCHIVE

The door leads to a brightly lit room with a lectern at its center. The lectern displays a large open tome, the *Chronicle of the Sovereign's Shattered Circle*. It records the decline of the Moonlit King and the full history of the Sodality of Silent Rites, including their origin





as described in the Adventure Background. The final entry of the book includes detailed instructions on how to restore their founder to flesh using an arcane ritual requiring the blood and gullet of a basilisk. The PCs can attempt the ritual as soon as they have the statue and those ingredients.

A bank of cabinets is arrayed along the north wall. The one in the northeast corner has an open drawer, inside of which are three contracts that bind the services of two ink devils and one barbed devil to the order. The other drawers contain various paperwork and ledgers.

16. ARCHIVE OF THE HALF MOON

This large room seems as if it was once akin to a fine museum hall but has since fallen into disarray. Several empty display cases can be seen in an alcove to the south, and there are several fallen suits of armor scattered about the room. Spread throughout the room are seven statues of shadow fey in various poses. But before you can examine any of this in more detail, a pair of hungry basilisks approaches and hiss menacingly.

Creatures. The **basilisks** attack immediately. A set of armor along the east wall is **animated armor** and also moves to attack.

Gullet Harvest. Once the basilisks are dead, the PCs can remove the gullets with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check. Failure does not ruin the gullet, but the PC is unable to complete the task; other PCs can attempt the same task, but each subsequent attempt causes the DC to go up by 1.

Treasure. If the PCs search the room, they find a basilisk egg in the southeast corner. A PC who makes a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check knows basilisks born and raised in captivity can be domesticated and trained. Because of this, basilisk eggs are highly prized.

Display Cases. All the cases are empty, but some remaining engraved plaques on the display cases read:

- ***The Empyrean Opus.*** "12-inch diameter, 6 inches wide. Cover of colorful feathered wings and crystalline eyes. Pages are made of circular mithral plate strung together by gold. Enchanted. DO NOT HANDLE DIRECTLY."
- ***Essence of the Void.*** "Size varies/changes. Dragon scale cover of multiple varieties. Bound with a silver clasp."
- ***Taergash's Exsanguinating Tome.*** "12 inches tall, 10 inches wide, 2 inches thick. Cover and pages appear to drip blood. Keep away from other materials. Handle with care."

Lifelike Statues. The room holds several statues of shadow fey. Each statue weighs approximately 200 pounds. If *detect magic* is cast, the statues radiate an aura of transmutation magic.

- The statue closest to the entrance is that of a beautiful female shadow fey wearing an elaborate gown and bearing a haughty expression. Though stone, the gown's fabric and exquisite folds appear almost lifelike. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (History or Religion) check recognizes the statue as the depiction of a young Sarastra Aestruum, the Queen of Night and Magic.
- A statue of a female shadow fey kneeling in prayer stands on the east side of the room. Her head is bowed, and her hands are clasped together, her eyes closed with a stone tear forming, forever waiting to fall. A golden amulet with a stylized snowflake symbol on it dangles from her neck that is clearly not part of the statue. The *identify* spell can identify it as an *amulet of proof against detection and location*; *detect magic* indicates an aura of divination magic on the amulet.
- A statue of a female shadow fey near the western wall stands proudly. Her hair is pulled back from her head, each strand meticulously detailed in stone, revealing short horns on her forehead. She wears traveling clothes and holds a walking staff in her left hand. The staff is made of wood and is clearly not part of the carving.
- A statue of a robed female shadow fey holds a stone book in her right hand, her left hand raised as if she were in the midst of casting a spell. Her eyes are shrouded beneath the hood she wears. Several quills have been placed on the open book's pages.
- A statue of a female shadow fey with wide eyes stands near the center of the room, her hands held to her mouth as in shock, as if to silence a gasp or stop screaming. She wears glasses and plain clothing. The statue is missing a finger on its right hand.
- A statue of a female shadow fey clothed in finery stands near the center of the room. Her wide, frightened, unsettlingly blank eyes appear to be stained with black tears; her cheeks stained with

patina. She holds her arms in front of her as if asking a question or if pleading to another. A PC who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check can determine that the statue's tears and stains appear to due to weathering, and that this is the only statue stained in this manner. This statue is that of the founder.

- A statue of a male shadow fey, wearing vestments similar to the other monks in the monastery, with an expression of surprise on his face; his left hand is broken off and missing. This is the brother the order tasked with securing the basilisks, who then, sadly, became one of their victims.

17. ARCHIVES OF THE FULL MOON

Bookshelves line many of the walls and rooms of this archives. Tables and armchairs are set by many of the shelves, which appear to hold handwritten letters, diaries, and first-hand accounts from various figures in history of the Shadow Courts. A transparent figure sits silently in an armchair set against the northern wall.

Creatures. This **ghost** is not initially hostile. She briskly rises if the PCs approach her, asking if they have an appointment. She becomes hostile and attacks if any PCs attempt to remove materials from this archive or if they fail to convince her they are allowed to be there.

A successful DC 10 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check convinces the ghost the PCs are allowed to be here. She introduces herself as Reen and grows confused after a few moments of conversation, mentioning that Mesina is likely waiting for her and that she should leave soon. If the PCs ask who Mesina is, Reen appears surprised and shares that Mesina d'Bruna is in charge of the entire archives. If the PCs converse more, the ghost reluctantly reveals she is worried about the terrible rumors that are being spread about Mesina, who is also her partner. She seems to be having difficulty remembering the details, and if pressed further she sits down and grows silent.

Reen was an archivist in the Order of the Sovereign's Circle who was killed soon before Mesina was turned to stone. She remains in this realm while the order is forced to hide and her partner remains a statue. As she was not living when the Queen of Night and Magic's edict struck Mesina's name from living memory, it did not affect her.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the PCs find the statue of the founder, they have several ways they can proceed to the conclusion of the adventure.

RETURN THE STATUE TO THE COURT

The PCs may return the statue to the Court of Sparrows. If they found the statue without being detected by the Order, they must determine a way to transport it out without being seen. Unless the PCs have figured out an alternative solution, they have disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks as they transport the statue to the entrance. On the way to the exit, the PCs may encounter (or be seen by) the same Sodality members as specified in the adventure, unless they were killed. Transporting the statue through Corremel does not draw undue attention.

Boon. If the PCs manage to return the statue, Gwana and Pritha pay the characters as agreed, including the bonus for avoiding detection, if warranted. The PCs have advantage on ability checks regarding any interactions with members of the Court of Sparrows.

Consequence 1. Remaining members of the Order of the Sovereign's Circle eventually come looking for the statue and maybe the PCs as well.

Consequence 2. If the PCs interacted with the Order and learned of their history but returned the statue to the Court of Sparrows anyway, they have disadvantage on ability checks regarding any interactions with allies of the Moonlit King.

DESTROY THE STATUE

If the PCs destroy the statue, Vacer is true to his word. A goblin servant delivers a pouch to the PCs containing the agreed upon amount, including an extra 100 gp each, with a note stating, "*We are pleased.*"

Boon. The party has advantage on ability checks regarding any interactions with the Demon Lord and his allies and may be contacted for other jobs in the future.

Consequence 3. If the PCs inform the Court of Sparrows of their actions, Gwana and Pritha are shocked. A DC 20 (Deception or Persuasion) check can be used to convince the pair that an alliance with the Sodality of Silent Rites could be useful for the court. If successful, Gwana and Pritha agree, and the PCs suffer no negative consequences; if the check fails, the trollkin and halfling express their

disappointment, and the PCs have disadvantage on ability checks regarding any social interactions with the Court of Sparrows until they can make amends.

Consequence 4. If the Order is aware if the PC's actions, they have disadvantage on ability checks regarding any social interactions with the Order and any other allies of the Moonlit King.

DEAD BASILISKS, NO STATUE

If the PCs defeat the basilisks, but do not return the (correct) statue, they receive the agreed-upon reward from the order if they were hired—or a confused thanks if the order was previously unaware of their presence.

Boon. The order allows the PCs to use their facilities at any time, and PCs have advantage on ability checks regarding any social interactions with the order.

Consequence 5. If the PCs inform the Court of Sparrows of their actions, they suffer the same ramifications as described in Consequence 3.

RESTORING THE FOUNDER'S STATUE

If the PCs demonstrated their worthiness, they can restore the founder's statue by bringing it to the chapel; or, they can perform the ritual themselves if they found it in the *Chronicle of the Sovereign's Shattered Circle* in area 15. In either case, the founder is restored to flesh and the order is overjoyed, even if the PCs elected to perform the ritual without the order's awareness.



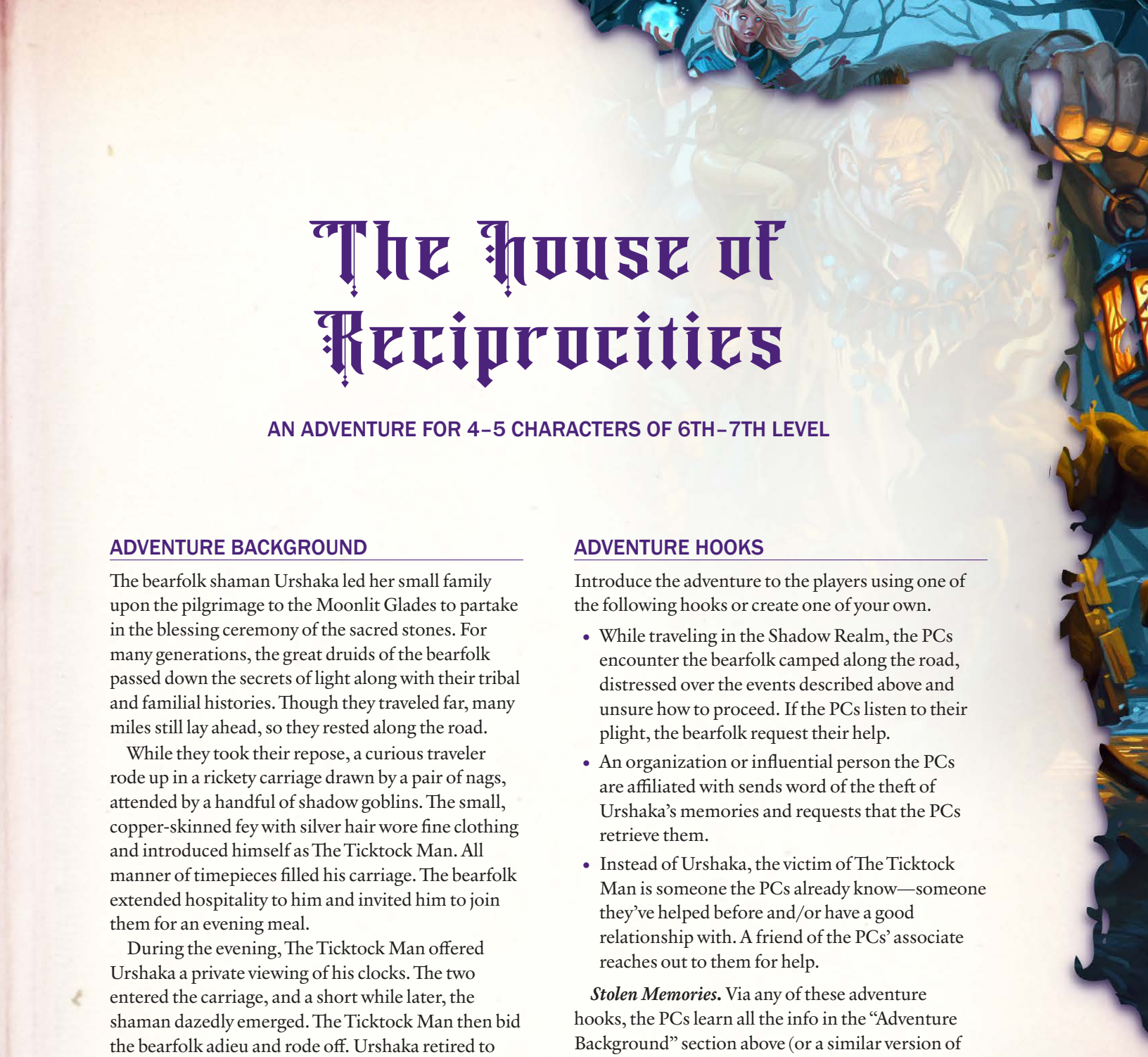
Founder. The founder is a lunar shadow fey, a rare subrace with luminous silver eyes often aligned with the Moonlit King. One challenge remains: while her body has been restored to flesh, she does not appear to remember who she is and can only undertake the simplest of tasks.

The Power of Names. PCs that succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Religion) check can determine the edict that struck her from memory may have affected her as well and restoring her name might help her recover her identity.

If the PCs met the ghost in the Archives of the New Moon, they may already know that her name is Mesina d'Bruna. If not, if the PCs tell the order their theory that restoring her name might help the founder recover, their members research on how to restore her.

Boon. In addition to the agreed-upon payment, if the PCs successfully restore the founder from stone, they have advantage on ability checks regarding any interactions with allies of the Moonlit King.

Consequence 6. If the PCs inform the Court of Sparrows of their actions, they suffer the same ramifications as described in Consequence 3.



The House of Reciprocities

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 6TH–7TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The bearfolk shaman Urshaka led her small family upon the pilgrimage to the Moonlit Glades to partake in the blessing ceremony of the sacred stones. For many generations, the great druids of the bearfolk passed down the secrets of light along with their tribal and familial histories. Though they traveled far, many miles still lay ahead, so they rested along the road.

While they took their repose, a curious traveler rode up in a rickety carriage drawn by a pair of nags, attended by a handful of shadow goblins. The small, copper-skinned fey with silver hair wore fine clothing and introduced himself as The Ticktock Man. All manner of timepieces filled his carriage. The bearfolk extended hospitality to him and invited him to join them for an evening meal.

During the evening, The Ticktock Man offered Urshaka a private viewing of his clocks. The two entered the carriage, and a short while later, the shaman dazedly emerged. The Ticktock Man then bid the bearfolk adieu and rode off. Urshaka retired to her tent, then fell into a stupor. When the distraught shaman finally woke, she expressed a profound sense of something important missing and realized she was suddenly unable to recall her identity and the traditions she had learned as a cub.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Introduce the adventure to the players using one of the following hooks or create one of your own.

- While traveling in the Shadow Realm, the PCs encounter the bearfolk camped along the road, distressed over the events described above and unsure how to proceed. If the PCs listen to their plight, the bearfolk request their help.
- An organization or influential person the PCs are affiliated with sends word of the theft of Urshaka's memories and requests that the PCs retrieve them.
- Instead of Urshaka, the victim of The Ticktock Man is someone the PCs already know—someone they've helped before and/or have a good relationship with. A friend of the PCs' associate reaches out to them for help.

Stolen Memories. Via any of these adventure hooks, the PCs learn all the info in the "Adventure Background" section above (or a similar version of those events if you choose hook #3).

Memory Merchants. An NPC relevant to the hook you chose tells the PCs they met a tiefling a couple weeks ago who works at a strange market where all manner of goods are exchanged; the tiefling, whose name is Albrytara, said they sell anything a person might want at this market—including "things you thought existed only in dreams." At the time, the NPC wasn't sure what she meant by that last part, but now they're wondering if that might include stolen memories. Albrytara deals in information from Midgard (or whatever plane the PCs call home) and is

known to look kindly upon so-called "brightlanders;" the NPC suggests finding her at her tent outside the market. They give the general location of the market as being at the intersection of several shadow roads that are roughly equidistant between Veiled Grove, Solvheim, and Hawthorn Grove. Depending on the NPC you choose, you might decide they would know for certain there are people there who deal in stolen memories and/or that the market is called "The House of Reciprocities."

House Intel. The House of Reciprocities is a politically neutral market where Shadow Realm denizens gather to exchange goods and services. The shadow fey that run The House distrust those from the mortal planes, so the PCs will require assistance to gain entrance. Outside The House of Reciprocities, travelers seeking to enter gather on a large campground known as The Common; this is where the PCs can find Albrytara.

Depending on the NPC and hook you chose, they might be able to provide any of this information to the PCs.

Part 1: The Common

The adventure begins when the PCs arrive at The Common that surrounds The House of Reciprocities. Read or paraphrase the text below to set the tone.

The House of Reciprocities sits upon the intersection of several shadow roads. A cluster of looming, rickety wooden structures, its towers protrude wildly, tilting at seemingly impossible angles. Its chaotic construction reveals gaps between the warped wooden planks, and moss sprouts from the slate tiles of its sagging rooftops. High above, rings of hovering witchlights or will-o'-wisps circle the tallest precipices. Windows of every size and shape dot the exterior.

Weeds and grass poke through the cobblestones of a broad common that surrounds the house. Dozens of strange wooden wagons and carts clutter the area, crammed into nearly every gap not already taken by one of the fifty or so patchwork tents spread throughout The Common. A diverse assortment of fey occupy the various encampments. At The Common's edge, roads stretch in every direction.



Two dozen or so wagons and twice as many tents fill The Common, though the number fluctuates daily as some pack up and head out and others arrive. A collection of merchants and travelers occupy the tents. These include sellers unloading their wares, buyers of all types, and travelers stopping in at the crossroads for gossip, news, and a spot to set up camp. Still, The Common draws opportunists, thieves, and con artists, as well as conspiracists, mad prophets, and entertainers looking for an audience.

As the PCs wander about this area, every few minutes, one of the fey notices them and expresses disdain for any non-natives, referring to them as "Tourists," "Shiners," or "Brightlanders." Any PC that gets identified as someone from "Brightland" (i.e., a plane that has sunshine) has disadvantage on any ability checks made to interact with the local shadow fey until the PCs gain a local patron.

As instructed, the PCs should seek out Albrytara (LN tiefling **spy**).

INFORMATION GATHERING

As the PCs search for Albrytara, allow them the opportunity to gather the following information or rumors:

1. The House of Reciprocities has many rooms—too many to count, too many to keep track of, and perhaps even more rooms than could actually exist within that structure.

2. The House manifests as a creation of the fey who converge at the crossroads to partake in exchanges; if they stopped coming, The House would vanish.

3. The House is inaccessible to the uninvited. Legends say it holds every secret ever kept, everything ever lost, and everything ever forgotten.

4. A clock merchant known as The Ticktock Man has a work residence within the house. Rarely does he go outside.

5. Memories can be purchased, and so can emotions and dreams. Numerous folk have sold them over the years.

6. Consuming another creature's memories can seriously damage one's mind.

Albrytara can be difficult and refuses to haggle, though her knowledge of events in "Brightland" is always reliable. During their hunt for information, the PCs stumble across the Puddug's Pungent Pets encounter (see below).

PUDDUG'S PUNGENT PETS

A pungent and foul odor wafts toward you as you pass by one of the tents, and the unpleasant scent is punctuated by a rumbling, mirthful giggle.

Creatures. Anyone entering the tent interrupts Puddug (N **shadow-touched hill giant**), who is sitting in the middle of the tent with an endearing, childlike expression on his face as he happily plays with a half-dozen small, green-skinned **fey pigs** (use statistics for **boar**). Tears seem to be streaming down the giant's face, perhaps from joy, perhaps from the oppressive smell—but if so, he doesn't seem to mind. Any interruption from intruders annoys Puddug, and he immediately sours and angrily attempts to chase them off. If the intruders refuse to leave, he and his pets attack, though they won't leave the tent to pursue an enemy.

Fey Pigs. Fey pigs look like green-skinned boars with clawed, hairless paws instead of hooves and a face only a mother (and Puddug) could love; on their backs are a pair of tiny faerie wings too small to allow them to fly. They're *kind of* adorable, but also repulsive; it's confusing. They definitely smell *really bad.*

ALBRYTARA'S TENT

Eventually, the PCs come upon Albrytara's tent.

Albrytara is an older tiefling with broad, curved horns and a pale complexion. She dresses in gray silk robes and walks with the aid of a gnarled cane.

After introducing herself, she asks the PCs what brings them to her tent; when she hears the story, as promised, she's happy to help. She can confirm that the talk around The Common is that someone is selling memories—likely the same individual who steals them, or at least someone who is working with the thief. Of course, such exchanges could only occur in The House of Reciprocities; however, the PCs need to first find someone who will vouch for them and is willing to escort them inside; otherwise, they will be refused entry.

Albrytara adds, "I cannot help you get inside, for it would put my business at risk; an information broker must remain neutral, and depending on what happens when you go in, there could be . . . ramifications to those who are seen helping you. However, I can put you in contact with an individual who might be willing to help."

After supper, which Albrytara provides (assuming the PCs agree to her terms), she takes them to the tent of Fradelrix Ungwort (CN wyrd gnome **noble**) and



introduces them, suggesting the PCs and Fradelrix can likely help each other out.

REDCAP'S CAT TRAP

Fradelrix is a fidgety sort who runs a high-stakes game of nonsensical rhyming called Redcap's Cat Trap.

The game's champion is Elyshrith, a former Shadow Court elocutionist exiled for backtalking his superiors, who presents himself as a shadow fey but is secretly an incubus. But Elyshrith has recently challenged Ungwort himself to a game, with the winner taking sole ownership and control of the game itself. The gnome fears he cannot defeat Elyshrith and desperately needs someone to dethrone him. If not, Ungwort will lose his livelihood.

If the PCs can beat Elyshrith, Ungwort promises he will introduce them to someone who might act as their House of Reciprocities patron. He's hosting a party tonight, in fact, which would be a convenient time to make such introductions. If the PCs press him to elucidate, he replies, "I'll explain more later; first, you need to help me—here comes Elyshrith now!"

Running the Game (with Dice)

The game takes place over the course of three rounds. Each round, all contestants must eat an extremely spicy red mushroom cap and then repeat a nonsensical poem. The individual repeating the poem fastest, and without making any errors, wins.

If there is a tie, the game continues into additional rounds. The spicier caps one eats, the harder it is to perform the verse without error. After Ungwort explains the rules, the PCs must nominate one individual to play the game.

- At the start of each round, all contestants pull a colored marble—blue (1st), green (2nd), red (3rd), or black (4th)—out of a bag to determine the order of play. To simulate this, have each contestant roll 1d20 with no modifiers. This is their initiative in the contest. If there are any ties, the contestant with the higher Charisma (Performance) modifier wins and can chose to go before or after the other contestant. (Unlike traditional initiative rolls, going last is better than going first.) Or, if you're playing in person, you can put four d20s of different colors in a bag and have the contestants each pull one.
- When their turn starts, each contestant eats a cap and must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, their tongue swells from the extreme spice; as a result, they must make their next Charisma (Performance) check at disadvantage.
- On their turn, each contestant must make a Charisma (Performance) check to recite the nonsense rhyme as fast as possible. That check will then be contested against the Charisma (Performance) checks of the other contestants. The contestant with the highest modified roll wins the round.
- The contestant with the slowest time each round is eliminated.
- The competition continues until one contestant outlasts all the others and is declared the winner.
- Casting spells during the game or colluding (or interfering) with the other contestants is not allowed.

The Redcap Rhyme

The nonsense rhyme the contestants must repeat is:

Red cats snap on a redcap's trap,
Redcaps clap on a dead cat's back,
Redcaps, trap snaps, red cats, dead cats.

The Contestants

In addition to the selected PC, the contestants are: Elyshrith, an exceedingly handsome shadow fey who oozes confidence and charisma; Qask, a snake-faced, scaly humanoid dressed in magenta robes; and Duke Montequise, an elegantly dressed humanoid with the face of a spider under a fabulous large hat.

The Contestants	Constitution Modifier	Performance Modifier
Elyshrith	+2	+8
Qask	+0	+2
Duke Montequise	+1	+4

Optional: Running the Game (with Roleplaying)

Instead of running the game as described above, the GM can allow the players to choose to recite the rhyme instead of using dice to adjudicate the game.

With these variant rules, instead of making a Charisma (Performance) check each round, each contestant must recite Ungwort's nonsensical verse as fast as possible without making any errors.

The poor sod must recite the verse for each round. The verse is performed 1 time in round one, two times in round 2, and three times in round 3.

Round	Rhyme Reps
1	1
2	2
3	3

The GM performs for Elyshrith and then assigns the other roles to the other players (or takes volunteers). Use a timer to time each performance. If the contestant makes an error, they must start the rhyme over, but the timer continues running; the total time it takes for them to recite the rhyme without error—regardless of how many times they had to start over—is their time for the round.

As GM, you have an advantage since you can read the rhyme ahead of time and practice it, but if you feel like you still need a leg up to accurately reflect Elyshrith's superior skills, you might consider applying a time reduction to each of your times.

After each round, the slowest contestant is ejected from the competition. The competition continues until one contestant outlasts all the others and is declared the winner

Concluding the Game

After the game is over, the few people who came to watch the battle cheer or groan, depending on who they were rooting for, and then quickly disperse, leaving the tent solely to the PCs, the contestants, and Ungwort.

If the PC Wins: The PCs gain Ungwort's favor, and he honors his agreement to introduce them to several individuals with the potential to get them inside the house.

If the PC Loses: Ungwort pays out 1,000 gp to the victor, but he's satisfied so long as the winner is not Elyshrith (see below); he doesn't like having to pay out the 1,000 gp, but so long as he gets to keep control of his game, he's happy enough to consider it a "win." He honors his agreement as above.

If Elyshrith Wins: Ungwort is beside himself at this tragic turn of events. He puts both hands over his face and mutters things such as "I'm ruined!" and the like. A PC who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check (or has a passive Insight of 13 or higher) notices a surreptitious, satisfied look shared between the other three participants, suggesting that there was collusion between them in order to help Elyshrith guarantee his victory. If a PC starts to voice such a concern, either aloud or by leaning over to whisper to Ungwort or their party members, Qask—already on edge—bares her teeth and draws steel; once that happens the other two contestants (resignedly) follow suit. Ungwort shouts, "This chicanery shall not stand; the deal is off!" then looks for a place to hide; as he ducks behind a PC, he grabs their wrist and says, "Defend me from these blackguards, and I will honor our deal."

Creatures. If combat ensues as a result of Elyshrith winning (or you decide that any of the game's players are sore losers and you'd like to have a combat here), the PCs face Elyshrith (an **incubus**), Qask (**a serpentfolk of Yig** [see appendix]), and Duke Montequise (**arachnocrat devil** [see appendix]). Ungwort cowers and hides; if cornered, he fights back.

GLUM-MOON GATHERING

Ungwort hosts a catered gathering at his establishment to celebrate the Glum-Moon Harvest, a fake holiday supposedly representing the time when his mushroom caps are red enough for the picking. He serves his famous mushrooms along with six more courses of other fungi. Some of the meal is mood-enhancing, as is his selection of fungal wines. He has invited four guests, each of whom the PCs can attempt to win over for access to the house.

Impress, Gift, or Charm. The PCs must suitably impress, gift, or charm one of the guests to win them over. PCs can attempt to improve their chances at winning over the guests by plying them with one of the mood-enhancing foods or beverages on offer. To do so, the PCs can make Charisma checks opposed by the guest's Wisdom (Insight); on a success, the guest accepts the food or beverage, and, as a result, for the remainder of the party, the PC has advantage on any further checks to interact with that guest.

Ms. Tildywadders

Ms. Tildywadders (NG erina **scout**), a member of the hedgehog folk race known as erina, reads people's fortunes using her quills to plot points upon their bodies that mark the flow of shadow energy. She offers her services, and if the PCs accept, she performs the painful procedure upon them as the evening's entertainment. Unfortunately, Tildywadders is deluded in her abilities. Ungwort knows Tildywadders has no powers. However, he encourages her treatment, as he finds it wildly amusing.

No Pain No Gain. The excruciatingly painful treatment deals 10 (3d6) piercing damage.



Hedge Your Bets. During the treatment, Tildywadders asks the victim questions and makes predictions. To attempt to convince Tildywadders that they see themselves entering The House of Reciprocities, the PC can manipulate the prediction with a Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check; the DC equals 8 plus half the amount of damage taken from the quills. If successful, Tildywadders invites the PCs to join her entourage; on a failure, she becomes upset and leaves the gathering in a fluster—but her leaving in a huff alerts the other guests that the PCs need a host, causing them to approach the PCs, prepared to make a bargain.

Torriense Darkwysper

Torriense Darkwysper (CN shadow fey **noble**) dresses in an antiquated gossamer dress with an elegant lace collar. Those conversing with him quickly discover he is obsessed with elven fashion, particularly wigs and dresses from earlier centuries. During the conversation, he expresses his desire to acquire a "Moonlit Court Gown." There's one for sale at a shop inside The House of Reciprocities, but at present, the cost of the gown is far beyond his means. He gleefully says he would *kill* to have it; a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check determines he might not be joking.

Dress Heist. If the PCs imply they can perhaps acquire the dress for him, he becomes keenly interested. It's likely they'd have to steal it; if they convince him they can and will steal the dress for him, he offers to take them inside the house. If the PCs don't fulfill their end of the bargain, Torriense just sighs wistfully, clearly disappointed; after a moment, though, he asks if they ran into Reissward, and if so, is there anything they could share? If the PCs can tell him anything, he'll be satisfied with the deal.

Lady Bauldrimere

Lady Bauldrimere (CG shadow fey **mage**) delights in odors of all sorts and carries several small vials containing scents that she passes around to guests to partake of. The scents range from heady floral bouquets to cloying candies to glandular musk—some pleasant, some awful, but all highly evocative. She has come here to collect new scents.

Stink Collector. If the PCs mention the powerful odor of Puddug's pets, she becomes extraordinarily excited and wishes to acquire one immediately. The PCs can win her favor by telling her the location of Puddug's tent. Whether or not Puddug will part with one of his pungent pets is another question.

Dr. Slipstitch

Dr. Slipstitch (NE **shurale satyr**) is a devilish-looking satyr with a single horn protruding from his forehead, dressed in a tweed waistcoat, cravat, and spectacles. He carries a large black case with gold lettering that reads, "Dr. Slipstitch. Extraction Specialist." The good doctor feeds off the laughter and tears of the dying and uses trained tapeworms, earwigs, and leeches to extract toxins and disease from the individuals he treats. Not surprisingly, many receive his services after they are "too late to be saved." He has come to the house to refresh his stock of "extractors."

De-banish Me. The doctor was banished to the Shadow Realm and desperately wishes to return home. He only takes the PCs into The House if they agree to bring him back to Midgard with them (or wherever their home plane is located). If the PCs renege on their end of the deal, he hunts them down … and collects his payment in laughter or tears.

REST BEFORE RECIPROCITY

Once the PCs gain a host's sponsorship, they possess a means of entry into the house. The host stresses that the doors open and close at select times. The PCs can camp outside Albrytara's wagon. So long as they remain within the boundaries of her lot, no one troubles them.

Part 2: Inside the House

A long stair winds up and around the cluster of dilapidated spires. Ascending the stairs feels strange, as if they constantly change direction, and the angles of the buildings shift and twist with every few steps. At last, the stairs end before a crooked door that hangs on a single hinge. Darkness spills from the cracks between the door and the threshold. There is a small hatch in the center of the door and an oxidized copper bell mounted on the door jam. Your host rings the bell, the hatch opens, and a pair of eyes stare outward, probing everyone. Finally, the door opens.

Stern-faced Doorkeeper Drenexla (LN shadow fey **guard**) appears, dressed in a perfectly tailored white suit. She allows everyone entry, then tells the host they must return in three hours to exit.

The PCs' host nods in acknowledgment; then, turning to them, asks, "Hear that?" The host shushes any response aside from a nod or a simple yes and says, "Time for questions later." At this point, the host enters, and the PCs are free to follow.

Stepping inside the space, it opens to a tremendous market square. Shaded and dim, wooden signs hang on iron chains from the high, vaulted ceiling's exposed wooden rafters. Below, partitions divide the square into a maze of stalls and shops.

A Three-Hour Tour. Once inside and away from the Doorkeeper, the PCs' host lets them know there is only one exit to The Common—the same place they came in—and it closes in three hours. If they aren't there in three hours, the host is leaving without them. The PCs cannot leave without their host—at least not without a fight—and the door may or may not bring them to The Common; it may simply open "elsewhere." If the PCs ask how to leave without the host, they reply, "Dear, that's your business." At this point, the host departs with the admonition, "Do try to stay out of trouble," leaving the PCs to their own devices.

Missing Memories. The objective is to discover the location—and perpetrator—of the stolen memories. As the PCs explore, they can pick up clues about who stole the memories and where to find them. While wandering, two events occur that may provide clues or cause problems.

EVENT: JACK OF STRINGS

Rimram, a **jack of strings** (see appendix), works closely with The Ticktock Man by seeking brightlander memories. Once Rimram hears of brightlanders in The House of Reciprocities, he comes looking for them, and once he sees the PCs, he fixates on them as prime targets. He avoids drawing attention to himself and always keeps 60 feet from the PCs—just close enough to target them with his Puppet Link ability. He uses this ability to force the PC he has linked to enter various shops. His hope is that by forcing the PCs to enter as many shops as possible, he will weaken them and/or force them to use their resources, which makes it easier for him to capture them for The Ticktock Man. He does this repeatedly if necessary, or if the mood strikes him (or the PCs just need more of a push to go into the other shops).



This event can take place whenever the GM wishes, but, as above, it is most beneficial to use this event to deter the PCs from reaching area 10 too quickly.

1. BRICKERBRACK'S SWAP

A chaotic arrangement of kiosks, tables, and blankets—all of which are heaped with piles of odds and ends—crowd The House's hallways. Known as "The Swap," the fey vendors here trade a mindboggling assortment of snail shells, mummified sprites, cross-sections of dyed minotaur horn, 874-step recipes, lucky dretch toes, petrified basilisk eyes, costume jewelry, bent candlesticks, scrimshawed orc tusk, sentient meats, and more.

2. PROMISES KEPT

Outside this shop hangs a gold-painted spinning wheel. Inside, an odd assortment of creatures—three shadow goblins; a fiendish-looking sprite with a lopsided wing; and a giant snail with a vaguely human-looking face—are swapping stories at a table.

If the PCs ask what it is they do in this shop, one responds, "Brightlanders often promise more than they are willing to lose, such as youth, memories, and first-born children. We make sure such debts are paid; we collect on them."

Clue. If asked about memories, they reveal they have collected a couple of bounties on behalf of The Ticktock Man. If pressed for more information, they quickly become suspicious and refuse to reveal the whereabouts of an excellent client to strangers but add, "Don't worry . . . he's around here somewhere. He rarely leaves his workshop."

3. DAG GNASHER'S

A sign outside this shop reads, "Dag Gnasher's Tooth Exchange. Most Gold per Tooth Guaranteed. Free Appraisals." Every so often, a scream comes from within. The proprietor, Dag Gnasher, is a fairy with black eyes and a wild aspect who is typically seen carrying (and/or wielding) a large mallet, a chisel, and some pliers.

Clue. The tooth fairy carries a small hourglass with sickly green sand inside, the memory of a child getting his teeth extracted. He accepted it as a payment from "the goat guy" in exchange for half-a-dozen bearfolk fangs about two months ago.

4. THE UMBRAL WORM

The Umbral Worm is a large shop filled with hundreds of jars filled with a diverse assortment of worms, insects, slugs, and other crawling organisms most would consider vermin. Its aged amphibianesque proprietor, Grumblub, walks with a cane and eagerly explains his stock's properties, benefits, and flavors. It contains creatures both magical and mundane, poisonous, venomous, parasitic, and harmless. Prices range from a few silvers to hundreds of platinum, though he keeps the more expensive stock in a walk-in vault in the back.

Host Relevance. Dr. Slipstitch stops in at this shop, as it is where he hopes to replenish his supply of "extractors." If he is the PCs' host and/or if the players enjoyed interacting with him, consider having them run into each other again here.

Complications. Two shadow fey get into an altercation over the last milky ribbon worm in the shop. During the argument, one pushes the other into a large glass tank labeled, "Black Butcher Death Scorpions," shattering it and releasing four—you guessed it—black butcher death scorpions (use statistics for a **swarm of poisonous snakes**). Grumblub flies into a panic, yelling that he had a buyer for the bugs, and offers 100 gp per scorpion to anyone who can capture them alive.

Creature Capture. The PCs can "capture" the scorpions by simply choosing to deal non-lethal damage and using regular attacks against them. But if the players come up with creative ways of capturing the scorpions non-violently, reward that creativity.

Clue. If the PCs successfully aid Grumblub, he expresses his gratitude by sharing a rumor that a puppeteer known as Rimram performs experiments with memories, with the ultimate goal of giving his puppets sentience. Grumblub shares this information even if all the scorpions die, so long as the PCs *tried* to capture them.

5. HABERDASHERY DE NOX

Torriense's ex-lover, Reissward Nox (N **shadow fey umbral tailor** [*Book of Ebon Tides*]) runs this shop that specializes in all manner of Shadow Court formal attire. Rows of lavishly brocaded suits and lace dresses, silk stockings and hosiery, yards of exquisite cloth, shoes, hats, and wigs crowd the room. Reissward and his staff also offer tailoring and commissioned pieces, though they only do this custom work for shadow fey. Nox has a workshop behind the showroom where five shadow fey **commoners** serve as apprentice tailors.

Host Relevance. Reissward stores many rare, antique pieces he uses for measurements and inspiration for new designs in his shop. Among these pieces stands a mannequin garbed in a stunning gossamer evening gown matching the description of the Moonlit Court Gown sought by Torriense. If the PCs inquire about purchasing it, Reissward insists that he simply couldn't possibly ever part with it—out of the question—though he compliments their excellent eye and taste.

Clue. If the PCs mention their recent interactions with Torriense, Reissward eagerly pleads for gossip. If they oblige him, he offers the PCs a 10% discount on any of the fine clothing he has on offer (though the prices of everything in his shop are pretty outrageous), but likely of more interest is that he offers to share information. When he asks the PCs what they might like to know, if the subject of memories comes up, he tells them a customer recently showed him a small hourglass filled with colored sand and told him the sand inside was memories. The customer then tried to pay his bill using the hourglass

as payment, but Nox refused, preferring coin instead. The customer was a short fellow with silver hair who requested a top hat. Unfortunately, Reissward didn't catch his name. (It was, in fact, The Ticktock Man.) If the PCs ask about timepieces, Nox remembers the customer did indeed have a very fine pocket watch on his belt.

6. THE LOOKING GLASS

At this kiosk, a young shadow fey named Oreliana sells enchanted hand mirrors that change the viewer's reflection based on their mood.

Clue. A male sable elf shopping at the kiosk stares apathetically into a mirror, and his reflection remains the same. His eyes are vacant, and his expression is blank. If the PCs attempt to talk with him, he acknowledges them and seems friendly enough. However, he cannot remember his name, nor is he certain why he is there.

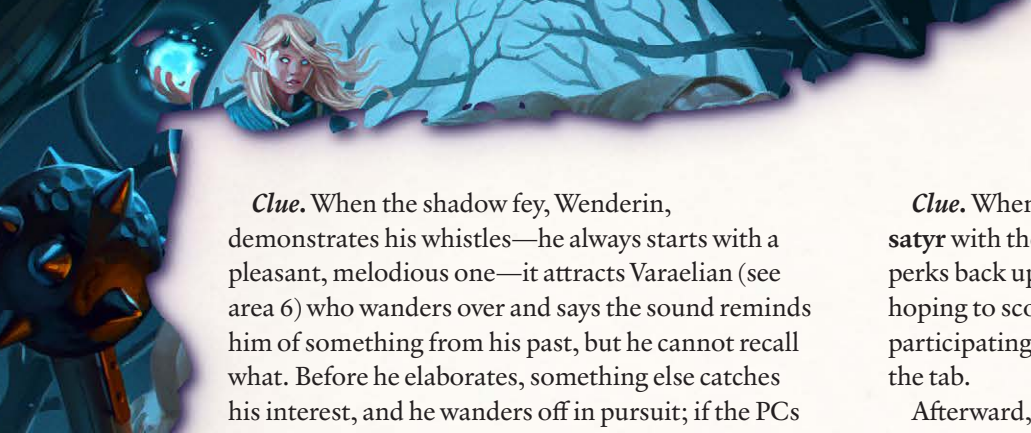
"I feel like I'm missing something," he says. "But I'm not sure what. I have come here to find it; I sense it here . . . somewhere."

The elf's name is Varaelian Azrilith; his memories were stolen from him nearly half a century earlier. If the PCs ask around about him, they learn he has been a fixture of The House for at least a decade, and most assume he's simply mad.

7. WENDERIN'S WHISTLES

This shop sells carved wooden whistles that imitate various sounds, such as that of crying babies, horrified screams, eerie winds, and other dissonant or unsettling sounds, as well as more pleasant ones.





Clue. When the shadow fey, Wenderin, demonstrates his whistles—he always starts with a pleasant, melodious one—it attracts Varaelian (see area 6) who wanders over and says the sound reminds him of something from his past, but he cannot recall what. Before he elaborates, something else catches his interest, and he wanders off in pursuit; if the PCs catch up to him, he is, in fact, *unable* to elaborate, in any case—he doesn't remember anything else.

8. GRANNY GRISTLEWICK'S CONFECTIONS

A **night hag** known as Granny Gristlewick runs three different covens throughout the Shadow Realm. From time to time, they convene here at her shop in The House of Reciprocities, where she spends her days engrossed in her favorite pastime: baking goodies for children. Her signboard boasts:

"GINGERBREAD AND OTHER CONFECTIONS:
Guaranteed to Lure Human Children
Scent carries for more than 5 miles
or your money back!"

Host Relevance. Lady Bauldrimere makes a stop here, as she wishes to purchase confections for her scent collection. If she is the PCs' host and/or if the players enjoyed interacting with her, consider having them run into each other again here.

9. THE BLITHE SPIRIT

The Blithe Spirit sells potent distillations made from unusual grains and **dark water** (*Book of Ebon Tides*). Some are said to contain the essence of wormwood, ghosts, or even alien creatures of the Void.

The storefront is arranged like a bar. The proprietor is Oslak (N human **commoner**), a middle-aged man with a glorious black handlebar mustache and a black derby hat. He offers single half-shot samples (up to three per customer) and sells six-shot sampler flights for 10 gp. Bottles run between 20 to 500 gp, depending on the liquor's rarity and potency.

A satyr is sitting on one of the barstools with his head on the bar.

Three Shot Maximum. If anyone drinks more than three shots, they become poisoned and must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw to avoid suffering the effects of the *confusion* spell; the duration of both effects is 1 hour. Before anyone actually *takes* a fourth shot, though, Oslak offers a friendly warning to them that they might want to reconsider.

Clue. When the PCs enter, the satyr, Florian (CN **satyr** with the changes noted below), immediately perks back up and turns his attention to them, hoping to score drinks, and tries to goad them into participating in a drinking contest—the loser pays the tab.

Afterward, or if the PCs don't wish to engage in a contest, Florian offers to trade information for flights; he provides one of the following pieces of information for each flight he is given. When given a flight, he one-after-another slams back all six shots like they're nothing and seems none the worse for it.

- "I've tasted memories before; thought they'd have more of a kick, to be honest! I bought them off a goat in a jester suit. Don't look at me like that. It was a *goat* in a bloody *jester suit.*" The goat in a jester's suit he's referring to is Rimram.
- "The memories, they came in an hourglass; they was all made of grains of sand and really gritty when I drank them all down; made me sneeze."
- "The goat has a shop filled with a bunch of weird—what do you call 'em?—oh, right: *puppets!* I tried to find his wine cellar once, but I got all turned around and wound up in a place filled with clocks, so I left. Admittedly, I might have been a bit drunk." The shop he's referring to is in area 10.

Creature Change. Florian has 20 Constitution, a Constitution saving throw bonus of +7, has advantage on saving throws against poison, and has resistance to poison damage.

Florian's Tolerance. If the PCs question Oslak about Florian's ability to drink so much or question the "three drink maximum" warning in contrast to Florian's drinking, Oslak just shakes his head and says he's never seen anyone like Florian. "He kind of scares me," he admits.

Storeroom. The store has a large storeroom filled with crates of liquor.

10. STRUNG ALONG

Rimram, the **jack of strings,** runs this shop. Whether you ran the "Jack of Strings" event or not, Rimram has learned of the PCs and desperately wants to capture them for The Ticktock Man.

As the PCs approach the shop, but before they can see him, Rimram ducks through a door into his back room. Watching through a one-way mirror set into the backroom door, he uses his Animate Puppet ability to animate five puppets to run the shop.

All manner of puppets, marionettes, articulated wooden toys, and plushy stuffed animals fill the shelves of this shop. All the creations appear to be exquisitely crafted, but after a moment you realize that all of them, while cute on the surface, also have some kind of subtly sinister or hideous element about them. The shop initially seems vacant, but moments after you step inside and look around, five of the puppets suddenly come to life: a jester ballerina puppet with a fractured porcelain face; a hideous patchwork troll plushy with one eye torn out; a toad hand puppet wearing a suit whose shiny black eyes feel like they're boring into your soul; a portly, two-headed clown marionette; and an exquisitely painted, articulated wooden doll dressed like a sweet little schoolgirl, but with a bloody scalpel clutched in one hand.

The jester ballerina holds up a sign that reads, "What Can I Help You With?"

The other four puppets all also unveil signs; they read: "Plushy," "String Puppet," "Articulated," and "Hand Puppet." The puppets wait for the PCs to choose one, then hold up a sign that says, "Be Right Back!" The troll then walks through a small door set into a larger door leading into the backroom.

After a few minutes, Zenk (LN shadow goblin **spy**), wearing a black suit and bow tie, comes into the shop through the small back door and says, "I hear you're interested in our fine selection of [whatever the PCs requested]." He then directs the PCs' attention to the requested types of puppets.

Clue. If the PCs stay in the shop long enough for Zenk to come out, any PCs with a passive Perception of 13 or higher hears the faint sound of a clock chime from further within the shop, behind the closed door. If asked about it, Zenk waves it off and says the thing always rings like that; he's not sure where it comes from.

Hard Sell. Zenk gives the PCs the hard sell: "You won't find craftsmanship like this anywhere else in the Shadow Realm . . . or in any other realm, I'd wager!" He then goes on with more in that vein if the PCs show disinterest. The puppets range in price from 20 to 500 gp depending on the level of detail and articulation.

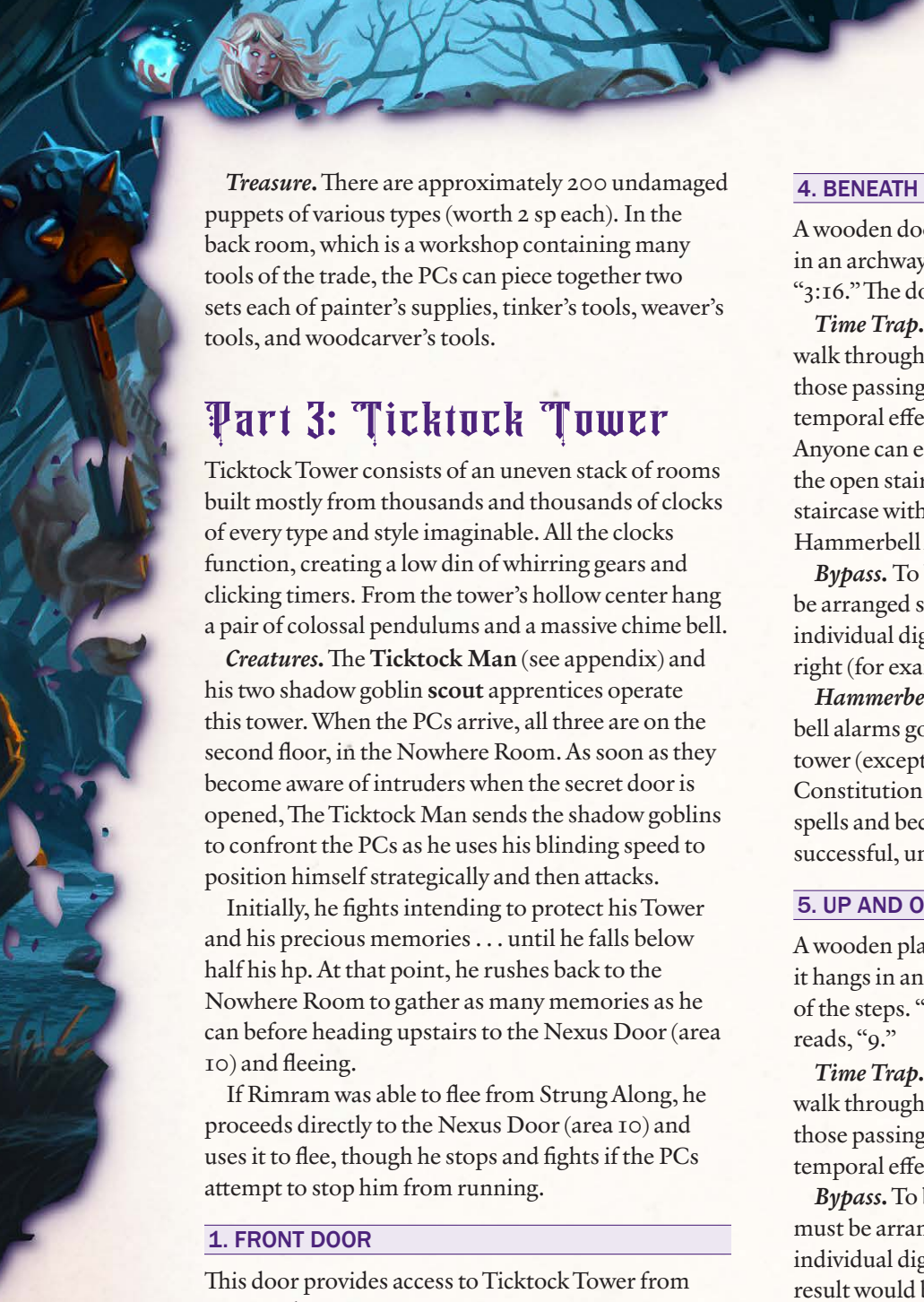
If the PCs ask about Rimram, purchasing memories, hourglasses, or anything else other than puppets, Zenk feigns ignorance—never even heard of a Rimram—and insists he only sells puppets. "I," he says, "am a puppet salesman and nothing more." A PC who makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check (or has a passive Insight of 13 or higher) notices Zenk's eyes flick toward the door to the back room in the middle of this statement.

Almost as if on cue, there's a sudden clattering sound of shelving collapsing, followed by a torrent of teddy bears dropping down to the floor from above the door to the shop. As the stuffed animals pile up on the floor, you can see that they're a motley collection of patchwork teddy bears of a wide variety of colors and disfigurements. Even as the teddy bears continue falling, the pile on the floor starts moving, forming into some kind of . . . swarm . . . that rises up to nearly the size of an ogre, blocking the exit. After a moment, however, the latter point is irrelevant as the door slams shut behind it.

Creatures. The pile of teddy bears forms a **gruesome plushy swarm** (see appendix). It immediately targets the PCs and attempts to kill them. With lots of tiny, tiny knives.

Once the swarm emerges, Zenk retreats into the back room, using Nimble Escape to Disengage if necessary. At the same time, Rimram, from the back room, turns the five puppet shop clerks (which are animated via his Animate Puppet feature) on the PCs. The next round, Rimram attempts to use his Puppet Link ability to target random PCs from behind the door as three shadow goblin **scouts** plus Zenk race through the smaller door to join the fight. Once the PCs defeat more than half the enemies—or, if they try to (or successfully) force their way into the back room—Rimram flees through a secret door hidden in a grandfather clock that connects to Ticktock Tower in order to warn The Ticktock Man.





Treasure. There are approximately 200 undamaged puppets of various types (worth 2 sp each). In the back room, which is a workshop containing many tools of the trade, the PCs can piece together two sets each of painter's supplies, tinker's tools, weaver's tools, and woodcarver's tools.

Part 3: Ticktock Tower

Ticktock Tower consists of an uneven stack of rooms built mostly from thousands and thousands of clocks of every type and style imaginable. All the clocks function, creating a low din of whirring gears and clicking timers. From the tower's hollow center hang a pair of colossal pendulums and a massive chime bell.

Creatures. The **Ticktock Man** (see appendix) and his two shadow goblin **scout** apprentices operate this tower. When the PCs arrive, all three are on the second floor, in the Nowhere Room. As soon as they become aware of intruders when the secret door is opened, The Ticktock Man sends the shadow goblins to confront the PCs as he uses his blinding speed to position himself strategically and then attacks.

Initially, he fights intending to protect his Tower and his precious memories . . . until he falls below half his hp. At that point, he rushes back to the Nowhere Room to gather as many memories as he can before heading upstairs to the Nexus Door (area 10) and fleeing.

If Rimram was able to flee from Strung Along, he proceeds directly to the Nexus Door (area 10) and uses it to flee, though he stops and fights if the PCs attempt to stop him from running.

1. FRONT DOOR

This door provides access to Ticktock Tower from Strung Along (House area 10).

2. UMBRAL PENDULUM

This colossal brass pendulum hangs from a broad gap in the ceiling that extends several stories up into darkness. The Ticktock Man can use it to make an attack with one of his lair actions.

3. CHIME OF UNDOING

Hanging alongside the pendulum, a massive metal chime dangles from high above. The Ticktock Man can ring the chime as one of his lair actions.

4. BENEATH AND UNDER DOOR

A wooden door with a clock face mounted on it hangs in an archway that faces the steps. The clock reads, "3:16." The door is closed. The doormat reads, "6."

Time Trap. The door is unlocked, and anyone can walk through it; however, the door alters time, and those passing through it are subjected to a random temporal effect (see the "Temporal Effects" sidebar). Anyone can easily avoid the door by stepping onto the open staircase. However, stepping onto the staircase without first opening the door triggers the Hammerbell Alarms (see below).

Bypass. To bypass the effect, the clock's hands must be arranged so that if one were to subtract all of the individual digits from each other, going from left to right (for example 9 – 2 – 1), the result would be 6.

Hammerbell Alarms. All the clocks with hammer bell alarms go off simultaneously. All creatures in the tower (except The Ticktock Man) must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or lose any concentration spells and become deafened for 1 minute, or if successful, until the start of their next turn.

5. UP AND OVER DOOR

A wooden plank door with a clock face mounted on it hangs in an archway that stands directly at the top of the steps. "7:29." The door is closed. The doormat reads, "9."

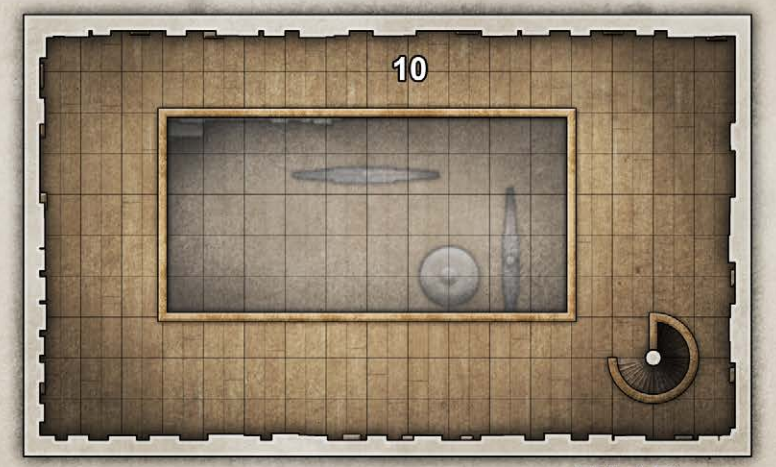
Time Trap. The door is unlocked, and anyone can walk through it; however, the door alters time, and those passing through it are subjected to a random temporal effect (see the "Temporal Effects" sidebar).

Bypass. To bypass the effect, the clock's hands must be arranged so that if one were to add all the individual digits together (for example 3 + 3 + 3), the result would be 9.

Cuckoo Alarms. All the cuckoo clocks in the tower ring simultaneously. The cacophony is maddening, and all creatures in the tower (except The Ticktock Man) must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw to avoid losing concentration on any active spells.

6. STICKY WICKET

The floor here is open to the floor above, and likewise there is an opening leading to a third floor. The enormous pendulums and chime hang down through the opening from above. The pendulum hanging at this level is swinging back and forth, north-south, slowly.

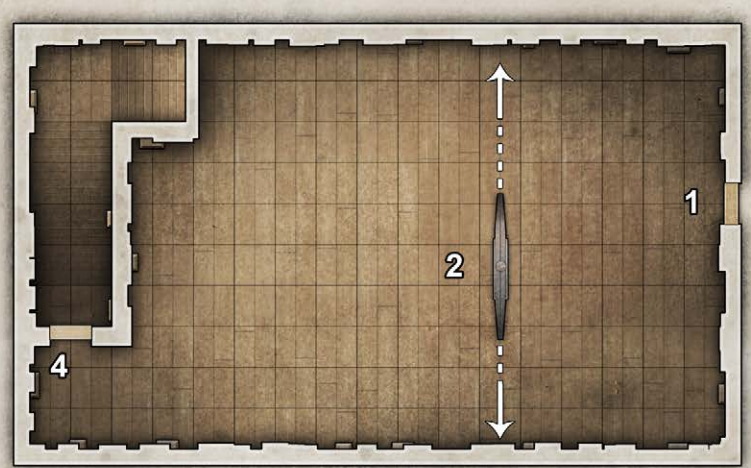


Third Floor

TICK TOCK TOWER



Second Floor



1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

First Floor

A creature can use the gap to access the upper levels by flying or climbing through it. Doing so triggers Hammerbell Alarms (see area 4).

7. PENUMBRAL PENDULUM

This pendulum matches the description of—and functions the same as—the one seen in area 2.

8. SIDEWAYS AND IN-BETWEEN

A wooden plank door with a clock face mounted on it hangs in an archway that faces the steps. The clock reads, "6:14." The door is closed. The doormat reads, "12."

Trap. The enchanted door siphons memories. Those passing through it must make a DC 16 Wisdom save or lose their background, including proficiency in any skills, tools, and languages associated with the background. The memories transform into colored sand and manifest within one of the hourglasses atop the shelf in the Nowhere Room. The effect lasts until the individual recovers their memories, as described below.

Bypass. To bypass the effect, the clock's hands must be arranged so that if one were to multiply the individual digits together, going from left to right (for example 2 × 3 × 2), the result would be 12.

Temporal Effects

When a temporal effect occurs, roll 1d6 to determine the result:

1. ***Time skips backward***. An affected creature makes its next ability check with advantage.
2. ***Time skips forward***. An affected creature makes its next ability check at disadvantage.
3. ***Time speeds up***. The next time an affected creature moves, its speed is doubled. The GM doubles the movement after the PC uses their movement.
4. *Time slows down*. On an affected creature's next turn, it is unable to take actions.
5. ***Time pauses***. On an affected creature's next turn, it can take 1 additional action.
6. ***Déjà vu***. An affected creature repeats the last action it took on its next turn as well; this does not expend additional resources.

9. THE NOWHERE ROOM

Two dozen hourglasses, each filled with different color sand, are arrayed on the shelves that line the walls of this room.

Anywhere on the walls that there isn't a shelf, there's a clock. They seem to all be synchronized, except that they're 12 minutes apart from each other. You can quickly see that the base time is the time that's on the clock in the door you came through. For a moment, you think you notice a pattern as to how they're arranged, but you blink and the same clock you were looking at suddenly has a different time on it, but the clocks are still all synchronized and 12 minutes apart.

Sands in the Hourglass. The sand in each hourglass holds a memory. The different colors of sand represent different emotions. A creature can view the memory within by holding the magical hourglass up to their eye. Viewing a memory takes only a short time but can damage the psyche. Any creature that views a memory from a mind other than their own must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or take 14 (4d6) psychic damage after the viewing is complete. If a creature views a memory that originally belonged to them, they regain the memory as if it had never been forgotten.

Memory Catalog. Upon closer inspection, the PCs can see that most of the hourglasses are unlabeled beyond noting a location, but a few are marked more extensively:

- "Court of Sparrows. Skilled Shadow Goblin Chef. (Excitement)" The memory is of the chef explaining a new recipe to another chef and seeing the chef impressed.
- "Golden Oak. Haughty Elf Flautist. (Sadness)" The memory is of an emcee saying, "It's my pleasure to give you Master Flautist Varaelian Azrilith" followed by applause; the elf then plays a beautiful, sad dirge on his flute and becomes so wrapped up in his performance that tears streak down his face as he plays. These are Varaelian's (area 6) lost memories; the sound of the whistle (area 7) reminded him of the music he once played on his own instrument.
- "Corremel. Stalwart Human Investigator. (Anger)" The memory is of a man questioning someone about the death of his wife and then slamming his hand against a wall after failing to get any answers; he goes back to his room at the inn and swipes his investigative notes off the desk and onto the floor.

- "Court of Pale Roses. Studious Wyrd Gnome Apprentice. (Triumph)" The memory is of a young wyrd gnome studying an arcane tome, making somatic gestures with a bit of phosphorus in hand as he mutters eldritch words over and over, until finally four torch-sized lights appear out of nowhere, swirling brightly around his hand; his eyes widen with wonder as he then makes the tiny magic orbs move at his command.

Urshaka's Memories. The bearfolk shaman's (or whomever the PCs are trying to aid as part of the hook) memories can be easily located by finding the hourglass labeled "Moonlit Glades." If the players don't remember where she was from, a PC succeeding on a DC 10 Intelligence check can recall that information. Urshaka's memory is of her learning the rites and traditions of her clan as a youth.

10. NEXUS DOOR

An enormous grandfather clock stands among the hundreds of timepieces lining the walls. A close inspection of the clock reveals that the cabinet opens to a magical portal connected to various locations along the shadow roads. The clock's hand's settings determine the destination. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the portal's purpose and how it functions.

Developments. If Rimram or The Ticktock Man has fled through the portal, the clock hands have been set to arrive near Corremel.

Treasure. The Ticktock Man stashes his treasure in various clocks throughout the room. Finding each stash requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

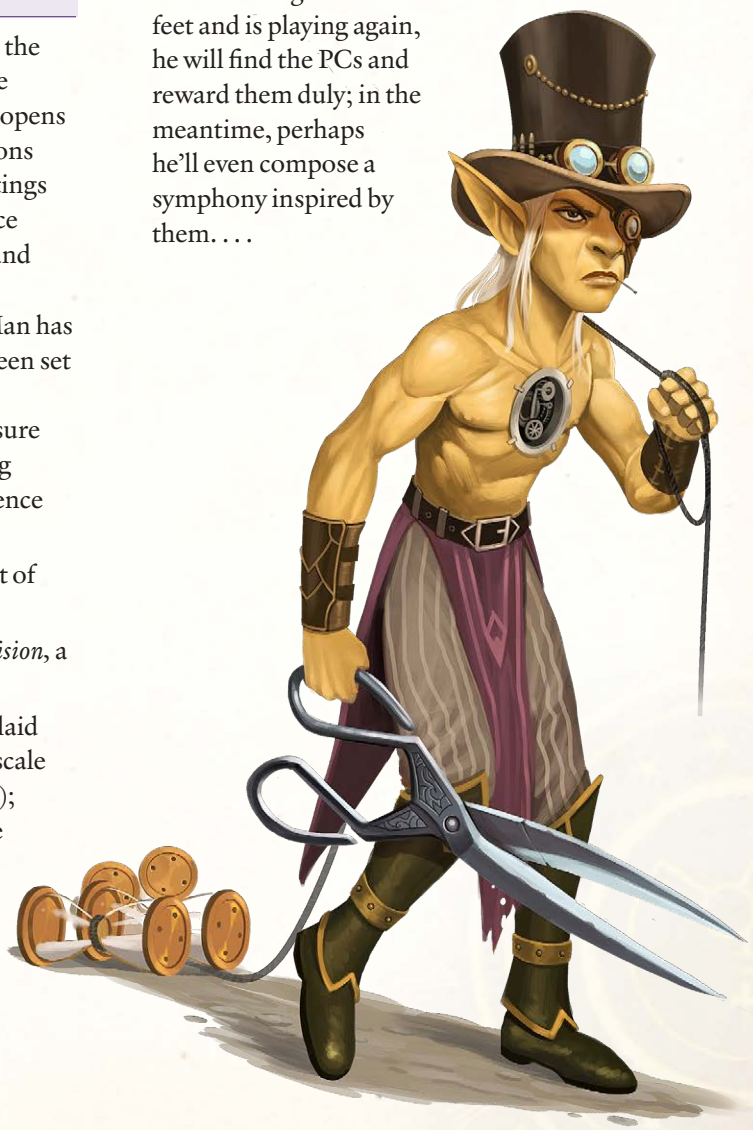
- *Stash 1.* 2,000 sp, 300 gp, and an assortment of gems (worth 350 gp total).
- *Stash 2.* A box with 1,200 cp, a *scroll of darkvision*, a *scroll of moonbeam*, and a *chime of opening*.
- *Stash 3.* 50 pp; a tooled leather coin purse inlaid with silver (worth 250 gp); a pair of dragonscale earrings set with moonstone (worth 250 gp); an ivory comb set with onyx (250 gp); a jade statuette (worth 250 gp); and a *figurine of wondrous power* (silver raven).

Concluding the Adventure

The adventure concludes when the PCs defeat The Ticktock Man, recover the memories, and exit The House of Reciprocities.

If the PCs previously met with the bearfolk directly, they may wish to travel to The Moonlit Glades to return the memories to Urshaka personally. She and her clan don't have much in the way of coin, but they extend their deepest thanks and give the PCs a ring of animal influence in gratitude.

Likewise, the PCs may wish to find Varaelian in The House to return his memories to him and perhaps also escort him back to his forgotten home of Golden Oak. Recovering his memories is a longer process for him than for most, as he'd been without them for half a century. Though he was a well-regarded flautist, he was never wealthy by any means, but he promises that once he gets back on his feet and is playing again, he will find the PCs and reward them duly; in the meantime, perhaps he'll even compose a symphony inspired by them. . . .



Among the Shades and Shadows

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 7TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Eldreth Umbril was a noble shadow fey living in Corremel-in-Shadow. He owned a modest home within the city, enjoyed his inherited wealth, and did what many minor lordlings do: moved in the circles of politics, was a patron of the arts, and reveled in food, drink, and good company.

Eldreth continued in this way for some years, until two new faces arrived at The Pluming Lantern Pleasure Salon: two dream eaters, in the guises of midnight shadow fey, named Andarian and Duella. The two quickly became the establishment's most sought-after courtesans, taking up residence in the largest, most well-appointed room. Eldreth was one of their most loyal patrons, but each time he returned to them, they demanded more and more in exchange for their time and attentions. Eldreth found himself compelled to pay their ever-increasing costs, until the day he realized he'd gifted them most of his wealth and family heirlooms, including his deceased mother's necklace. Plunged into shame and despair, Eldreth wandered the city in a drunken stupor for three days and three nights until he relented to his misery and flung himself from the River Bridge and into the Lethe, ending it all.

Eldreth has returned in the form of a Stygian shade, with only a few tattered scraps of memory to guide him to who he once was. He needs the characters' help to track down his true identity and reclaim his family's name.

Starting the Adventure

The inky-black waters of the River Lethe run east-west through Corremel. As the characters approach the city limits, read or paraphrase the following:

The city of Corremel glows like a beacon in the darkness of the Shadow Realm. Myriad lanterns light your way, dotting the path forward.

A figure lingers at the edge of the light. A shadow fey dressed in tattered courtly attire, with two short horns that curve back along his head and short hair that falls into his downcast eyes, stares into the black water. It's only after he turns his head at the sound of your approach that you realize his form is ghostly and translucent. He lets out a small cry and rushes toward you.

"Please," he begs. "Help me."

The figure, Eldreth Umbril, is a newly formed Stygian shade (use statistics for a **wraith**). If the PCs hear him out, he explains that he does not remember how he came to be here, on the edge of the River Lethe, nor does he remember his name or who he is. He has a burning need to reclaim his lost memories, but he's afraid of entering Corremel in his current form. He begs the PCs to help him track down clues to his identity and to help him figure out the cause of his death.

Eldreth is certain Corremel holds the answers he seeks, though he's unable to explain why. The only fleeting memories he presently has are the following:

- He recalls an image of a massive, white marble bridge. (See "The River Bridge.")



- He holds tight to a fond memory of a woman singing, accompanied by a lute. He can hum a few bars of the melody but does not recall the words or the entire song. (See "The Horn Gate Inn.")
- He remembers the smell of oil paints, the taste of good wine, and the sound of a man's low laughter. Accompanying these sensory memories is the image of a half-completed painting of a white stag amidst the dark trees, surrounded by will-o'-wisps. (See "The Horn Gate Inn.")
- He has a memory of a thick crimson rug twined over with a design of brambles and black morning glories. (See "The Pluming Lantern Pleasure Salon.")
- He's confident he was rich, and that if the PCs help him, they will be paid handsomely (once he regains his memories and his wealth). He distinctly remembers an intricate necklace of silver and black opal that was dear to him. The memory of the necklace evokes feelings of helplessness, rage, and despair, and he has a hard time keeping his composure when discussing it. (See "The Pluming Lantern Pleasure Salon.")

If the PCs agree to help Eldreth, he thanks them profusely and remains at his location to await news from them.

COMBAT WITH THE STYGIAN SHADE

If the PCs attack Eldreth, he uses his first two turns to take the Dodge action, uses his movement to retreat from combat at his full speed (using Disengage in place of Dodge if necessary) and begs the characters

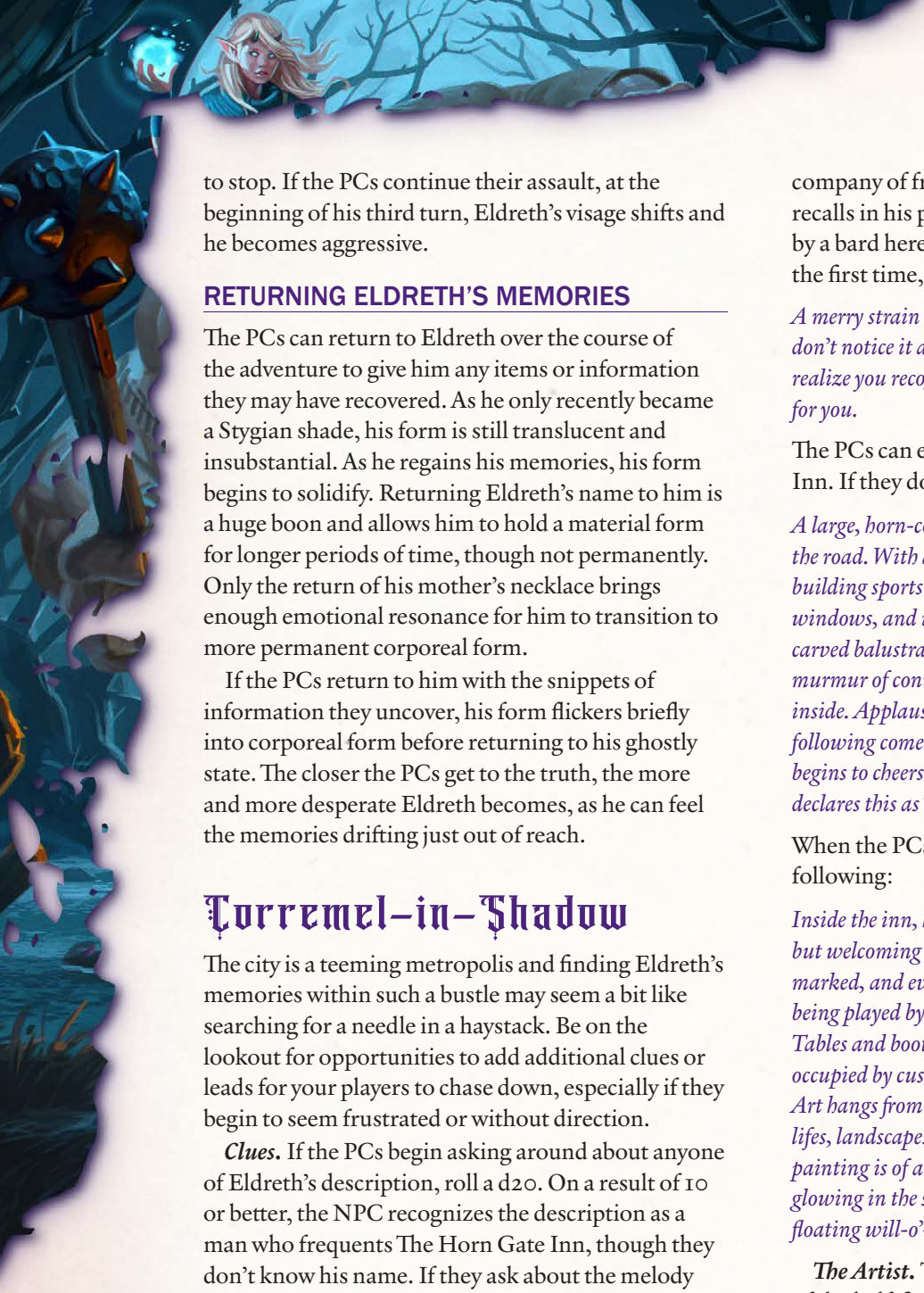
The Power of Names

Since learning Eldreth's name is a vital element of this mystery, it's important that you don't slip up and refer to him by his actual name to the PCs until they discover it. Refer to him to the PCs as "the Stygian shade" until they learn his identity.

Alternate Plot Hook

In case the provided plot hook won't work for your game (or the PCs do something unexpected, like kill poor Eldreth before acquiring the plot), here are some additional options for introducing the adventure:

- Eldreth's sister, Indirial, recently arrived in the city from the Courts of the Shadow Fey when communication with her brother suddenly ceased. She found his home empty, the valuables missing, and no answers. She's particularly distressed to find her mother's black opal necklace is missing. She hires the party to find out what happened to Eldreth and to bring him home if they can. She knows, prior to his silence, that he'd recently squabbled with his on-again, off-again lover, Soren Cimmerian, and had talked often of sating his baser appetites at The Pluming Lantern.
- Alternatively, if the PCs are in another city within the Courts of the Shadow Fey, place Indirial there and have her request an escort to Corremel and/or ask that the PCs investigate on her behalf.



to stop. If the PCs continue their assault, at the beginning of his third turn, Eldreth's visage shifts and he becomes aggressive.

RETURNING ELDRETH'S MEMORIES

The PCs can return to Eldreth over the course of the adventure to give him any items or information they may have recovered. As he only recently became a Stygian shade, his form is still translucent and insubstantial. As he regains his memories, his form begins to solidify. Returning Eldreth's name to him is a huge boon and allows him to hold a material form for longer periods of time, though not permanently. Only the return of his mother's necklace brings enough emotional resonance for him to transition to more permanent corporeal form.

If the PCs return to him with the snippets of information they uncover, his form flickers briefly into corporeal form before returning to his ghostly state. The closer the PCs get to the truth, the more and more desperate Eldreth becomes, as he can feel the memories drifting just out of reach.

Torremel-in-Shadow

The city is a teeming metropolis and finding Eldreth's memories within such a bustle may seem a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack. Be on the lookout for opportunities to add additional clues or leads for your players to chase down, especially if they begin to seem frustrated or without direction.

Clues. If the PCs begin asking around about anyone of Eldreth's description, roll a d20. On a result of 10 or better, the NPC recognizes the description as a man who frequents The Horn Gate Inn, though they don't know his name. If they ask about the melody Eldreth hummed, the NPC recognizes it without the need for a roll as a popular song often performed by a trio at The Horn Gate Inn. Any NPC asked about a large white bridge can easily point the PCs to The River Bridge.

THE HORN GATE INN

A large, horn-colored mansion situated on the northernmost edge of the city, The Horn Gate Inn is often the first stop for travelers and adventurers.

There are musical performances every night at The Horn Gate Inn, and musicians vie for the privilege of performing for the public. Eldreth often frequented The Horn Gate Inn, sometimes on his own or in the company of friends, and the short strain of melody he recalls in his present form is a song often performed by a bard here. When the PCs approach the inn for the first time, read or paraphrase the following:

A merry strain of music dances across the air, so light you don't notice it at first. As it becomes clearer, however, you realize you recognize the tune as the one the shade hummed for you.

The PCs can easily follow the music to The Horn Gate Inn. If they do so, read or paraphrase the following:

A large, horn-colored mansion dominates the east side of the road. With a stone exterior and a slate gray roof, the building sports numerous gables, turrets, and stained-glass windows, and is bedecked with balconies with intricately carved balustrades. Patrons filter in and out, and the low murmur of conversation punctuated by laughter floats from inside. Applause suddenly breaks out as the song you were following comes to an end. A moment later, a new song begins to cheers of approval. A swinging sign above the door declares this as The Horn Gate Inn.

When the PCs enter the inn, read or paraphrase the following:

Inside the inn, hand-carved wooden décor creates a grand but welcoming ambiance. Shadow fey, humans, elf-marked, and even a few halflings dance to a lively song being played by three musicians on drum, lute, and pipe. Tables and booths are arrayed around the dance floor, occupied by customers eating and drinking and laughing. Art hangs from the walls above the booths, featuring still lifes, landscapes, portraits, and tasteful nudes. One striking painting is of a white stag, its flawless, pale coat nearly glowing in the shadow of a midnight forest dotted with floating will-o'-wisps.

The Artist. The painting is the completed version of the half-finished piece Eldreth remembers. It was painted by Soren Cimmerian (NG shadow fey **noble**), an artist who resides full-time in a suite of rooms at the inn. He's currently sitting at a table with other artists, drinking and laughing. A PC who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices Soren as a pretty, pale-haired shadow fey with numerous paint stains on his hands and on his charcoal-gray tunic and leggings.

Clues. Though the inn is crowded, the PCs can easily find a table if they wish. If the PCs ask any of the staff about the painting, they're able to tell them the name of the artist and point to him where he sits at his table. If they ask any of the staff about a man

matching Eldreth's description, they can tell them that his name is Eldreth Umbril and confirm he's a regular patron, though he hasn't been seen in a while. He was usually in the company of Soren, indicating Soren in the crowd if they haven't seen him already.

Soren Cimmerian

Soren Cimmerian is an up-and-coming artist living in the city of Corremel-in-Shadow. He's a tall and broad-shouldered shadow fey with long, white hair he adorns with small braids, and his tiny black horns are easy to miss. His face is more pretty than handsome, and his skin and eyes are pale gray.

Currently, Soren rents a small suite of rooms on the third floor of The Horn Gate Inn, consisting of a sitting room, a bedroom, and a study that he's converted into his artist's studio. Until three months ago, Soren and Eldreth enjoyed each other's company, and Eldreth spent many days (and nights) in Soren's suite. When Eldreth began visiting Duella and Andarian more and more frequently, however, Soren became at first jealous, and then increasingly concerned with his friend's obsession with the courtesans. The last time Soren saw Eldreth, nearly two months ago now, they argued viciously about the matter, leading Eldreth to hurl a pot of paint against the wall of Soren's studio out of anger. The dripping vermillion splotch is still visible on the wall and the floor beneath it.

If Soren is approached by the PCs, he welcomes conversation with newcomers and is highly flirtatious with all of them, especially the most charismatic of the group. He can identify Eldreth from a description, though the mention of his former lover sets him in a quiet pique.

Clues. If the PCs inform Soren that Eldreth is dead, he sobers and invites them to his suite to tell him more. Once there, he answers the PCs' questions as best he can:

- Eldreth Umbril lived in a house east of Joyful Park called Inkblot Manor.
- He hasn't seen Eldreth in nearly two months, not since they had a huge argument and said some unkind things to one another.
- Soren is less enthusiastic about recounting the reasons for the argument, but reluctantly tells the PCs it was because Eldreth had taken to visiting two newer courtesans at The Pluming Lantern. He was jealous at first, yes, but then as Eldreth spent more and more of his family's money on the two, that's when he became worried and confronted him about it.
- He claims Eldreth was like an addict of some sort, willing to do whatever he could to earn just a few more minutes of their time. He can tell them the courtesans' names: Andarian and Duella.

Reuniting Soren and Eldreth

If the PCs tell Soren that Eldreth has returned as a Stygian shade, he immediately demands to be taken to him. The two tearfully reunite, and Eldreth takes on a corporeal form for a few minutes as the rush of memories associated with Soren fill him. Soren asks how Eldreth died, but Eldreth still does not remember, so Soren asks the PCs to discover the answer, if they haven't already.

If the PCs show any reluctance to continue the quest, Soren can offer them some of his art as payment. If pressed for actual coin, or if the PCs have been to Inkblot Manor and accuse Eldreth of being poor and unable to pay them, Soren mentions Eldreth's sister, Indirial, who would surely pay them handsomely for aiding her brother.

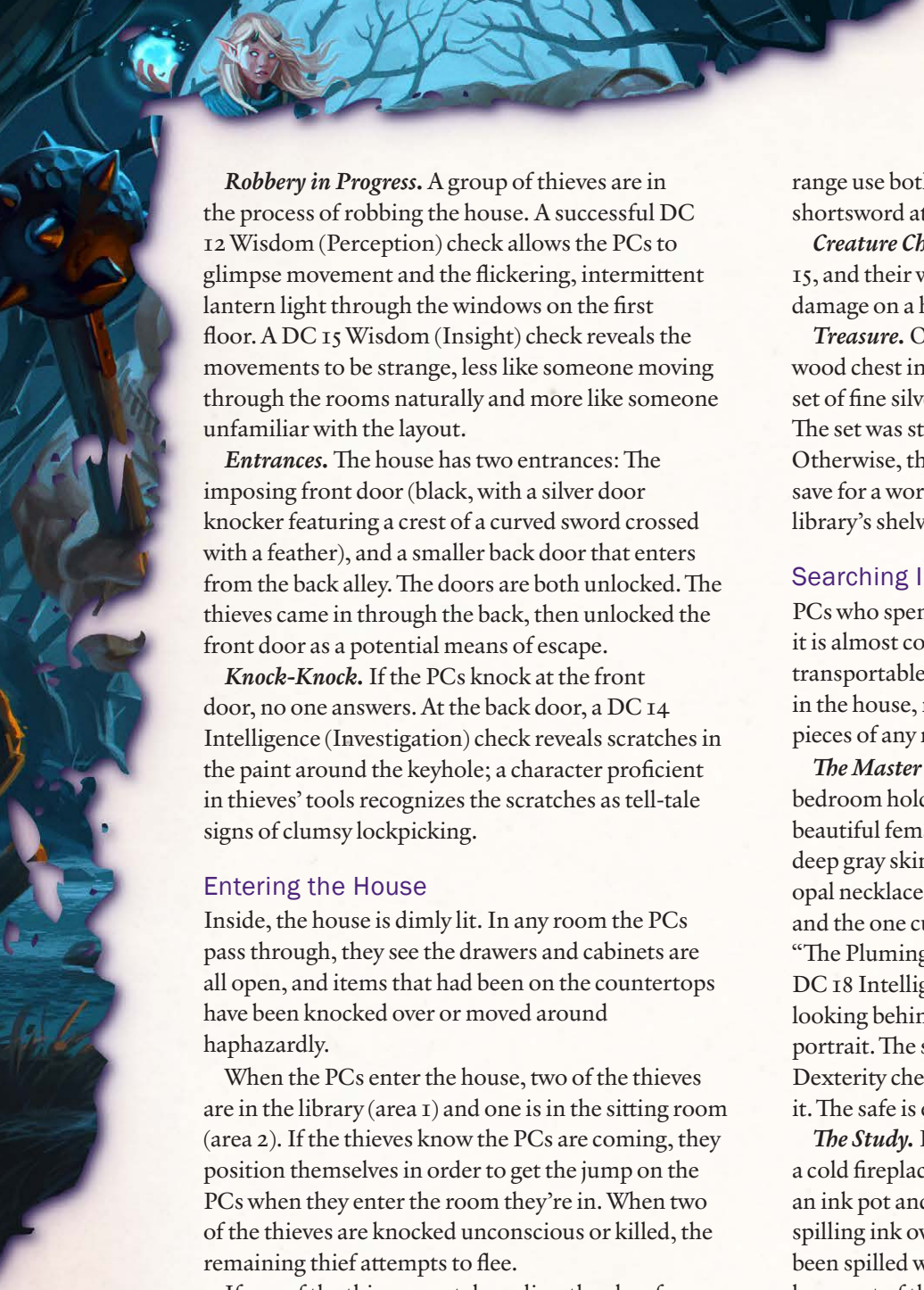
Soren insists on taking Eldreth back to his rooms at The Horn Gate Inn. If this happens, the two can be found there for the rest of the adventure.

INKBLOT MANOR

So named because of the strange, constantly changing blotched patterns of the black and white marble of its façade, Inkblot Manor was the home of Eldreth in life. The ground floor consists of a sizable foyer, sitting room, and library in the front, with a dining room, kitchen, and scullery in the back. The second floor holds the master bedroom, study, and a private sitting room. The third floor holds three guest rooms, dusty and unused, and a large storage room filled with cloth-covered furniture.

When the PCs approach Inkblot Manor, read or paraphrase the following:

Nestled in a wealthy neighborhood west of Joyful Park, Inkblot Manor is one of the smaller houses on the block but is still grand in its own right. A three-story mansion, with black scrollwork along the eaves and arched windows that stare out at the street like blank eyes, the house's most notable feature is the marble façade, covered over completely with black and white blotched patterns. The blots shift and change ever so slowly before your eyes, like ink drops soaking through paper.



Robbery in Progress. A group of thieves are in the process of robbing the house. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check allows the PCs to glimpse movement and the flickering, intermittent lantern light through the windows on the first floor. A DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals the movements to be strange, less like someone moving through the rooms naturally and more like someone unfamiliar with the layout.

Entrances. The house has two entrances: The imposing front door (black, with a silver door knocker featuring a crest of a curved sword crossed with a feather), and a smaller back door that enters from the back alley. The doors are both unlocked. The thieves came in through the back, then unlocked the front door as a potential means of escape.

Knock-Knock. If the PCs knock at the front door, no one answers. At the back door, a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals scratches in the paint around the keyhole; a character proficient in thieves' tools recognizes the scratches as tell-tale signs of clumsy lockpicking.

Entering the House

Inside, the house is dimly lit. In any room the PCs pass through, they see the drawers and cabinets are all open, and items that had been on the countertops have been knocked over or moved around haphazardly.

When the PCs enter the house, two of the thieves are in the library (area 1) and one is in the sitting room (area 2). If the thieves know the PCs are coming, they position themselves in order to get the jump on the PCs when they enter the room they're in. When two of the thieves are knocked unconscious or killed, the remaining thief attempts to flee.

If any of the thieves are taken alive, they beg for their life and apologize profusely. They were told Inkblot Manor was empty, and that the owner would not be returning any time soon, so they assumed it was ripe for the taking. The thief seems upset, however, and explains they hadn't gotten very far in their search of the house, and anyway, it seems like everything worth anything is already gone. They suppose maybe another group got there before them.

Creatures. Three shadow fey thieves (use statistics for **veteran** with the changes noted below). Any thieves not in the room with the PCs when combat begins use their heavy crossbows and duck behind cover between shots. Any thieves fighting in melee range use both longsword attacks and their offhand shortsword attack.

Creature Change. The shadow fey thieves have AC 15, and their weapon attacks deal an extra 1d4 poison damage on a hit.

Treasure. One of the thieves has a fine, polished wood chest in their backpack. Inside the chest is a set of fine silverware service for 24 (worth 100 gp). The set was stolen from Inkblot Manor's kitchen. Otherwise, the thieves' bags are mostly empty, save for a worthless trinket or two swiped from the library's shelves.

Searching Inkblot Manor

PCs who spend time searching the manor discover it is almost completely empty of any easily transportable valuables. There is no money found in the house, no jewelry, and no small trinkets or art pieces of any notable value.

The Master Bedroom. The wall of the master bedroom holds a painting of Eldreth's mother, a beautiful female shadow fey with curly dark hair and deep gray skin, wearing an intricate silver and black opal necklace. This is the necklace Eldreth remembers and the one currently in Duella's possession. (See "The Pluming Lantern Pleasure Salon.") A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check (or a PC looking behind the frame) reveals a safe behind the portrait. The safe is locked, and a successful DC 18 Dexterity check with thieves' tools is required to open it. The safe is empty.

The Study. In the study, a desk stands adjacent to a cold fireplace. On the desk is an open journal and an ink pot and quill that have been knocked over, spilling ink over the desktop. The ink is dry, having been spilled weeks ago by Eldreth. The open journal has most of the pages torn out, with only one entry remaining. On the open page, in a shaky hand, is written the phrase "What have I done?" Eldreth wrote this after realizing he'd traded away his mother's necklace, the event that preceded his eventual demise. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check or DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals several mostly burned pieces of paper in the fireplace. These are pages from Eldreth's journal, which he ripped out and threw into the fire in despair. The PCs can make out the following excerpts on the burned remains:

"... went to Soren ... a sweet night at The Horn Gate ... quarreled. He's driven by petty jealousy. Typical of ... doesn't understand. ..."

"... what beauty and wonder ... Duella. The Pleasure House has always been a favorite of mine, but since they arrived ... more and more, willing to offer anything, everything, to spend time in their presence. It's as if they've ensnared me, body and soul. What I wouldn't ..."

"... must see them. What more can I do? Perhaps they will accept ..."

There is nothing else of interest in Inkblot Manor.

Eldreth's Neighbors

Eldreth's neighborhood is upper class and is therefore constantly patrolled by Lanternkeepers, and the neighbors, all shadow fey **nobles,** tend to notice when things are amiss. If the PCs go knocking on any of the neighbors' doors, roll 1d20 and consult the "Eldreth's Neighbors" table to determine the NPC's demeanor, which determines how forthcoming they are. If the PC doing the talking is a shadow fey, add a +2 modifier to the d20 roll.

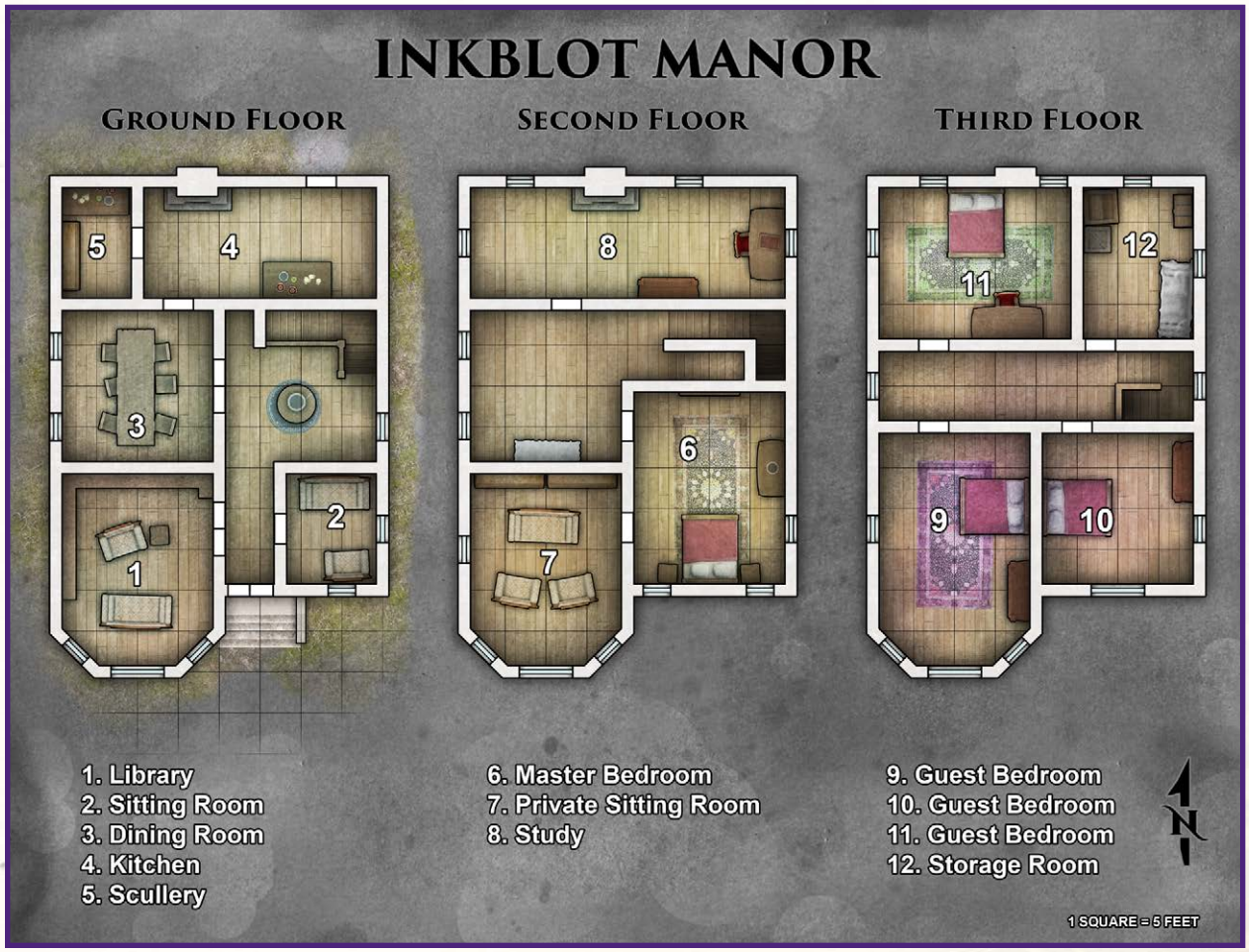
Whether any of the NPCs end up calling the guard or not, once the PCs have approached three neighbors, the Lanternkeepers stop them in the street, ask them their business, and then suggest they move on and stop bothering these folk.

THE RIVER BRIDGE

The River Bridge is a massive, white marble structure that spans the River Lethe in the center of the city. One of the only safe ways to cross the River Lethe, there's a near-constant stream of traffic over it. Buskers stake out prime locations on the bridge, hoping to catch a spare coin from a passing traveler, and it is regularly patrolled by Lanternkeepers. The bridge itself arches over the dark waters of the river, and each of its many supports features a carving of an unfortunate soul recently lost to the waters, morphing and changing often.

When the PCs approach the River Bridge, read or paraphrase the following:

A massive white marble bridge arches across the River Lethe, connecting the northern and southern portions of the city. All sorts pass across it, from those dressed in noble finery



to weary, road-stained travelers, and the clatter of carriages rattling across the cobblestones is a constant song. At least a dozen marble supports rise out of the dark water, each one carved with a lifelike figure with its face frozen in a mask of horror. As you watch, one of the figures, a young human woman in a fine dress, shifts and changes into the form of a bearfolk warrior, its wide muzzle stretched open in a howl of terror.

The PC(s) with the highest passive Perception immediately recognize one of the carvings, a shadow fey with curving horns, short hair, and tattered finery, as Eldreth.

If the PCs ask any of the nearby townsfolk about the carvings, they are informed of the disturbing truth of the figures. If they ask the passing Lanternkeepers if they recognize Eldreth's carving, a successful Charisma (Persuasion) check is required to gain any information. Consult the What the Lanternkeepers Know table to determine what the PCs learn.

WHAT THE LANTERNKEEPERS KNOW

DC	Information Provided
12	The Lanternkeepers confirm they recognize Eldreth from around town.
15	The Lanternkeepers know and tell the PCs Eldreth's name.
18	The Lanternkeepers know and point out that Eldreth lived in a house not far from here, just to the southwest, called Inkblot Manor.

THE PLUMING LANTERN PLEASURE SALON

The Pluming Lantern Pleasure Salon is located on the northeast side of Corremel, two blocks east of The Horn Gate Inn. When the PCs approach The Pluming Lantern, read or paraphrase the following:

A massive, turquoise, marble structure rises up at the corner of two cross streets, topped by a crystal dome that glows from within and casts broken rainbows across the surrounding buildings. A single, nearly featureless tower juts up from one corner of the building, capped with a pointed roof and ringed by a single balcony. The double doors at the front of the main building open as a shadow fey couple exits, bringing with them the sound of light laughter, harp music, and the scent of strong perfumes and incense.

Just within the front door of The Pluming Lantern, a host waits to greet any newcomers and inquire of any services needed. The PCs can choose a service or spend time in the lounge, where food, drinks, and company are all available. The lounge features curtained booths and low tables with cushions for relaxing, all partitioned enough to maintain the illusion of privacy. The baths are at the rear of the main building, behind heavy curtains, with their own retinue of attendants, while the tower holds private rooms for more intimate entertainments. A door at the rear of the building opens directly into the baths from the street, where an attendant waits to assist any patrons. Bouncers in plain clothing are positioned in discreet locations—throughout the public areas and in the hallways of the tower—and are quick to protect any of the Lantern's employees or to eject any unruly patrons.

ELDRETH'S NEIGHBORS

d20	NPC Demeanor	Information Learned
1–5	Suspicious	The NPC is wary of the PCs and may shut the door in their faces, or even call the guard if the PCs press and fail at their attempts to get information. A DC 18 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check is required to get any information from this NPC; on a success, the NPC provides the information listed under "Uninterested" below. If an Intimidation check is attempted (successful or not), the NPC calls the guards on the PCs as soon as they are out of sight.
6–18	Uninterested	The NPC tells the PCs Eldreth's name and that they haven't seen him in several weeks. They have no interest in chatting. A DC 14 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check is required to get any additional information from this NPC; on a success, the NPC provides the information listed under "Friendly" below. If an Intimidation check is attempted (successful or not), the NPC does not answer the door if the PCs return in the future.
19–20	Friendly	The NPC tells the PCs Eldreth's name, and that they haven't seen him in several weeks—and that when they did see him, he seemed in a bad state. They also mention they heard he'd frittered away his family's fortune over at The Pluming Lantern Pleasure Salon . . . and that he's surely not the first person to do so.

Services at The Pluming Lantern are not limited to mundane or carnal activities. Typical spa services are offered, as are magical and illusory diversions. The only limits are the patron's imagination—and, possibly, their ability to pay.

Andarian and Duella

Andarian and Duella—who are **dream eaters** (see appendix) disguised as midnight shadow fey—came to The Pluming Lantern three months ago and quickly earned the honor as the most popular courtesans. They used their newfound influence to force Amalthea Coronatto, a lunar shadow fey courtesan, out of her rooms, which they then claimed as their own.

When the PCs arrive at The Pluming Lantern, Andarian and Duella are entertaining a guest in their suite. If the PCs spend any time in the lounge, they notice a female shadow fey (their most recent patron) half-stumble into the lounge from the tower door, and she then walks, somewhat dazed, out of the building. Shortly after she leaves, Andarian and Duella come to the lounge and are immediately surrounded by fawning patrons.

When the PCs first see Duella and Andarian, read or paraphrase the following:

You see a pair of shadow fey, both thin and androgenous. The more masculine of the two has black eyes, alabaster white skin, dark charcoal gray hair that hangs long and loose around his shoulders to his mid back, and two long, white twisting horns that angle back and away from his head. He wears dark gray leggings with soft, black, thigh-high leather boots and a black vest with intricate silver stitching along the border that hangs open to show his muscled physique. Black onyx earrings stud his ears, silver and black bracelets on both arms jangle as he moves, and multiple silver rings glint against his pale skin.

The more feminine figure has pale eyes, gray skin, and white hair done up in an intricate style of braids, held back with an opalescent hair stick to show off her long, pointed ears and thin, black horns. She wears a gown with draped sleeves that attach at her wrist, her silhouette visible through the diaphanous material. She also wears delicate silver and black opal earrings, and though the gown is high-necked, it bears a keyhole neckline through which an intricate silver and black opal necklace can be seen.



The black opal necklace worn by Duella is an intricate piece of twisting silver and sparkling jewelry; it is the *Umbril opal necklace* (see appendix) and belonged to Eldreth's mother. If the PCs saw the portrait of Eldreth's mother in Inkblot Manor, they immediately recognize the necklace from the painting. While wearing the necklace, Duella's Charisma score becomes 22, her Charisma bonus is +6, and her spell save is DC 18.

If the PCs are not hidden from Andarian and Duella, the two immediately turn their eyes to them, almost simultaneously. They then shoo away their adoring crowd and approach the PCs. They introduce themselves and join the group without being invited, confident in their own allure. Andarian and Duella are curious about these newcomers and ask friendly questions about the PCs, their travels, and their business in the city—and in The Pluming Lantern. The two have no desire to fight, or to even be remotely antagonistic with the PCs and look confused and petulant if any of the PCs are rude; they retreat to

their room if things become too heated or it seems they're not wanted.

If the PCs inquire after the necklace, Duella explains it was a gift from a patron. She refuses to part with it for any amount of money or offer of services, claiming it holds too much sentimental value for her to just give up.

The pair are always together, never going anywhere without one another, and so catching one alone would take some clever planning indeed. If they are not in the lounge area of The Pluming Lantern, they can be found in their chambers on the third floor of the tower.

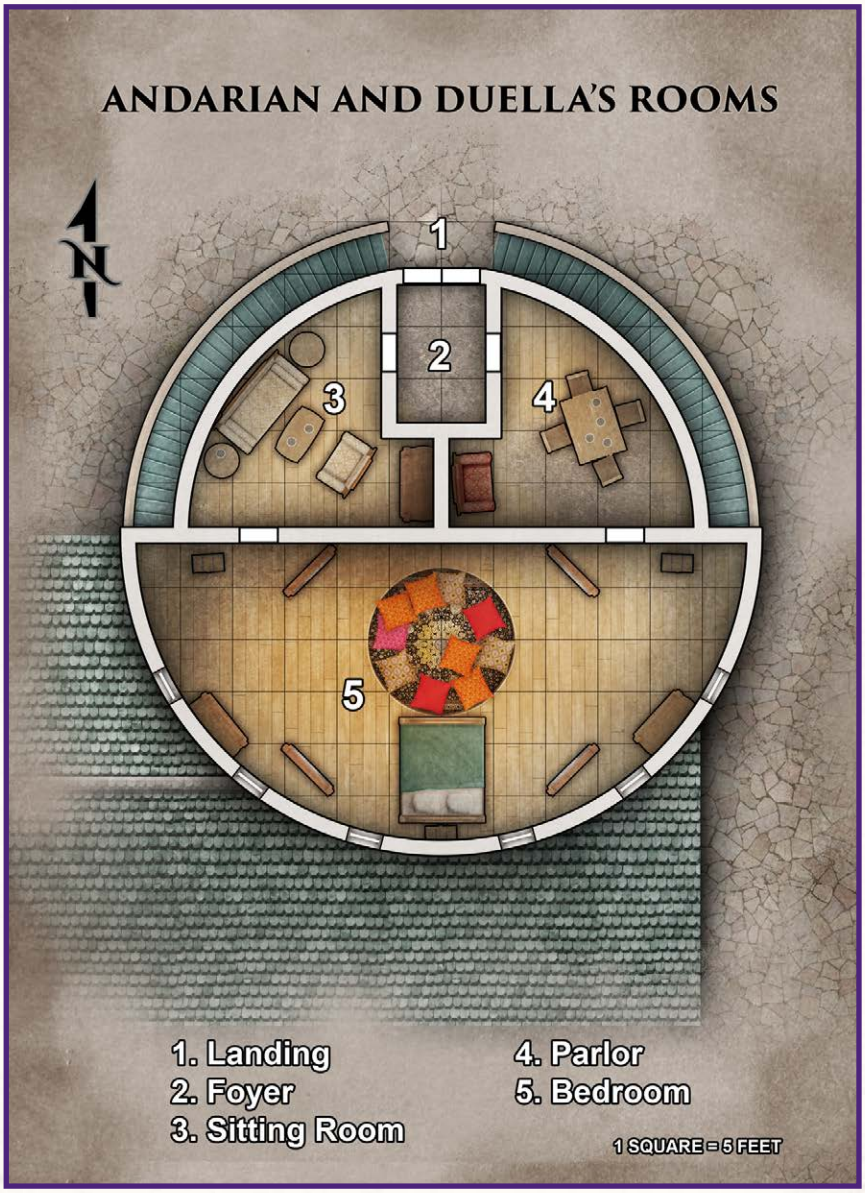
Combat within The Pluming Lantern

At any given time, there are ten bouncers (**gladiators**) within The Pluming Lantern. If the PCs become aggressive toward any of the employees or patrons in the public areas of The Pluming Lantern, they are immediately set upon by 1d4 bouncers. If the combat occurs in any of the private areas, the bouncers head toward that location as soon as they hear anything that indicates trouble, arriving in 1d6 rounds. The bouncers refrain from using their weapons unless the PCs draw steel or use magic. PCs ejected in this fashion find themselves blacklisted from The Pluming Lantern and are thereafter refused entry. The Pluming Lantern is also quite busy at all hours of the day or night, so the chances of harming innocent bystanders if a fight occurs is high.

If the PCs initiate combat with Andarian and/or Duella in public, the pair is content to let the bouncers handle the PCs unless things look particularly dire. In a tight spot, they use *command* and *suggestion* on the remaining patrons to defend them (though several would likely jump in to defend them on their own); they then flee to their rooms and lock themselves inside, content to wait for others to handle the violence, as they have no desire to blow their cover.

Andarian and Duella's Rooms

Andarian and Duella's rooms in The Pluming Lantern are plush and well decorated. The bedroom holds one oversized bed, situated behind a lounging pit in the floor filled with cushions and pillows. Positioned around the bed and the pit are four tall mirrors. The two mirrors in the northeast and northwest corners hides a wardrobe and a chest. Hanging from the ceiling is a chandelier whose magical lights can be changed to a different color with but a word. Small



arched windows dot the curving walls at ten-foot increments. Behind the bed hides another chest; this chest is locked, and it requires a successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to unlock it.

If the PCs confront Andarian and Duella here, the pair once again attempts to belay combat by use of their charms, but if the PCs are openly hostile, they use their *command* and *suggestion* spells, and Duella positions herself in the most optimal place to use her Waking Dreams ability. The pair much prefer to subdue the PCs and then drain them with their Dream Eater's Caress ability at their leisure.

If either Andarian or Duella falls to 0 hp, they return to their natural, hideous form, and the other screams for the bouncers if they are not already there. When the remaining dream eater falls to ¼ of their health (25 hp) they use their Shapechanger ability to polymorph into an eagle and escape through the closest window, at least one of which is already open.

Treasure. The pair of dream eaters have amassed quite a fortune in their short time. Duella wears a pair of black opal earrings (worth 150 gp) and the *Umbril opal necklace*. Andarian wears black onyx earrings (worth 25 gp), ten onyx and silver bracelets (worth 10 gp each), four silver rings (worth 5 gp each), and has a key to the chest behind the bed in an interior pocket in his vest. The chest to the northeast contains five sets of fine clothes, a pouch holding 25 pp, and a gold and ruby tiara (worth 300 gp). The wardrobe to the northeast contains ten sets of fine clothes, *boots of elvenkind*, and a *cape of the mountebank*. The chest on the northwest side holds five sets of fine clothes, a pouch containing 30 pp and four gemstones (worth 50 gp each), a *wand of secrets*, and a *wind fan*. The wardrobe contains ten sets of fine clothes and *iron bands of binding*. The chest behind the bed contains a *bag of holding* filled with 15,000 gp and 2,500 pp.

Concluding the Adventure

The adventure can end in several ways, leading to different fates for the PCs involved.

IF ANDARIAN OR DUELLA ESCAPES

If the PCs initiated combat with the dream eaters, but one of them escaped, that is not the last they see of them. The dream eater finds somewhere to lie low, licks their wounds, and plots their revenge on the PCs. Depending on how forthcoming the PCs were with the dream eaters about their previous and future business in the Shadow Realm, the dream eater may make things politically complicated for the PCs by taking on a new guise and spreading malicious rumors about them. Or they may simply gather a new group of followers and wait for the opportune time to strike.

IF ANDARIAN AND DUELLA ARE BOTH KILLED

If the PCs kill both dream eaters, the PCs have some explaining to do to the staff of The Pluming Lantern and the Lanternkeepers. If they are relative newcomers to the city, explaining this away is more difficult than if they have already established a reputation for themselves.

IF ANDARIAN AND DUELLA ARE LEFT TO THEIR DEVICES

If the PCs allow Andarian and Duella to continue living as courtesans in The Pluming Lantern, the pair continues to prey on the citizens of Corremel, eventually ensnaring one of Prince Hander Svenk's most trusted accomplices. If the PCs somehow convince the dream eaters to go elsewhere, they set their sights on the Courts of the Shadow Fey.

ELDRETH'S FATE

Eldreth's fate depends largely on what the PCs uncovered while searching for answers.

If they reunite him with Soren but do not return his mother's necklace, he offers them their share of any wealth they gained from the dream eaters. He stays with Soren in The Horn Gate Inn—only able to become corporeal for brief periods of time—until he becomes restless and goes searching for his memories. If Andarian and Duella are still in The Pluming Lantern when he does so, he ends up following the train of memories there and falls back under their sway once more. If Andarian and Duella are dead, he haunts their former rooms, unsure why he finds himself drawn there.

If the PCs reunite him with Soren and return his mother's necklace, he regains his corporeal form and is able to begin rebuilding his family's fortune. He offers the PCs their share of any wealth they recovered from the dream eaters. He spreads tales of the helpful heroes, increasing their reputation.

The Time-Twister's Daughter

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 7TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

After the magical wards protecting the city of Oshragora from time's tyranny failed, the city was ravaged by chaotic temporal storms. As it was ripped from the mortal plane and thrown into the Shadow Realm, one of the architects of the original magical protections used his last moments to transfer his arcane knowledge to his youngest daughter before sealing her in a vault for her own protection. He had foreseen that these protections would eventually collapse and so designed the vault in such a manner that it not only protected his daughter from the storms that were tearing the city apart, but it also continued to protect her from the effects of time's passage.

Oshragora is not as difficult to locate and travel to as it once was, and a few doughty souls have returned with tales of a strong room in a region of the city where time expands and contracts so rapidly that it is impossible to gain access. Having heard these tales, some figures of power in the Shadow Realm are greedy to discover what treasures the vault holds.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are several ways to draw the PCs into this adventure. Select or adapt one of the following hooks or devise one based on the needs of your campaign:

- ***The Court's Bidding.*** Mirrkos (N shadow fey **spy**), an agent working on behalf of a powerful figure in the Courts of the Shadow Fey, offers the PCs one rare magical item each to breach a vault in Oshragora and return its contents to him in Corremel. Mirrkos explains what he knows of Oshragora, notably that time moves in a strange and random manner and dangerous shadows and umbral vampires populate the city. He also shares that the Kairious family of Oshragora possessed an item that protected them from the vagaries of time. He cautions that the information is old and may lead nowhere, but it may be a place to start.
- ***Friends of the Glade.*** Sivaer Firehide (NG **bearfolk druid**) hires the PCs to investigate reports of an unopened vault in Oshragora. The druids of the Moonlit Glade are concerned at the frequency with which splinters of Oshragora appear in their domain and hope a solution to their problem lies in the vault that appears to have been sealed before the city fell. Sivaer Firehide suggests the PCs gather more information on Oshragora before they travel to it, with the hope that speaking with a recent visitor beforehand will provide valuable intelligence to the PCs.

- ***Pure Villainy.*** Crime boss Henrik Stoll (LE **dream eater** [see appendix]) hires or tasks the PCs with procuring the contents of an unopened vault in Oshragora and returning to him with them. Henrik informs the PCs that **umbral vampires** (see appendix)—which hold and control the city—can steal their strength. He also tells them the *shroud of Kairious* will safeguard them against some of the strange temporal effects of the city. If asked how he knows such things, he simply smiles and doesn't answer.

Traveling to The City Fallen into Shadow

The temporal anomalies that plague the city of Oshragora serve to confuse its location in both space and time. Its general location is known to some denizens of the Shadow Realm, but the specific site seems to shift within that location.

It takes the PCs 3d8 days to travel to Oshragora, and again to return from it, regardless of their point of origin. Each time they set camp you should describe the area. When they wake after their rest, you should describe a different area, even if only slightly. This helps confound the actual distance to the city and reinforces the feeling of the Shadow Realm as a strange, liminal place.

While the PCs are traveling to Oshragora, roll 1d10 every three days of travel and present the corresponding Shadow Realms Encounter. If you roll the same result more than once, roll again until you get a new result or choose a different encounter.

Encounters on the Way to Oshragora

1. FAILED ADVENTURERS

As the PCs approach a tributary of the River Styx, they encounter two figures kneeling beside two shrouded corpses while stitching a third corpse into its own shroud. If approached, the pair, Fiela (NG shadow fey **spy**) and Jann (LN elfmarked **priest** of Valeresh, or any god of war or justice) are wary but polite. The pair encountered a splinter of Oshragora while traveling and were swarmed by four umbral vampires and numerous shadows. Their three companions were slain before they could even react, causing the pair to flee and hide. When the splinter faded after an hour, their companions were beyond Jann's ability to save them. The pair are grateful for any assistance or prayers offered as they consign their friends' bodies to the Styx. Jann offers limited spellcasting in return for any help; they have one 3rd-level and three 1st-level spell slots remaining.

Creatures. If you'd like to introduce an element of combat, have three **shadows** rise—one from each of the corpses—as the two groups converse. The shadows fight until destroyed.

TEMPORAL DISTORTIONS

d6	Temporal Effect
1	Perception slows, causing everything that moves to become blurry and indistinct. All creatures in the splinter are affected by the spell *blur*.
2	Everyone in the splinter hops between two different timelines. Each living creature is affected by the *blink* spell. Affected creatures are safe from attacks when they jump to the other timeline.
3	Time is inconstant in the splinter. Each creature that rolls an even result on its initiative roll gains the effects of the *haste* spell. Each creature that rolls an odd result on its initiative roll gains the effects of the *slow* spell.
4	Each creature in the splinter gains a slightly out-of-sync double. Each time a creature targets you with an attack, it must roll a d20. On a result of 1–10, the attack hits your double. On a result of 11–20, the attack hits you. Your double's AC and hp are equal to yours at the beginning of combat. Your double can't move or take actions independently of you.
5	Time jumps backwards in short bursts. At the end of each of its turns, each creature regains 10 hit points, up to its maximum hit points. On the first round after it dies, each creature that is dead must roll a death saving throw, on a success it regains 10 hit points and resumes living as though it had never been dead.
6	No temporal effect.



2. THE HUNTERS OR THE HUNTED

As the PCs travel through a dark pine forest, they hear a horn sound in the distance, followed by the echoing replies of other horns all around them. The Wild Hunt has caught their scent. Shortly after the horns sound, the PCs hear hoofbeats following baying hounds nearby. Hiding from the Hunt requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity (Stealth) check; a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check allows the PCs to use the environment to mask their presence.

Creatures. If the PCs can't avoid the Hunt, a group of six hunters (five CN shadow fey **scouts** led by a CN shadow fey **berserker**) and two **hounds of the night** (see appendix) circle them and demand the PCs hunt with them. If the PCs refuse, the hunters give them 6 rounds to run before giving chase. Each hunter and hound breaks off its attack and flees once it is reduced to 10 or fewer hp. If the PCs agree to hunt, they spend the remainder of the day catching pheasant, deer, and elk, then revel with their hunting companions. When they wake the following day, all trace of the hunters' camp is gone as though it had never existed.

3. DARK SHADOWS RISE (SPLINTER)

The landscape flickers and shifts into a pocked cobblestone street with crumbling buildings on each side. The shadows lengthen and twist unnaturally in the wan light until four of them begin to stretch and move toward the PCs. The splinter of Oshragora fades after 1d20 minutes.

Splinters of Oshragora

Portions of the city occasionally erupt into existence elsewhere in the Shadow Realm. When this occurs in an encounter, it is noted "(Splinter)" in the heading preceding the relevant encounter. Unless otherwise noted, the splinters remain for 1d20 minutes before they fade back to their proper location. Creatures that arrive in the splinter fade away with it as long as they haven't left the area the splinter occupies.

Each time a splinter is encountered, there is a chance time and space within it might be altered or distorted. Roll on the Temporal Distortions table to determine what temporal effect the splinter has. Each effect lasts as long as the affected creature remains in the splinter or until the splinter fades.

Creatures. As the four **shadows** encircle the PCs, an **umbral vampire** drifts through one of the buildings and joins the attack. The creatures fight until destroyed.

4. TOIL AND TROUBLE

A small hut sags nearby, its drooping roof missing many shingles. A group of three old women tend an immense stewpot suspended over a roaring fire. When the women see the PCs, they invite them to join them for dinner and wave their hands to waft the enticing smell of the stew toward them. A PC that succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Investigation) check realizes the stew is made with humanoid flesh. The women ask the PCs to join them three times. Each time they ask, whichever PC responds must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to avoid offending them.

Creatures. If the PCs offend the women—who are a coven of three **green hags**—or if the respondent attempts a Charisma (Intimidation) check on either of the first two requests, the hags attack in a rage. If, however, the respondent succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check after the third request, the hags haul their cauldron into the hut and sulk.

Eating the Stew. If a PC consumes any of the hags' stew, it must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. The target suffers the effects of the *geas* spell to the coven on a failed save; on a successful save, the target suffers the effects of *bestow curse* for 24 hours. The coven uses PCs under a *geas* as guards and gofers, occasionally sending them across the Shadow Realm to procure one object or another. If all three hags are killed, the duration of both effects immediately expire.

5. STONE OF REMEMBERING

An **umbral vampire** hovers 10 feet above the ground, chiseling unrecognizable symbols into a flat, smooth slate wall standing 30 feet tall, 40 feet long, and 3 feet thick. The imposing expanse is free-standing and obviously unnatural. It seems out of place with no other similar features in sight. He is wearing a garish collection of ancient-looking clothing in shades of yellow, blue, and purple and looks as though he has been at his work for some time. If the PCs don't interrupt him, the creature seemingly doesn't notice them and allows them to pass by unmolested.

Any PC who attempts to speak to him in a peaceful and respectful manner must succeed DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a failure, or if the PCs are aggressive or impolite, the vampire is offended and attacks. On a success, the vampire explains he is inscribing the names of the families responsible for Oshragora's doom on the rock so that all may know of their hubris. He explains the Kairious family, to which he belonged when he was human so long ago, crafted a censer, the smoke from which cloaked those within it from the temporal turmoil around them. He admits he left everything behind in the city when he crept away but can tell them where his family home is located in the city and give them his family signet, which may be useful when they reach area 2 in the Kairious Complex.

Creatures. If attacked or offended, the **umbral vampire** attacks the PCs for 3 rounds before drifting into the sky and out of reach as fast as it can.

6. WE TROLLS. PAY TOLLS.

Hek and Pek, **troll** brothers, claimed this rickety-looking 60-foot-long bridge spanning the River Lethe years ago. They demand that each non-shadow fey creature that wishes to cross gives them "something fancy." Once this has been provided, they step aside and allow the payer to cross the bridge with a reminder that they'll still be here when the PCs come back around this way.

The toll can be any object worth 50 gp or more, though the trolls want *items*, not coins or gems. A character that succeeds on a DC 12 Charisma (Deception) check successfully spins a tale about the item they are proffering and convinces the brothers of its value; grant advantage on the roll for clever roleplaying. A PC can bully the trolls into letting them pass by succeeding on a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check, but the brothers remember them if they pass through again in the future and demand an item with a value of 150 gp to allow them to pass.

Creatures. If the PCs fail on any of their ability checks interacting with the trolls, if Charisma (Intimidation) is attempted more than once, or if the PCs refuse to pay the toll, the **trolls** (with the changes noted below) attack.

Creature Change. Hek and Pek deal an extra 7 (2d6) necrotic damage with their claws and bite, and if either of them takes radiant damage, they can't regenerate at the beginning of the next turn.

7. THE OTHER GUYS

Creatures. A group of adventurers hired by someone else interested in the Impossible Vault—possibly one of the patrons mentioned in any of the unused adventure hooks—ambushes the party. The group consists of:

- Gianna, a NE human **assassin**
- Nikola, a N human **knight**
- Henrik, a LE dwarf **priest**
- Sage, a CN tiefling **scout**

8. THE WEEPING GIANT (SPLINTER)

The landscape disappears and is replaced by a crumbling flagstone street with collapsing buildings flanking it on either side. A lone **ogre** wearing chain mail and wielding an immense maul is fighting a **shadow beast** (see appendix) with 75 hp remaining. He is unaware of the **umbral vampire** floating toward him from behind.

Once the battle is over, the ogre takes off his helmet and begins to sob. His name is Rind, and he doesn't know where his friends have gone. His companions were looking for the *shroud of Kairious*, which he calls the "shroud of Curious," for a "fancy

No Windows and No Doors

An inn called The Ring exists in Oshragora with no windows and no doors—or ordinary entrances of any kind. The inn can only be entered through one of the portals connected to the doors inside of it that the building itself creates; many of these portals exist throughout the Shadow Realm, but some folk have found their way to this inn by stumbling through circular doorways on other planes. A three-dimensional shadow of this building moves about the Shadow Realm, appearing at random locations, only to disappear sometime thereafter. A stay at The Ring can be purchased by many means, none of which are coin; performances, the sharpest blade a person owns, or even a memory have been known to serve as currency. Excellent live entertainment (and merely adequate rooms and food) can be found there, as can four gateways that can take one just about anywhere . . . provided you have the permission of the proprietor, the enigmatic entity known as The Ringmaster.

lady" in Corremel. Rind (NG **ogre** with the changes noted below) has a childlike disposition and is a steadfast, if teary-eyed, companion. He has a crude map leading to the Kairious Complex (see the "The Kairious Complex" section). The rest of his party fared poorly in his absence and were slain and subsequently dragged off by umbral vampires for some unknown purpose.

Creatures. Rind won't attack the PCs unless he is attacked by them, and if the PCs jump in to assist him, he gladly fights alongside them. The **shadow beast** fights to the death; the **umbral vampire** attempts to use *plane shift* to escape if he is reduced to 25 hp or fewer.

Creature Change. Rind has AC 16 and has been reduced to 30 hp by the time the PCs arrive on the scene; his maul uses the same statistics as the ogre's greatclub attack.



9. UNFRIENDLY DENIZENS (SPLINTER)

Creatures. As the PCs cross through the center of a plaza that looks as though it was just built, 3d6 **shadows** surge toward them from the shade cast into the plaza by the surrounding structures.

10. ENTER THE RING

When the PCs walk through a door or under an archway, regardless of what is on the other side in that door's physical space, it leads them into The Ring (see "No Windows and No Doors" sidebar). The PCs can spend as much time in the tavern as they wish, but the next door they pass through inside the establishment leads them into the oven in area 3 of "The Kairious Complex."

OSHRAGORA SIGHTS

d8	Sights Seen
1	One of the PCs appears to age and become elderly, then the years quickly fall away in reverse until they are a small child, only to spring back to their true age seconds later.
2	As the PCs walk along a street, they notice the shadows of people who aren't there going about their business.
3	The street the PCs are about to turn onto flickers and disappears, leaving a barren, dark expanse across which they can see the street beyond.
4	For 1d4 minutes, every article of clothing one of the PCs touches that didn't enter the city with them crumbles to dust.
5	A structure builds itself, as if being constructed by invisible hands.
6	The PCs turn down a street, only to find themselves at the head of the street they just turned off.
7	The facades of the nearby buildings change rapidly, shuffling through different looks, signs, and purposes—until eventually settling on a single appearance.
8	For 1 minute, every step the PCs take moves them 10 feet in the direction they are traveling.

The Temporal Chaos of Oshragora

Oshragora is a nightmare of uncontained temporal chaos. Some structures fracture and crumble into rubble before rewinding themselves whole again. Others age from new construction to ancient ruins over the span of a few moments. Entire sections of the city periodically fade away to appear elsewhere in the Shadow Realm, leaving disturbing voids in the cityscape, only to return a short time later.

While within the boundaries of Oshragora, roll on the "Temporal Distortions" table (see "Splinters of Oshragora" sidebar) every time the PCs have an encounter.

Describing the City. Oshragora evokes a sense of combined melancholy and menace. The city and its umbral vampire inhabitants suffer eternally from the hubris of the archmages who sought to defy time itself. Everywhere the PCs look, they should see something wondrous twisted or still affected by the ravages of time unhinged. The "Oshragora Sights" table has some of the things the PCs might witness as they travel throughout the city. Adapt or embellish as needed.

The Kairious Complex

Before Oshragora fell into the Shadow Realm, the Kairious family was known for its craftsmanship of beautiful magical curios. The Kairious home was reduced to a swirling tumult of debris because of the chronal tempests that plagued the city during its fall. Occasionally the wreckage reforms itself into the structure of a fractured but once-great manor—only to explode once again a moment later.

The intact workshop and storage space located beneath the manor were built to stymie potential rivals and thieves by using multiple pathways that lead to the same locations. The redundant nature of some of its passages allowed the family time to respond to threats. The temporal distortions that plague the city are in effect in the Kairious Complex.

Lighting. The underground complex is perpetually dimly lit by dozens of permanent *dancing lights*.

Construction. The complex's passageways are 5 feet wide with 10-foot ceilings. The chambers have a ceiling height of 15 feet. The walls and ceiling of the complex are crafted of colored bricks. The ceiling is crafted of yellow bricks, while the walls are comprised of sky-blue bricks. The floor is laid in glassy, violet ceramic tiles.

1. CYCLONIC MANOR

The ravaged foundation of a multi-story house is evident at this site, but the home that once stood here swirls in a vortex of masonry, wood, glass, and furniture. Despite the magnitude of the whirling chunks, a pile of dwarf-sized stones lies unmoving on the ground near the central portion of the site.

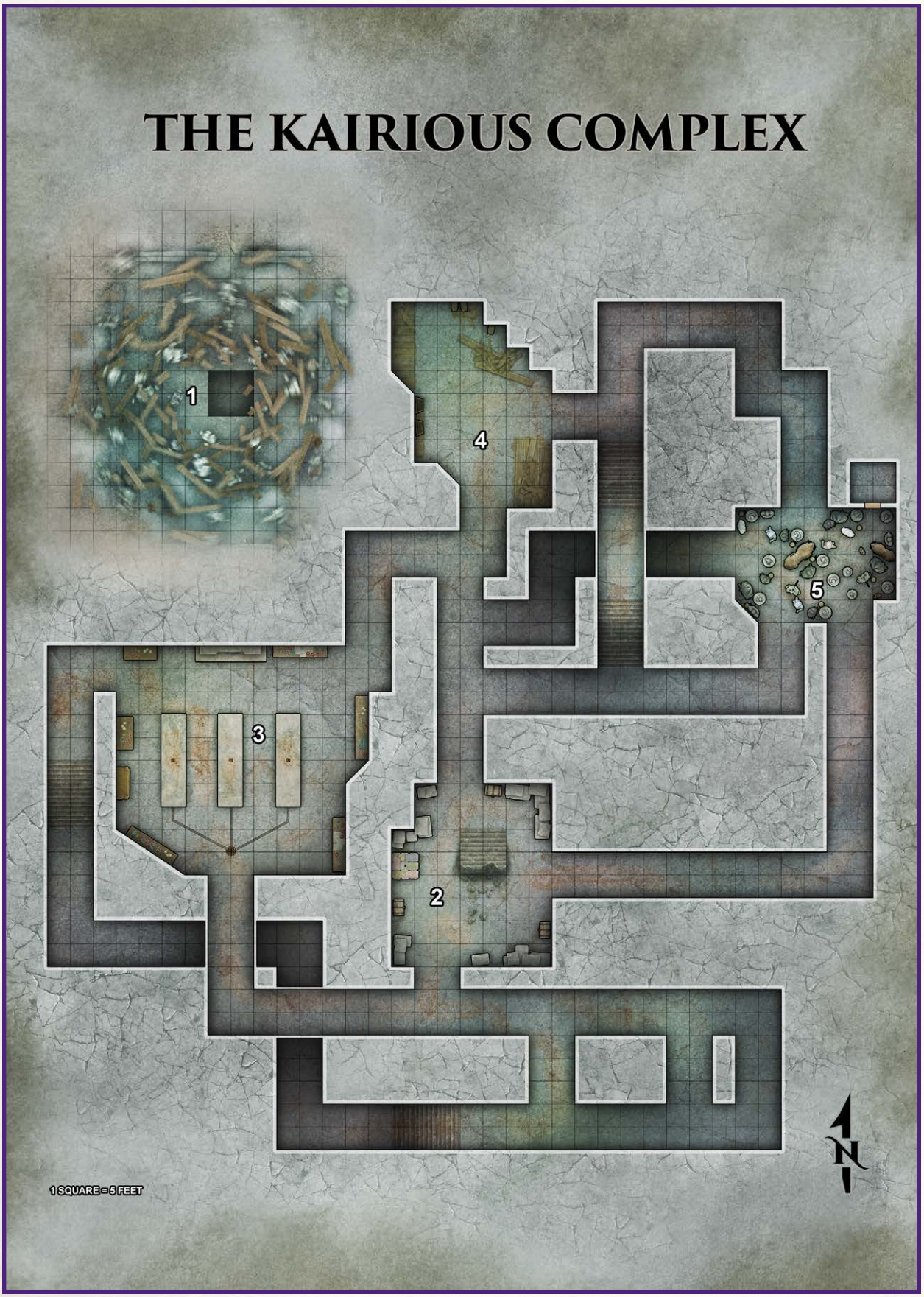
Dungeon Entrance. From outside the swirl of rubble, the PCs can see the edges of a large chute or chimney leading to a location beneath. If a PC succeeds on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, enough rubble can be moved to allow the PCs access to the complex beneath. A second PC can use the Help action with this check. A PC that is proficient in Intelligence (Investigation) has advantage on their Strength (Athletics) check if another PC can't Help them. On a failure, the PC can make a new check as an action on their next turn.

Once enough rubble has been cleared from the chute to use it, each PC can attempt a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to climb down its 50-foot length. If the PCs set a rope, they can climb down without a check.

Flying Rubble. A tornado of wind and rubble rages ceaselessly at this site. Whenever a creature starts its turn in the area bounded by the manor's crumbling foundation, it must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the flying debris.

2. SECURED STOREHOUSE

The chute leads to a large storage area. A crumbled set of stairs lying on the floor beneath the chute indicates the room once had easier access from the house that was destroyed by the constant tumult above. Blocks of stone, of sizes ranging from 1-foot cubes to 10-foot-by-8-foot slabs, are piled around the chamber, along with neatly piled stacks of multicolored bricks. Three steel chests embossed with golden stars can be found in the chamber, one against the north wall, a second against the east wall in the southern section of the room, and a third in the center of the west wall. A lifelike statue of a chimera stares sightlessly toward the stairs from the south wall. There are several rusty brown stains on the floor of the chamber.


THE KAIRIOUS COMPLEX
1
2
3
4
5
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
N

Stone Monstrosity. If a creature sets a hand on one of the chests or moves within 5 feet of one of the room's exits, the chimera statue animates and attacks (use statistics for **stone golem**). If a creature bearing the Kairious family signet presents it to the golem, it returns to its position and becomes inert.

Treasure. The chests against the north and west walls are open and empty. The chest against the east wall is sealed. If the Kairious family signet is pressed into an identically shaped depression on the chest's lid, or if a PC succeeds on a DC 17 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools, the chest opens. Inside are 5 pearls (worth 100 gp each), 10 jars of lead-based ink (worth 10 gp each), a leather pouch full of gold dust (100 gp worth), 2 rubies (worth 50 gp each), a pair of platinum rings (worth 50 gp each), 4 flasks of holy water, and a small box containing diamond dust (500 gp worth).

3. CHAMBER OF ALCHEMICAL AGONY

There are three large, stonework tables located throughout this room, all bare as if waiting for someone to begin using them again. Each table has a centrally located drain that leads to channels cut into the floor that all run into a larger drain. The walls of the chamber are lined with shelves holding jars and containers of all shapes and sizes. Many of the jars contain small creatures suspended in preserving fluid. A large, casket-shaped wardrobe stands against the west wall of the room, and the north wall is dominated by a massive 15-foot-by-10-foot stone oven with iron double doors standing ajar.

Creatures. The viscous liquids and unguents that collected beneath the room's drain have gained a dull form of sentience as a **black pudding** and two **ochre jellies.** The oozes become aware of anything stepping foot above them and immediately force their way back up the drain and into the room, one emerging each round for 3 rounds.

Wardrobe of the Suspended Mage

The wardrobe standing against the west wall of the room has the words "Keep Sealed" carved into it. If opened, the PCs see that it holds a human male suspended in a faceted block of resin. The figure's face is contorted in pain and rage, and it is garbed in red, green, and violet clothing that is centuries out of fashion. An open book is clutched in one of the man's hands and the other is held protectively in front of his chest. The figure is Yildbray Kairious (**archmage**), who is still alive and trapped in a magical resin his sisters duped him into creating ages before Oshragora fell into the Shadow Realm.

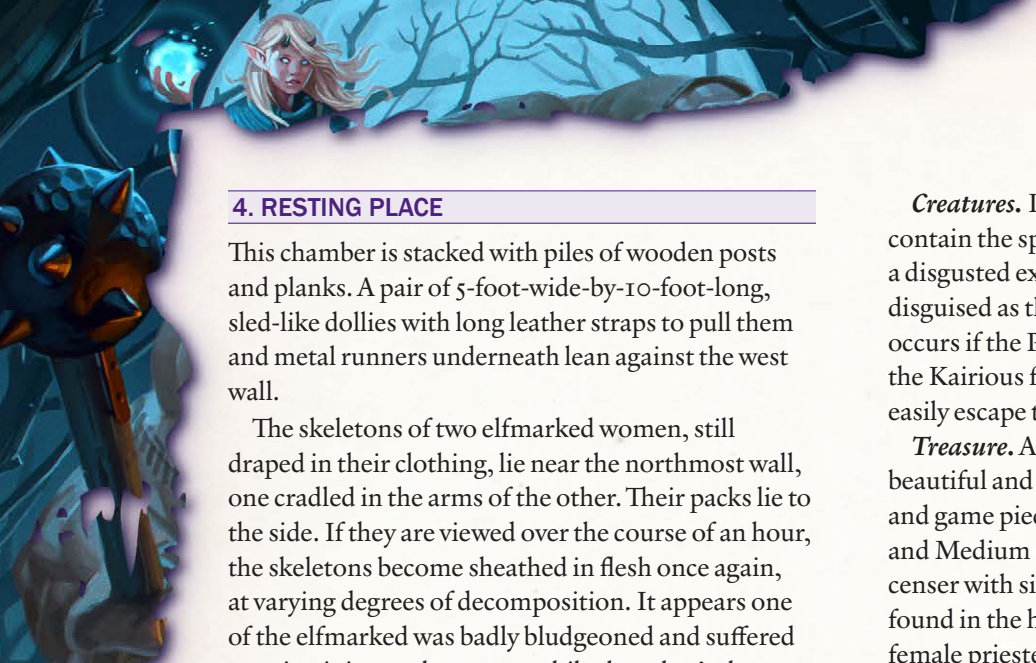
Resin Demolition. The resin has AC 17 and 54 hp, with a damage threshold of 10. It regains 10 hp at the beginning of each turn unless it took acid damage on the previous turn. (Acid damage also bypasses the resin's damage threshold.) Enough of the resin can be dissolved to free Yildbray by using 3 uses of the universal solvent noted under "Treasure" below.

Freeing Yildbray. If freed, Yildbray is forceful and paranoid. He demands to know who the PCs are, what they are doing in his home, and where his sisters Arnelia and Ormelle are. If calmed with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check, he can't answer any questions about the current state of Oshragora but can be convinced to help the PCs while they remain in the complex. If he detects any deception, Yildbray attacks immediately. Until he rests, Yildbray only has his 1st- through 3rd-level and his 7th-level spell slots. If he casts *teleport*, the temporal storm above the complex draws his body into it and tears him apart; if that happens, the PCs discover the bloody chunks of his body swirling among the other debris when they depart the complex.

Treasure. There is enough alchemical material in this chamber to comprise five sets of alchemist's supplies. If they spend 1d4 hours examining the contents of the bottles and jars, they find a *potion of gaseous form*, 3 *potions of growth*, a *potion of speed*, a jar of *oil of slipperiness* (5 uses remaining), and a jar of *universal solvent* (6 uses remaining). A large, sealed container holds a **homunculus** named Sluja. In the oven is a *brazier of commanding fire elementals* hidden beneath a thick layer of ash and charred bone.

Sluja the Homunculus

Sluja appears to be a tiny humanoid doll constructed of leather, twine, and bone. The homunculus' greatest desire is to be praised for doing good work, and it readily attends to small tasks in service to people who do so. Sluja can be convinced to tell the PCs how members of the Kairious family opened the cupboard in area 5. It also knows the names of all the members of the family alive at the fall of Oshragora: Pagritte, Buhlford, Jitsko, Kelevray, and Visterella.



4. RESTING PLACE

This chamber is stacked with piles of wooden posts and planks. A pair of 5-foot-wide-by-10-foot-long, sled-like dollies with long leather straps to pull them and metal runners underneath lean against the west wall.

The skeletons of two elfmarked women, still draped in their clothing, lie near the northmost wall, one cradled in the arms of the other. Their packs lie to the side. If they are viewed over the course of an hour, the skeletons become sheathed in flesh once again, at varying degrees of decomposition. It appears one of the elfmarked was badly bludgeoned and suffered a goring injury to her torso, while the other's throat was cut while she grieved.

5. MENAGERIE

This chamber is filled with statues of animals, monsters, and people made of a wide variety of materials. The statues range from life-sized representations, including a pair of steel bulls, to miniature game pieces. The floor is so cluttered it is difficult terrain. A large steel door is set into the north wall of the room. Set into the middle of the door is a piece of stone carved into the shape of the face of a balor; the demon head has its mouth opened wide.

Hungry Demon

The northern door is locked and cannot be opened with a physical key or thieves' tools. The carved balor's head is exquisitely detailed, almost appearing to be the petrified remains of the real thing rather than a worked piece of stone.

Puzzle Lock. The hollow inside the demon's mouth is pitch black. If a light is shone inside it, the following words can be seen engraved in a tiny, neat script: *I relish cobalt, dote on flax, and periwinkle my diet lacks.*

If a blue, yellow, and purple object of any material (multicolored items can be used if one or more of the listed colors is present on it) are placed in the balor's mouth, or if a spell that produces an array of colors, such as *color spray* or *prismatic spray* is cast into it, the mouth closes and chews for a moment. When it opens again, the material placed inside is gone. The head then offers thanks before asking, "*Who are you?*"

If one of the PCs offers the name of a member of the Kairious family, the balor's face resets and the door opens, revealing a large space holding only a single large book, a *manual of stone golems.*

Creatures. If the PCs place items that don't contain the specified colors, the demon's face makes a disgusted expression and wakes the **gorgons** disguised as the steel bull statues. The same thing occurs if the PCs offer a name other than a member of the Kairious family when asked. The gorgons cannot easily escape the room and fight to the death.

Treasure. All the statuary in the chamber is beautiful and valuable. There are 5d20 Tiny statuettes and game pieces (worth 10 gp each), and 3d10 Small and Medium statues (worth 100 gp each). A brass censer with silhouettes of hourglasses on it can be found in the hands of a Medium brass statue of a female priestess, holding it aloft; the censer is the *shroud of Kairious* (see appendix). The room also holds two complete dragonchess sets (worth 100 gp each), one of which has a board of checkered agate and jet tiles and pieces of gold and sapphire; the other board is checkered in mother-of-pearl and onyx with amethyst and cobalt pieces. A bronze griffon *figurine of wondrous power* is mixed among the figures.

The Impossible Vault

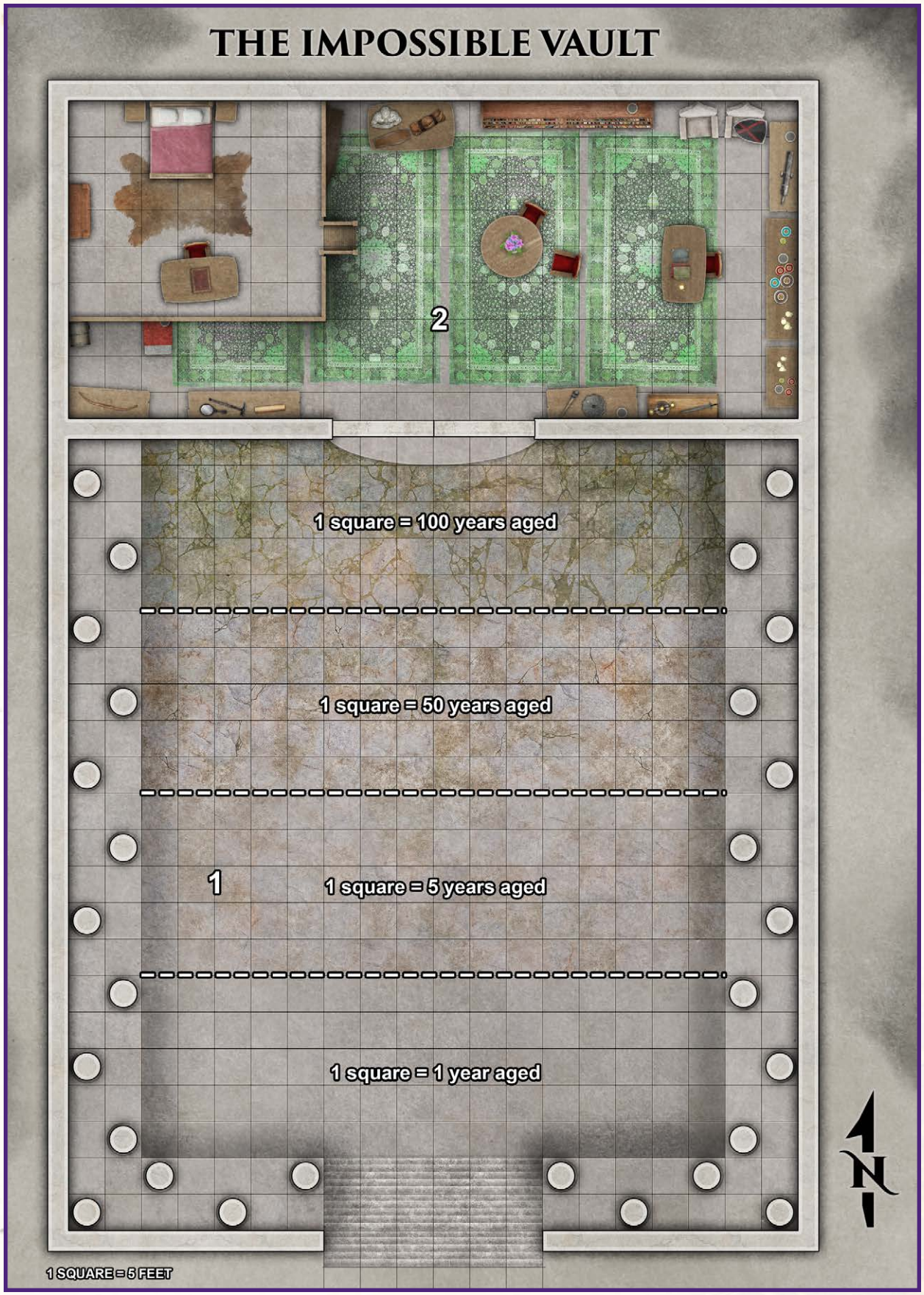
In stark contrast to the city itself, this modest-sized white stone building, and the colonnaded courtyard leading to it, bears no scars of the temporal chaos evident everywhere else. The vault itself is constructed of white onyx inset with massive double doors, each of which has a stone knocker set at eye-level for a 6-foot-tall human.

1. COURTYARD OF LOST YEARS

Images of peregrine falcons carrying the sun in their talons—the symbol of the Chezzino family—run in bas relief along the edge of the colonnade's roof. The scent of hyacinth wafts in the air from perpetually blooming flowerbeds inside the courtyard's columns.

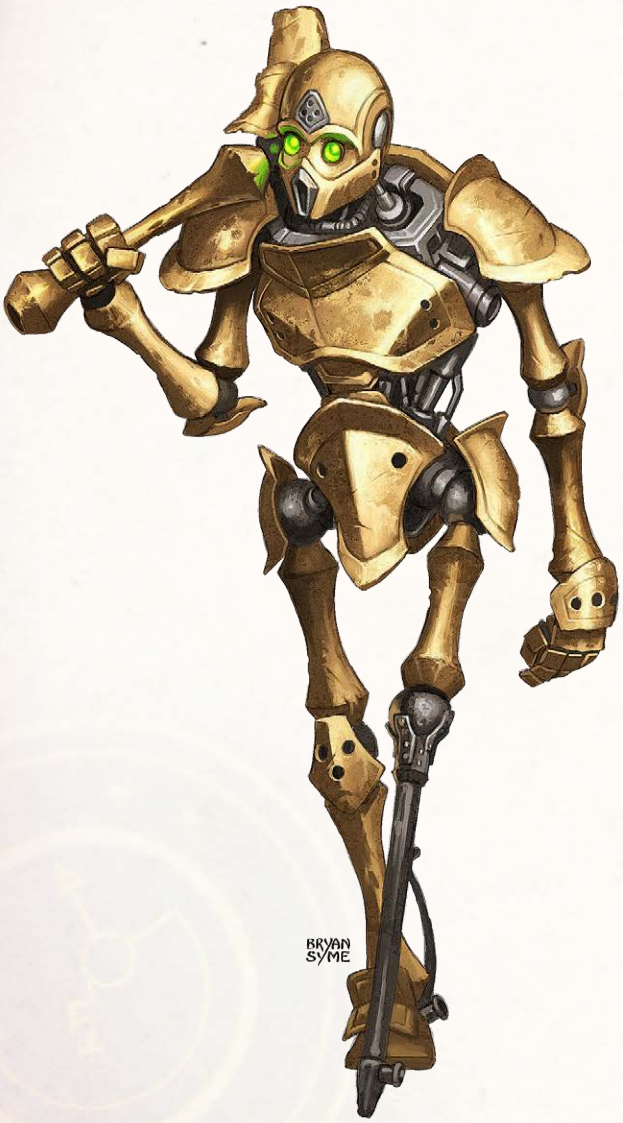
Trap Clue. The front edge of the courtyard is sculpted with more falcons (1) flying above a baby on its belly; (2) a crawling toddler; (3) a young woman dancing; (4) and a stooped crone supporting herself with a walking stick.

Fatalistic Figure. A rusty gearforged (see "Gearforged" sidebar) leans against one of the columns lining the southern end of the courtyard. A crude metal stump is affixed to the knee of its left leg, and it carries the cracked and warped remainder of that leg in one of its hands. It is so motionless at first, it appears to be a statue. When it moves, its joints


THE IMPOSSIBLE VAULT
2
1 square = 100 years aged
1 square = 50 years aged
1
1 square = 5 years aged
1 square = 1 year aged
N
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

screech loudly, as if they haven't been oiled for ages. A successful DC 15 Intelligence check using tinker's tools determines that Mal's chassis looks like it's aged more than a thousand years.

Mal's Misfortune. Mal (NG gearforged **veteran**) and their companions attempted to cross the courtyard to the building's door, but their companions died of old age before they could span the hundred-foot distance, their bodies crumbling to dust and carried away on the breeze. By the time Mal reached the door, their body aged six hundred and eighty years. Then, to make matters worse, they couldn't get inside, and so they had to cross back over the courtyard *again*, aging *another* six hundred eighty years. Mal is demoralized and has five levels of exhaustion. They don't know what their next steps should be, but if they are helped in their self-maintenance, they assist the PCs. They don't understand the magic of this place, but they can tell the PCs that it seemed like whatever was happening got much worse the closer they came to the vault door. (For more information on gearforged, see the *Midgard Worldbook* or *Tome of Heroes*).



Time Trap

The courtyard is laid in orderly five-foot squares of white onyx; they start out pristine, as if freshly laid, then progressively show more and more signs of age the closer one gets to the vault door. Directly in front of the double doors, there is a slightly raised long dais made of smooth, polished stone that spans 30 feet long by 5 feet wide.

Each time a creature steps on one of the tiles, they age a certain amount depending on where in the courtyard they are. Refer to the "Time Trap Aging" table to determine how much aging occurs with each step, how one can avoid the aging effect, and what the tiles in each section look like.

Attempted Bypass. A creature that enters the courtyard from anywhere other than the stairs ages 100 years for its first step, then the trap functions as described above.

Shroud Immunity. A creature standing within the vapor emitted by the *shroud of Kairious* is immune to the effects of the trap.

Trap Clue Revisited. As hinted by the bas relief carvings in the columns of the colonnade, a creature can escape the aging effects by traversing the courtyard in the following fashion by (1) slithering, then (2) crawling, then (3) dancing, then (4) stooping and walking with a cane.

Pay Tribute. When one of the stone knockers is struck against the vault door, a skeletal figure wearing a blue cloak and carrying an hourglass under one arm appears out of nowhere. It holds out its other hand and rasps, "Give a rare gift."

If a rare or rarer magical treasure is placed in the skeleton's open hand, it nods and gestures, opening one of the double doors before disappearing with its tribute. If an object of lesser value is placed in its hand, the skeleton simply vanishes into thin air and the object falls to the stone below. The figure reappears when the knocker is used again.

TIME TRAP AGING

Courtyard Location	Years Aged	Action Required to Avoid Aging Effect	Tile Appearance
1st 25 Feet (1–25)	1	Creature must slither on belly across the tiles.	Tiles are pristine and look as though they were recently laid.
2nd 25 Feet (26–50)	5	Creature must crawl on its hands and knees across the tiles.	Tiles are scuffed, showing signs of wear and a slight patina of age.
3rd 25 Feet (51–75)	50	Creature must stand erect and dance across the tiles.	Tiles are heavily worn and show numerous hairline fractures.
4th 25 Feet (76–100)	100	Creature must stoop and walk no more than half its speed, using a cane or similar object for support.	Tiles are chipped and feature wide cracks and broken edges.

2. THE VAULT

The interior of the vault is spacious and vast. The temperature is comfortable. A pair of sturdy leather boots stands by the door. Four thick wool rugs depicting geometric patterns cushion the stone floor. Several tables hold curios from an ancient era as well as whatever tribute the PCs offered to gain entrance. A vase of vibrant pink and blue lilies and hyacinths rests on a table, permeating the space with their sweet bouquet. A comfortable chair rests next to a small table piled high with three thick books.

A wide-runged ladder leads to a loft in the northwest corner of the area. The loft holds a four-poster bed, a large wardrobe full of long-out-of-style men's and women's clothing, and a table on which sits a book of children's fairy tales.

Immortal Effect. Creatures inside the vault are under the following effects:

- They do not age.
- Their health remains in exactly the same state as when they entered the vault, unless magic alters that state, such as with healing or restoration magic.
- The effects of all diseases and conditions are suspended while in the vault and resume when they leave.
- They cannot tell how much time is passing.
- All other magical effects are suspended in the vault as if the area inside is in an antimagic field.

The Living Repository. The Impossible Vault was built to comfortably house Ulla Chezzino (CG human **mage**) and protect her from the chronal ravages wrought by her people. Ulla is a nineteen-year-old girl with olive skin, blue eyes, and braided platinum hair. She is wearing a blue dress patterned in white.

Ulla's personality is sarcastic, and she loves clever wordplay. She uses three words when she could say the same in thirteen. She is well educated, though all her knowledge of the world is millennia out of date. She lacks patience for people who lack the desire to learn or who think her incapable of something due to her age or gender. When people offend her, she speaks to them in a mocking fashion. If offered a chance to leave, she accepts, so long as her liberators promise to take her to the nearest sizable settlement.

Ulla has no conception of how long she has been in the vault; to her, it feels as if it might have been a few weeks at most. Before she was locked inside, her father magically transferred all his magical knowledge to her, so she can recall astounding facts about the nature and manipulation of magic, some of which have been lost in the intervening ages. But she—like any other creature—can't cast spells while in the vault.

Impossible Ulla. Ulla is a CG **mage** who has access to all 1st- to 5th-level wizard spells, as well as proficiency in Nature and Religion.

- She is a source of temporal disruption. No matter where an encounter involving her takes place, roll on the "Temporal Distortions" table; the effect rolled has a 50-foot-radius centered on her.

Trap Option

The aging effect of the time trap is intended to be permanent. If you wish to soften the trap, consider allowing every step a creature takes to reverse its course out of the courtyard to erase the aging effect it initially suffered.

- **Umbral vampires** and **shadows** ignore her.
- Her challenge is 7 (2,900 XP).

The Guardian. If Ulla is attacked—or if a creature attempts to force her to take any action against her will—while she is inside the vault or in the courtyard, Shevarrah, a **djinni,** appears in the nearest empty space to protect her. The djinni promised Ulla's father she would protect his daughter, so she fights to the death.



LEAVING WITH ULLA

Ulla's presence outside The Impossible Vault has a deleterious effect on her surroundings. She disrupts time in her immediate vicinity. You may wish to use some of the descriptions from the "Oshragora Sights" table to describe the effects. In addition, she attracts Splinters (see the "Splinters of Oshragora" sidebar), which spring into being around her with alarming regularity.

Each day she is free, run the Dark Shadows Rise (Splinter) encounter at a time of your choosing. Every time you run it after the first, add 1 **umbral vampire** and 1 **shadow.** The first three days, the Splinter fades after 1d20 minutes. It fades after 1 hour for the next three days, and after 1d6 hours the three days after that. Once she has been free of the vault for ten days, the Splinters are permanent and no longer fade away.

It should quickly become evident that Ulla's continued freedom poses a grave danger to . . . pretty much everything. Unless the PCs are aware of a place where her condition won't put people in jeopardy, they need to decide whether they will return her to her prison, disregard the danger, or make another choice regarding her fate. Ulla does not willingly return to her prison unless convinced through strong roleplay or a successful DC 25 Charisma (Perception) check. She may be more likely to be swayed by Deception or Intimidation, at your discretion.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the PCs have made a decision regarding Ulla's fate, they probably return to their patron, or their patron's agent, and either gain the agreed-upon reward or attempt to justify their decision and possibly deal with the consequences of failing to live up to their end of the bargain.

Depending on what decision is made about Ulla, she may become a recurring character or element in your campaign. The PCs may need to work to keep any promises they made to convince her to return to the vault. If they made a grimmer decision, it may instead come back to haunt them later.

Radiance Lost

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 7TH–8TH LEVEL

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

More than a thousand years ago, an elf lord known as The Sun King and a shadow fey known as The Dusk Queen fell in love. They were happy . . . until The Dusk Queen's ambition tore them apart. To stop her escalating acts of evil, The Sun King used his sun magic to imprison her in a hidden and unknown prison and sequestered himself with his grief in a palace built in the Shadow Realm.

The Sun King and his palace disappeared, and the story faded into obscurity. Until now. A desperate shadow fey mage named Elmyra Lamorieth has uncovered the location of this ancient palace that, for centuries, had been relegated to legend. She intends to find this palace, claim the lord's potent sun magic for herself, and use it to reclaim her standing in the shadow fey courts.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are some suggested hooks to involve your PCs in this adventure:

- A friendly NPC previously encountered in the Shadow Realm is an investor in Elmyra's expedition. The NPC offers to put the PCs in contact with the shadow fey to seize this lucrative opportunity.
- While passing through a settlement, the PCs hear rumors of an odd couple who just passed through town. The shadow elf mage and the hill giant were offering a great deal of money to qualified individuals interested in some kind of treasure hunt. These two left town only a few hours ago, so the PCs can still catch up if they're interested.
- If one of the PCs is a wizard or is interested in arcane research, Elmyra is an acquaintance from a shared scholarly circle—or she hears of this PC's presence in the Shadow Realm and tracks them down. She extends the invitation to join her expedition to this PC and their companions.

A Dangerous Expedition

This adventure begins when the PCs receive a mysterious package containing a job offer.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

When you are ready to begin, read the following:

A loud pop, followed by a gentle thrum, disrupts the murky air as a tiny winged fey wearing a red uniform suddenly appears before you. The little creature yells, "Delivery!" and tosses a black silk bag on the ground before disappearing once again.

The creature who delivered the bag is a **sprite** named Wort who works as a courier for the shadow fey nobility. The sprite uses his *invisibility* feature to conceal himself and flies away as quickly as his wings take him. Still, if the PCs prevent him from leaving, Wort quickly agrees to answer whatever questions they have so that he can stick to his delivery schedule. Wort doesn't know the bag's contents or anything other than the physical description of the person who paid him to deliver it; he can tell the PCs that she was a pale-skinned shadow fey woman with white hair.



Investigation reveals the black silk bag to be a *bag of holding* that contains 150 gp and a letter that reads:

Dear Adventurers,

It was with supreme delight that I took notice of such accomplished heroes traversing this dark realm. It was, indeed, highly fortuitous, as I happen to be in need skilled bodyguards to accompany me on a perilous—and highly lucrative!—historic expedition.

I hope that you will meet me within three days' time at The Rosy Casket tavern so that we may further discuss this venture.

Consider the enclosed gold and the enchanted bag itself merely the beginning of the many rewards I am willing to offer in exchange for your expertise and bravery.

I look forward to meeting you in person.

Sincerely,
Elmyra Lamorieth

If the PCs have a group name they are known by, Elmyra addresses her salutation to that name rather than the generic "Adventurers."

The message is from Elmyra Lamorieth (NE shadow elf **mage;** see "Roleplaying Elmyra" sidebar), a disenfranchised shadow fey noble. She hired Wort to deliver her message after hearing rumors of an adventuring party in the area. Any PCs who have spent time in the Shadow Realm and succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recognize the name on the letter and know the information in the "Roleplaying Elmyra" sidebar; PCs who have spent time in shadow fey society (or are privy to shadow fey gossip) have advantage on this check.

When the PCs receive this message, they should be no more than a day's journey away from the roadside tavern called The Rosy Casket, where Elmyra is waiting.

The PCs can follow the lead by rendezvousing with the shadow fey at the tavern or ignoring the notice. If they ignore the message, Elmyra's henchman, a giant named Grim (CN **hill giant;** see "Roleplaying Grim" sidebar), tracks down the party to deliver a second letter from the noble. This second letter promises more explicit rewards for cooperation. Elmyra has many contacts and resources across the Shadow Realm, so, if the PCs balk at taking the adventure hook, offer whatever treasure you know will motivate the party to accept.

Spellbook. Elmyra has all the spells in her spellbook that a **mage** normally does, but also has the spells *identify* and *dimension door.*

The Rosy Casket Taverns

The Rosy Casket taverns are a peculiarity amidst the gloomy wilderness that suffuses the Shadow Realm. Extensive enchantments protect each location, shielding them from hostile creatures and allowing the structure to shift alongside the fluctuating boundaries of the shadow roads.

Ownership. The Rosy Casket franchise is owned by seven dwarven brothers of the Blackstone clan. The brothers each manage one of the seven identically named taverns.

Offerings. The Rosy Casket taverns are often the only establishment travelers encounter for miles along the shadow roads. Consequently, the taverns have a wide range of offerings in addition to standard tavern fare. Weary travelers can purchase food, drink, standard adventuring equipment listed in the *Basic Rules*, a bed for the night, and the occasional magic item.

A MAGICAL SITE LOST TO TIME

When the players enter The Rosy Casket, read or paraphrase the following:

Warm light and cheerful chatter banish the oppressive gloom of the Shadow Realm once you step inside The Rosy Casket. All manner of creatures sit drinking and laughing at stylish metal tables, enjoying the perfume of living roses growing along the ceiling beams.

A shadow fey woman dressed in pristine traveling gear sits at a back corner table, past a crowd of unlikely couples. She gestures with a gloved hand for you to approach.

"Come, come," she says. "It's such a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm Elmyra Lamorieth, so good to meet you."

Elmyra recognizes the PCs by description and formally introduces herself. She buys a round of drinks and directs them to a private room to chat further about the job offer.

Once out of earshot of the other patrons, Elmyra lays out her proposition.

"As I mentioned in my letter, I require skilled adventurers to accompany me on a dangerous expedition. An ancient map has come into my possession that leads to a magical site long thought to be forever lost to time. I believe great treasure and knowledge lies within this hidden palace.

"The map leads into the heart of the shadow marshes, a dangerous place rife with horrible creatures and ghosts. So it won't be easy. But nothing worth having ever comes easy, yes? I'm sure—no, I know—you all are more than up to the challenge. "



If the PCs have additional questions for Elmyra, she shares the following details:

- More than a thousand years ago, an elf lord known as The Sun King and a shadow fey known as The Dusk Queen fell in love. They were happy together until some unknown schism between them eventually tore them apart—and in the end The Sun King used his sun magic to banish The Dusk Queen to a hidden and unknown prison.
- The palace, called The House of Dawn, was built as a personal retreat for The Sun King. But he—along with his palace—disappeared without a trace from the Shadow Realm more than a thousand years ago. He originally arrived in the Shadow Realm as a traveler from another plane, supposedly a place of endless sun.
- The shadow marsh in question is called the Gloaming Fens. Like all the wild areas of the

Roleplaying Elmyra

Elmyra Lamorieth is a brilliant mage and the last living member of the Lamorieth bloodline. Her family once held great status and power in the shadow fey courts, until one of her ancestors was accused of plotting against the Queen of Night and Magic. The Lamorieth family lost all favor and were stripped of their lands and titles from that moment on.

Elmyra seethes with hatred for those who cast her family into disgrace and has spent her long life mastering the arcane arts and accumulating allies outside the courts in hopes of one day restoring her family's name.

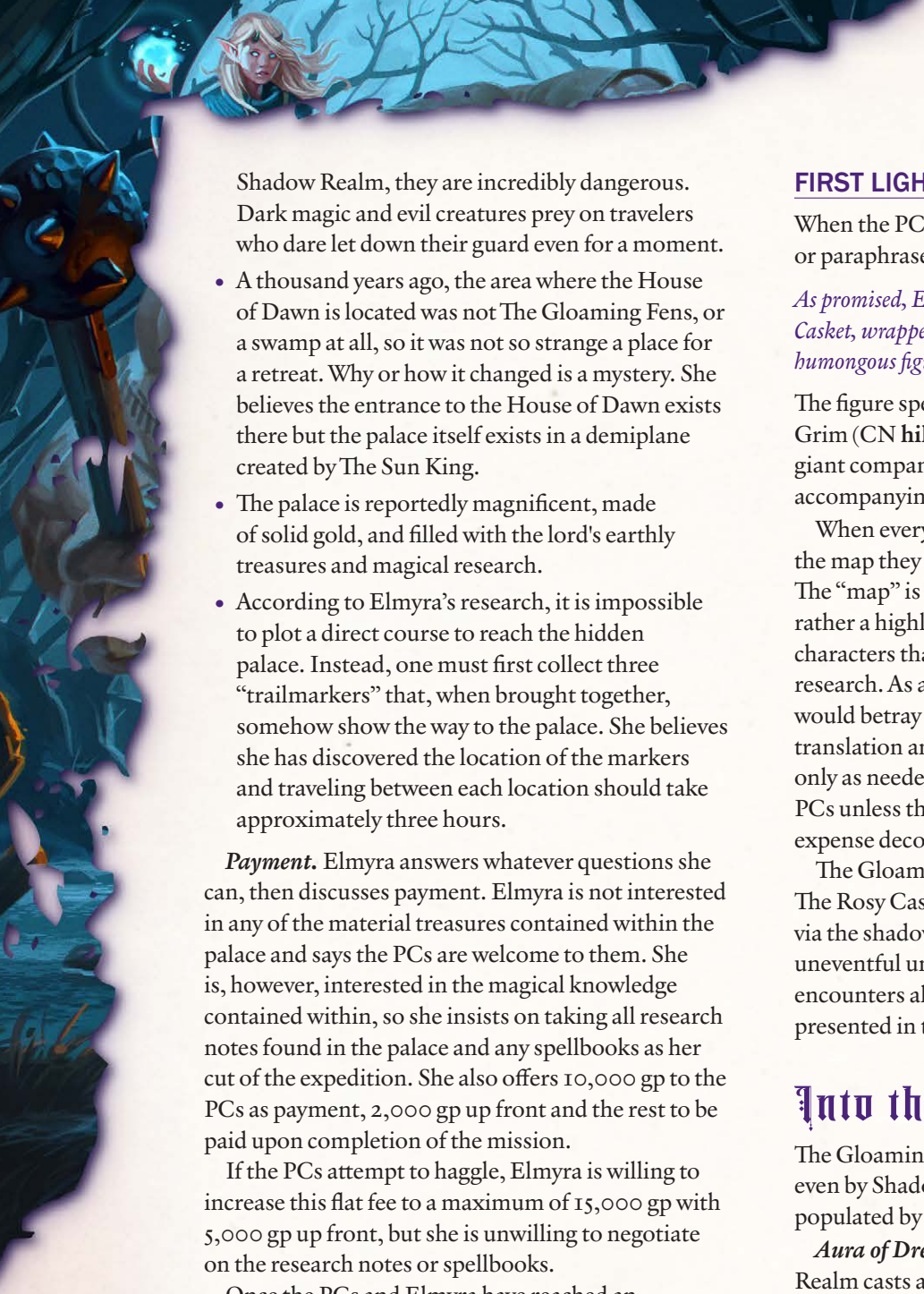
Alignment. Neutral evil.

Personality Trait. I can't trust anyone but myself.

Ideal. More power is the solution to every problem.

Bond. I will restore my family's name, whatever the cost.

Flaw. I have given my life to one zealous pursuit and anyone who gets in my way must be destroyed.



Shadow Realm, they are incredibly dangerous. Dark magic and evil creatures prey on travelers who dare let down their guard even for a moment.

- A thousand years ago, the area where the House of Dawn is located was not The Gloaming Fens, or a swamp at all, so it was not so strange a place for a retreat. Why or how it changed is a mystery. She believes the entrance to the House of Dawn exists there but the palace itself exists in a demiplane created by The Sun King.
- The palace is reportedly magnificent, made of solid gold, and filled with the lord's earthly treasures and magical research.
- According to Elmyra's research, it is impossible to plot a direct course to reach the hidden palace. Instead, one must first collect three "trailmarkers" that, when brought together, somehow show the way to the palace. She believes she has discovered the location of the markers and traveling between each location should take approximately three hours.

Payment. Elmyra answers whatever questions she can, then discusses payment. Elmyra is not interested in any of the material treasures contained within the palace and says the PCs are welcome to them. She is, however, interested in the magical knowledge contained within, so she insists on taking all research notes found in the palace and any spellbooks as her cut of the expedition. She also offers 10,000 gp to the PCs as payment, 2,000 gp up front and the rest to be paid upon completion of the mission.

If the PCs attempt to haggle, Elmyra is willing to increase this flat fee to a maximum of 15,000 gp with 5,000 gp up front, but she is unwilling to negotiate on the research notes or spellbooks.

Once the PCs and Elmyra have reached an agreement, she suggests the PCs make whatever preparations they require now, as she wants to set out at first light. The shadow fey is happy to cover the costs of rooms at The Rosy Casket if the PCs wish to rest. Otherwise, they can purchase anything from the "Adventuring Gear" table found in the *Basic Rules* directly from the tavern keeper. At your discretion, The Rosy Casket may also have a limited number of uncommon or rare potions for sale.

FIRST LIGHT

When the PCs are ready to begin the expedition, read or paraphrase the following:

As promised, Elmyra is waiting just in front of The Rosy Casket, wrapped in a thick green cloak. She is speaking to a humongous figure crouched beside her.

The figure speaking with Elmyra is her bodyguard, Grim (CN **hill giant**). The shadow fey introduces her giant companion and informs the party he will be accompanying them on their quest.

When everyone is ready to depart, Elmyra reveals the map they must follow to reach the hidden palace. The "map" is not a typical landscape drawing but rather a highly complex cipher of symbols and umbral characters that Elmyra has decoded after months of research. As additional protection against any who would betray her, Elmyra has memorized the map's translation and shares key pieces of its information only as needed. The map is indecipherable to the PCs unless they too spend significant downtime and expense decoding it.

The Gloaming Fens themselves are not far from The Rosy Casket and can be reached in a few hours via the shadow roads. The journey to the marshland is uneventful unless you would like to add any random encounters along the shadow roads, such as those presented in the *Book of Ebon Tides*.

Into the Gloaming Fens

The Gloaming Fens are a foul stretch of wilderness—even by Shadow Realm standards—and heavily populated by monstrous creatures.

Aura of Dread. The hostile magic of the Shadow Realm casts a perpetual aura of dread over the marsh. Spending time in the Fens wears on the psyche of all living creatures. A creature exposed to the marsh's elements must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the end of each three-hour period or gain one level of exhaustion. It is impossible to gain the benefits of a long rest while in the Gloaming Fens.

Fog. Unless specified otherwise, all areas of the marsh are blanketed by dense fog. The fog reduces visibility to a range of 30 feet and imposes disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Wetland. Vast tracts of standing water make finding solid ground in the marsh a considerable challenge. Unless specified otherwise, the ground is considered difficult terrain.

BOG BRIDGE

Ahead, the curve of a stone bridge juts through the curling mist. To the left, there's a beautiful, decorative spike at the head of the bridge's stone balustrades; the balustrade to the right looks as if it is meant to have one as well but does not.

With a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, a PC can see that the balustrades on the other end of the bridge both have the decorative spikes in place. The missing spike is the arcane trailmarker the PCs need to touch before they can proceed. Unfortunately, one of the three **trolls** who live under this bridge liked the shiny stones in it and now wields it as a weapon.

Creatures. The three trolls are ravenous and lying in wait, submerged beneath the bridge, ready to spring a trap once the PCs step onto it. PCs who specifically look for danger can spot the trolls with a successful DC 16 (Wisdom) Perception check. If the trolls remain undetected, they wait for as many PCs as possible to step onto the bridge before smashing the supports to collapse it. When it collapses, PCs standing on the bridge must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall 10 feet into the muddy water below. Medium or smaller PCs in the water are subjected to underwater combat rules until they swim to either shoreline 20 feet away.

Once the bridge has collapsed, or the trolls are detected, they collectively attack. Since the deep water does not impede the trolls due to their Large size, they prefer to fight in it for as long as possible, using the bridge remains as half cover from creatures attacking them from the shore.

Trailmarker. The trailmarker is a 3-foot-long marble post with arcane symbols inscribed on its surface. One of the trolls wields it as a weapon during the fight. (Treat its damage the same as a standard claw attack but dealing bludgeoning instead of slashing damage.) If the marker is carried more than 100 feet away from the bridge, it magically reappears on the bridge.

Treasure. PCs who search under the bridge find the trolls' cache of riches stolen from past victims. The cache contains 200 gp, six gems (worth 50 gp each), and a *belt of dwarvenkind.*

Roleplaying Grim

Grim is a very unusual hill giant. He does not know anything about his past or how he arrived in the Shadow Realm. Elmyra found him a few months ago wandering along the banks of the River Styx with his memories wholly drained by the water's magical effects.

Since then, they have spent most of their time together, with the shadow fey relying on him to be her research assistant and bodyguard. Perhaps because whatever personality he once had was wiped clean by the river, the giant has a surprisingly gentle and thoughtful demeanor about him. Elmyra thinks he may even be capable of learning the spellcasting arts one day, should she ever have the time and inclination to teach him.

Alignment. Chaotic neutral.

Personality Trait. I take the time to consider my words before speaking.

Ideal. Everyone deserves a second chance.

Bond. I owe Elmyra my life, and I would follow her to the ends of the earth.

Flaw. I become furious when people treat me like an unintelligent brute.

Running Elmyra & Grim

It is in Elmyra's and Grim's best interests to help keep the PCs alive through this adventure, but they never intentionally put themselves in danger on behalf of the party. Neither the giant nor the mage is willing to rush into combat first, take the lead position when traveling, or volunteer to test a way forward. If the PCs attempt to goad either NPC into taking one of those actions, they refuse, and Elmyra reminds them they are being paid a great deal of money to be here.

Grim always stays within 10 feet of Elmyra, who maintains as much physical distance between herself and enemies as logistically possible. The mage also has no intention of being caught spell-less when she reaches the House of Dawn, so she does not use any 3rd-level or higher spells while in the marshes unless she needs to protect Grim or herself from mortal danger.

Development

When one of the PCs first touches the trailmarker, they experience a flash of memory left by the lingering heartache of the lord.

The marble surface of the marker flares with sudden heat, and the scenery shifts around you. Two beautiful nobles stand together on a pristine stone bridge. The woman, a shadow fey dressed in night-black velvet, quietly watches the fireflies dance above a moonlit lake. The man, an elf whose skin casts an amber glow, pulls a small box from his pocket and reaches out for the woman's hand.

The memory fades as quickly as it appeared, and your senses return to the ruined bridge and fetid bog of the present.

Once a creature has experienced this memory, a mote of starlight the size of a firefly emerges from the marker. The mote is immaterial and cannot be interacted with or dispelled in any way while it remains in the confines of the swamp.

The mote follows the creature who experienced the memory until it is in the presence of the two other motes or until the creature leaves the swamp.

FORGOTTEN MAUSOLEUM

A twisted, black iron fence surrounds the perimeter of a mossy isle. Geometric outlines of tombstones are just visible through the gloom.

This black iron fence surrounds the circular isle, covering a 60-foot diameter of solid land. The only entrance through the fence is an iron gate with a padlock. The gates and fencing are 20 feet high. The fencing is enchanted to repel evil creatures, which cannot willingly come within 10 feet of the gate or fence (including Elmyra). PCs who succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check or cast the *identify* spell learn the nature of this enchantment; they also know that casting *dispel magic* suppresses the effect on a 10-foot section of the fence for 1 hour.

Explosive Glyph. A magical glyph is hidden within the locking mechanism of the padlock. If it is triggered, its explosive runes erupt with magical energy as described in the spell *glyph of warding*. The spell was cast at 3rd level and is set to deal fire damage.

Padlock. The padlock can be picked with a successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. A success also disables the effect of the *glyph of warding*.

Alternately, the lock can be shattered with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, but breaking the lock triggers the glyph.

Creatures. The island is occupied by a number of **ghosts** equal to the number of PCs. Each ghost appears as a headless knight walking around the island or scratching at the earth, looking for something. The ghosts ignore the PCs until they interact with the sarcophagus in the mausoleum, at which point the knights become enraged and attack.

Mausoleum. At the center of the island is a crumbling 10-foot-square mausoleum with a single unmarked sarcophagus inside. The PCs can remove the heavy stone lid of the sarcophagus with a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check. Attempting to remove the lid or touching the sarcophagus causes a **wraith** to materialize and attack any PCs inside the mausoleum. The wraith cannot leave the confines of the mausoleum, but the ghosts can pass through the walls to attack; if combat ensues, the ghosts arrive after 1 round of combat with the wraith.

Trailmarker. The trailmarker is a 3-foot-long marble post with arcane symbols inscribed on its surface. It rests inside the sarcophagus next to the skeleton. If the marker is carried more than 100 feet away from the island, it magically reappears in the sarcophagus.

Treasure. The personal effects and armor buried with the skeleton are decayed beyond use, except for a red-hued *flame tongue* longsword clutched in its hands. PCs who search the mausoleum discover an alter box containing four flasks of holy water and a *scroll of protection from evil and good*.

Development

When one of the PCs first touches the trailmarker, they experience a flash of memory left by the lingering heartache of the lord.

A chorus of clanging metal fills your mind as you touch the marble trailmarker. The field around you is filled with shadow fey soldiers running drills with graceful precision. Walking through the military camp is a beautiful noble couple, strolling arm in arm. The woman, a shadow fey dressed in night-black velvet, smiles as she observes the army prepare for war. The man, an elf whose skin casts an amber glow, wears a look of grim satisfaction on his face, as if proud but taking no joy in what he sees before him.

The scenes fades as quickly as it appeared, returning you to the Gloaming Fens.

Once a creature has experienced this memory, a mote of starlight the size of a firefly emerges from the marker. The mote is immaterial and cannot be interacted with or dispelled in any way while it remains in the confines of the swamp.

The mote follows the creature who experienced the memory until it is in the presence of the two other motes or until the creature leaves the swamp.

FLOODED SINK

The swamp water deepens here as a circular pool covered in a layer of slimy gray algae stretches out ahead.

This pool is a large sinkhole flooded with water. Touching the surface disturbs the layer of algae, revealing that the black water stretches down far beyond sight.

Sinkhole. The top of the sinkhole is a 20-foot-diameter circular opening that narrows to 5 feet at its bottom. The sinkhole extends 300 feet deep into the ground. The walls of the sink are a slimy mixture of mud and rock. The water that fills the bottom 150 feet of the well is murky with silt, causing the area to be heavily obscured.

Creatures. Diving into the pool attracts the attention of two aquatic **ropers** (with the changes noted below) who live in the sinkhole. The first roper attacks when a creature reaches 100 feet below the surface, and the second attacks at 200 feet.

Creature Change. The ropers can breathe underwater and have a 10-foot swim speed.

Trailmarker. The trailmarker is a 3-foot-long marble post with arcane symbols inscribed on its surface. The marker is hidden at the bottom of the sinkhole among the bones of the victims of the ropers. If the marker is carried more than 100 feet away from the sinkhole, it magically reappears at the bottom of the well.

Treasure. PCs who spend at least 1 round searching the bottom of the sinkhole find 350 gp and a *circlet of blasting* still attached to a bleached humanoid skull.

Development

When one of the PCs first touches the trailmarker, they experience a flash of memory left by the lingering heartache of the lord.

The fragrance of jasmine fills your senses as the marble surface of the trailmarker turns cold. A memory overtakes you, not your own, but as vivid as if you had lived it yourself. An elven man whose skin casts an amber glow sits alone on a garden bench by a cobblestone wishing well. He writes something in a gilded book, pausing every so often to wipe away a tear.

The scene disappears, leaving only the sunken hole before you and a persistent feeling of regret.

Once a creature has experienced this memory, a mote of starlight the size of a firefly emerges from the marker. The mote is immaterial and cannot be interacted with or dispelled in any way while it remains in the confines of the swamp.

The mote follows the creature who experienced the memory until it is in the presence of the two other motes or until the creature leaves the swamp.

Vision Writing. In the vision, the lord is adding a spell to his spellbook. Because wizards use a unique system of notation in their spellbooks—and what the PC sees in the vision isn't the entire spell, could have been viewed only for a moment, *and* is a spell that's of far higher level than the PCs can cast—it would be extremely difficult to determine what spell it is. If a PC is persistent and/or surpasses an incredibly tough DC on an Intelligence (Arcana) check (perhaps DC 30), if you wish to reward them for their diligence, the spell he's adding to his spellbook is *imprisonment*.

THE FINAL MOTE

Once the PCs have collected all three motes, it flies to join the two others, forming a sharp, peaked triangle (like the needle of a compass). From this point on, the three motes move and spin in midair to point the way toward the lost palace.

FINAL DESTINATION

If the PCs follow the motes' guidance, they arrive at their destination in short order, with no further difficulty. When that happens, read the following:

As you trudge through the swamp following the motes, it's hard to imagine how you're going to find anything in the unending muck of this horrible place. But then between one step and the next, where a moment ago there was nothing, suddenly you see it. The ever-oppressive fog thins, and there, in the heart of the marshland, is a glimpse of a once-magnificent palace of marble and gold. The central body of the building is sunken into the brackish water, but the tops of two domed towers stick up out of the marsh.

"Fascinating," Elmyra says, mostly to herself, as she takes out a notebook and starts writing in it. "I thought it would have been better preserved. Hmm. It's possible the demiplane somehow degraded after all these centuries. Even the swamp

itself bled into it. I'll have to give this a much closer study. But no time for that now. I suppose all that's left is for us to go inside! Come on, then, this is why we came all this way. Let's get to it."

The main entrance of the palace has disappeared into the muddy water, but the PCs can gain entry by climbing through the windows into one of the two front tower domes (area 3 or 4). Since the palace is partially sunken, reaching the window of either tower is an easy climb requiring no ability check.

The Sunken House of Dawn

This partially submerged building is a ghost of its former magnificence. The floors and walls are white marble covered with exquisite wooden paneling, plush carpets, and decorative modeling gilded with gold. Ornate stained-glass windows afford views of the gloom outside, but the PCs cannot open any submerged windows or doors to the exterior due to the palace's magical climate controls.

Ceilings. Unless specified otherwise, the ceilings of the House of Dawn are 15 feet high and covered with ornamental molding and astronomy-themed frescoes.

Doors. Unless specified otherwise, the interior doors in the palace are made of white wood with no locks.

Light. The solar lamps throughout the building have begun flickering and are losing power as the lord's magic wanes, but they still fill each room with dim light unless specified otherwise.

Climate Control. Powerful enchantments built into the palace's foundations shield the interior from the hostile influence of the Shadow Realm. While inside, creatures are not affected by magical conditions imposed by the marshes or the Shadow Realm as a whole. These enchantments have created a magical barrier preventing the marsh water and filth from entering the submerged rooms.

Restorative Properties. When a creature enters the palace for the first time, they immediately reduce their exhaustion level by one.



Arcane Lifts. The palace contains several Arcane Lifts: 10-foot-square, magical, elevator-like platforms. Each lift can only go to certain locations in the palace; in the description of each room, it is specified where each lift goes. It takes 1 round for the lifts to move to the next floor. Each lift can carry a maximum of 1,000 pounds in a single trip.

SEVEN RAINBOW OBJECTS PUZZLE

The fireplace of the Drawing Room (area 14) conceals a secret passage to The Sun King's Arcane Workshop (area 16). This secret passage was designed to be a whimsical puzzle/treasure hunt game to play at parties. The wall swings open only when the seven rainbow objects scattered throughout the palace are placed in their respective stands. The objects are a Blue Watering Can, a Red Notebook, a Violet Teacup, an Indigo Blade, an Orange Plaque, a Yellow Frame, and a Green Spyglass.

If the PCs are missing any of the items by the time they find the Drawing Room, they can determine what sort of item fits into its respective stand by succeeding on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

THE SUN KING'S RADIANT CONSTRUCTS

When The Sun King first built the House of Dawn, he also created several constructs made of pure radiant energy to care for the building. As his radiant magic faded, so too did that of these radiant constructs. Some faded away into nothingness, but others remained—and *transformed* . . . becoming mercurial beings of shadow. These shadow caretakers (use statistics for **invisible stalker** with the changes noted below) now wander the palace, attempting to find purpose in their confused existence.

Creatures. Whenever the PCs enter a new room, roll a d12 and consult the "Shadow Caretakers" table to determine if one of them is present, and, if so, how it responds to the PCs.

Creature Change. The Shadow Caretakers' creature type is construct, and they understand elvish instead of Auran.

1. DOME OF THE RISING SUN

The great glass dome that once covered this circular room is now shattered. Jagged points stretch into the fetid water, but everything else has washed away. Large dark shapes swim through the water just out of sight.

This room was once topped by a glass dome like the other three towers until it shattered centuries years ago. The climate control magic could no longer protect the room upon its destruction, and it is now completely flooded with marsh water. No furniture or markers of the original room remain.

Entrances. There are two ways to enter (or exit) this submerged room. Creatures can swim into it by diving 15 feet down into the muddy water of the marsh.

Arcane Lift. This room can be accessed via the arcane lift in the Library (area 5). The lift cannot be activated from this room.

Creatures. The dark shapes swimming in and around the room are three **giant crocodiles** who attack any creature who remains in the room for longer than 1 minute.

Developments. This is one of the only ways out of the building during the Great Escape encounter.

SHADOW CARETAKERS

d12	Encounter
1	Objects appear to fly around the room as a caretaker obsessively tries to redecorate. The caretaker ignores the PCs unless they interfere with its activities.
2	Objects shatter and break as two caretakers furiously attack anyone who enters the room.
3	A caretaker hiding in this room becomes infatuated with one of the PCs. They follow them for the rest of the adventure and try to give them little handmade gifts.
4	A caretaker hiding in this room decides to drive the PCs away. They follow them for the rest of the adventure, staging spooky events to convince them the palace is haunted.
5	Several caretakers in this room are lounging about and using the furnishings as if they are humans.
6	A caretaker hiding in this room drops down from the ceiling to attack the first PC who enters the room.
7–12	No caretakers are present.



2. DOME OF HIGH NOON

Every inch of this room is covered in trailing vines and overgrown plants. Humid air and bright light fill your senses. Amidst the tangle at the room's center, a floating glass ball shines with the brightness of a miniature sun. A continuous stream of water gushes from a blue watering can suspended on a hook just below the orb.

This room is a greenhouse where the serving staff grew food. Without caretakers to regulate the environment, the magic sun and water have caused the plant life to grow unchecked.

Arcane Lift. This room contains a lever that summons or controls the arcane lift. This lift lowers into the Kitchen (area 6).

Puzzle Object. The **blue watering can** ceases to spout water if removed from its hook, and it has the properties of a *decanter of endless water.* It is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

Creatures. The magic conditions have caused the plants in this room to mutate into two **shambling mounds.** The creatures reveal themselves and attack if anyone interacts with the watering can. The mounds do not pursue any creature beyond the confines of this room.

3. DOME OF THE SETTING SUN

This room is illuminated by a large glass ball floating at its center that casts everything in the pinks, oranges, and purples of a sunset sky. Curio cabinets and overgrown potted plants line the walls. A piano with a red notebook propped in its music desk dominates one side of the space.

This room is a conservatory where The Sun King and his guests could relax.

Puzzle Object. The **red notebook** is filled with sheet music of long-lost ballads and original compositions. It is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

Stairs. The staircase in this room leads down to the Armory in area 9.

Treasure. PCs who look for valuables in this room find a set of six ceramic and gold figurines of dragons playing musical instruments (worth 250 gp).

4. DOME OF STARLIGHT

As you enter this room, the ambient glow emitting from a floating glass ball dims to black. The rest of the glass ceiling brightens with the glow of thousands of shimmering stars depicting the night sky. The only furniture in this room is a reclining chair and a green spyglass resting in a trifold stand.

The Sun King built this room to replicate the stargazing he frequently indulged in on his homeworld. A creature who sits in the chair and uses the spyglass to observe the dome ceiling can look at different regions of the sky as if they were using a telescope.

Puzzle Object. The **green spyglass** loses its magic qualities when removed from the room, but it is worth 1,200 gp. It is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

Stairs. The stairs in this room lead down to the Private Chambers (area 10).

5. LIBRARY

Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves line the walls of this library. A continuous stream of water drips from the ceiling, adding to a pool of rotting carpet.

This library contains The Sun King's collection of books that are not relevant to his arcane studies.

Arcane Lift. This room contains a lever that summons or controls the arcane lift. This lift rises to

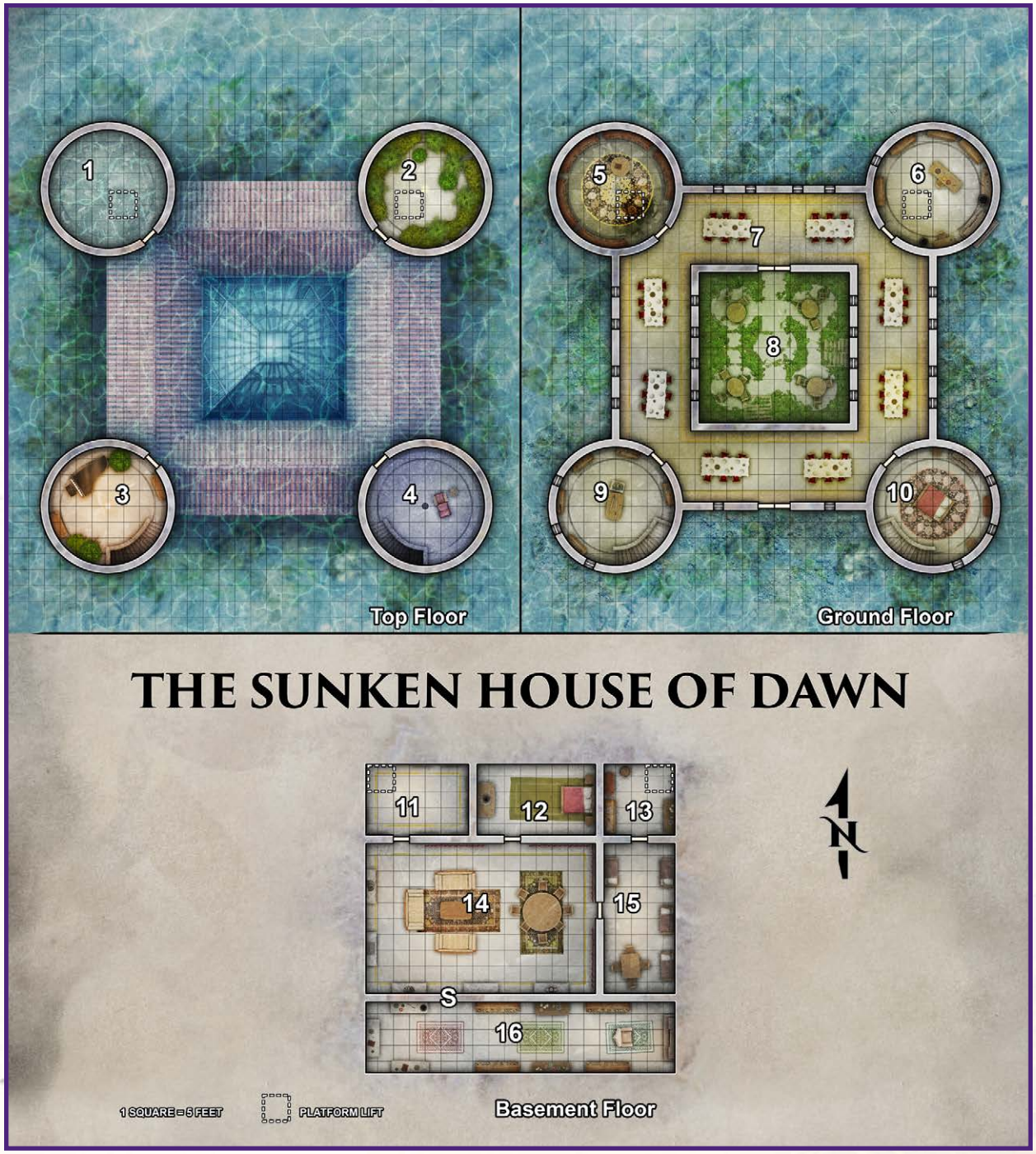
the Dome of the Setting Sun (area 3) or lowers to the Portrait Gallery (area 11). Using the lift to travel to area 3 causes a torrent of water to flood into the library from the marsh, sending 500 gallons rushing in before the climate controls can seal the lift platform.

Treasure. While none of the books in this room are magical, several are rare first editions. PCs specifically looking for valuable books find seven tomes worth 500 gp each to the right buyer.

6. KITCHEN

This large kitchen is equipped to make vast amounts of food. The cabinets, jars, and shelves lining the walls all appear to be empty. It clearly has not been used for a very long time.

Arcane Lift. This room contains a lever that summons or controls the arcane lift. This lift rises to the Dome of High Noon (area 2) or lowers to the Pantry (area 13).





7. BANQUET HALL

This large room is built of intricate stonework with vaulted ceilings covered with peeling sheets of gold gilding. Beautiful paintings and tapestries hang on the walls, and rugs cover much of the marble floors. Immaculate banquet tables line the halls, ready, each, to seat dozens of guests. Vast windows on the inner walls look into what was once a magnificent courtyard, now left to ruin.

This room is the largest in the House of Dawn. It is where The Sun King hosted events with retinues of guests. Feasts and dancing would occur here.

Entrances. There is a door in each corner of the hall that leads to the Library (area 5), the Kitchen (area 6), the Armory (area 9), and the Private Chambers (area 10), respectively. There are also stained-glass doors that lead into the Courtyard (area 8). The double doors to the south that would normally serve as an exit are impossible to open due to the climate control seal.

8. COURTYARD

Stained-glass doors open onto the verdant expanse of the once magnificent—now hopelessly overgrown—courtyard, lit by bobbing spheres of light. A paned ceiling of iron and glass holds back a slowly churning mass of black water and silt above it. Small, circular tables are dotted throughout the area, as are swirls of toppling trellises and crumbling statuary. The tables are set with delicate violet teacups.

This central courtyard was once used to host lavish garden parties.

Creatures. The bobbing lights are in fact seven **will-o'-wisps** drawn to the misery of the palace. They attack any creature that steps into the courtyard or otherwise interacts with any of the teacups.

Puzzle Object. A single **violet teacup** is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

9. ARMORY

Well-made weapons of every variety are stored on wooden racks along the walls. A 10-foot-tall bronze statue of an elf wielding an indigo-hued blade is the only decoration. A spiral staircase leads upward.

None of the weapons in the racks are magical, but if a PC searches for a specific simple or martial weapon, they can find it here.

Puzzle Object. The **indigo blade** is a *+1 longsword* and is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

Stairs. The stairs in this room lead up to the Dome of the Setting Sun (area 3).

10. PRIVATE CHAMBERS

This master bedroom is surprisingly gloomy. Thick, black velvet covers the windows, and a rectangular shape that has been covered with a piece of dark cloth hangs above the empty fireplace.

This room is the master bedroom where The Sun King slept before he forevermore retreated to his workshop.

Covered Painting. The covered rectangular object is a painting of a beautiful shadow fey woman with cold eyes in royal garb.

Stairs. The stairs in this room lead up to the Dome of Starlight (area 4).

Treasure. PCs who search this room for valuables find five sets of fine clothes sized for a Medium creature (worth 15 gp each) and a *cloak of elvenkind* hanging in a wardrobe.

11. PORTRAIT GALLERY

Rows of exquisite, large paintings fill the walls of this square room. Each of the eight portraits depicts a different shadow fey or elf dressed in regal clothing.

This portrait gallery holds eight paintings that portray the visages of The Sun King's family and friends. Each one, with its frame, is approximately 5' × 4' in size and weighs 50 pounds.

Arcane Lift. This room contains a lever that summons or controls the arcane lift. This lift rises into the Library (area 5).

Treasure. Each of the 8 paintings (along with their frames) could be sold for at least 100 gp to the right buyer.

12. GUEST ROOM

This lavish room has a carved wooden bed frame, an oak chest, and a burnished copper washbasin.

This bedroom is set aside for guests. It holds nothing of value.

13. PANTRY

This stone pantry is filled with wooden racks supporting rows of empty jars and casks. An orange plaque on the door bears elvish script that reads, "Wine a little, laugh a lot."

Since The Sun King does not need to eat, there is no food in this pantry.

Arcane Lift. This room contains a lever that summons or controls the arcane lift. This lift rises into the Kitchen (area 6).

Puzzle Object. This **orange plaque** is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

14. DRAWING ROOM

Overstuffed chairs, dart boards, and plush rugs give this stylish lounge a very cozy feel, despite its extreme age. Various marvels cover the walls, including beautiful woven tapestries and paintings, and a golden sculpture shaped like an animal head stands in each corner. The mantle above the marble fireplace, however, is curiously devoid of accoutrement.

This room is intended for lounging and entertaining of the more intimate variety.

Empty Mantle. PCs who investigate the fireplace's mantle see seven empty stands where differently sized objects are meant to be placed. The fireplace conceals a secret passage to the Arcane Workshop (area 16). (See the "Seven Rainbow Objects Puzzle" section earlier in the adventure.)

15. SERVANT WING

This long, rectangular room contains a row of identical cots and trunks. A painting of daffodils in a yellow frame hangs over the cot on the far left.

Before the servants all left or died, they shared this simple living space.

Puzzle Object. This **yellow frame** (painting optional) is one of the seven items needed to open the secret passageway in the Drawing Room (area 14).

16. ARCANE WORKSHOP

Long stone counters wind around the walls of this room alongside worktables, bookcases, and racks crammed with biological and mechanical treasures. The eastern wall features a large, glowing fireplace; facing the fireplace, and about 15 feet away from it, is an elaborate throne, crafted of wood and gilded with gems and precious metals. A labored wheezing sound comes that direction.

This is The Sun King's sanctum, where he once used his talents to create artifacts to light the Shadow Realm. It has since become his cell, as his mind and body have decayed over the centuries.

The Sun King. The wheezing sound comes from the ancient elf lord slumped over on his throne. The figure takes no notice of the PCs until they initiate an interaction with him. If they do so, go to the "Lord of Light" section.

Treasure. The workshop is very disorganized, but a PC who takes the time to search it finds various spell components and alchemical ingredients (worth a total of 3,000 gp), two diamonds (worth 500 gp each), a set of alchemist's tools, and a *potion of speed.*

Research Notes. Scattered about the workshop are papers, books, and scrolls, which are almost entirely concerned with the flow of shadow, the nature of the ebon tides, and the role of the heavens (or stars) in the Shadow Realm. It is all information that would be extremely valuable to the Queen of Night and Magic or the Court of One Million Stars . . . or any number of figures looking to control the nature of the Shadow Realm.

Lord of Light

If the PCs interact with The Sun King, read or paraphrase the following:

The emaciated elf shifts uncomfortably in the padded throne, pulling his hands tighter into his threadbare golden robes. Rheumy gold eyes, laced with cataracts, squint at you from a wrinkled silver face as he whispers, "My lady, is it you?"

If Elmyra is present, The Sun King addresses her with this statement. If Elmyra is dead or otherwise separated from the PCs, he addresses the PC who most closely resembles the shadow elf noble depicted in the portrait in the Private Chambers (area 10).

If Elmyra is present, read the following:

Elmyra's face is the picture of surprise as The Sun King addresses her. The shock turns to confused disgust, and she waves a hand towards you and says, "I don't know what's going on here but just get him to give me his spellbook."

Elmyra is utterly uncomfortable seeing the legendary Sun King in this state and insists the PCs deal with him. There are a couple of ways the PCs can acquire The Sun King's spellbook, detailed below. If the players are struggling to figure out what to do, let them know what options they have.

COMBAT APPROACH

The more direct—but less beneficial—way to deal with The Sun King is by attacking him. In his current condition, the lord does not fight back and dies quickly. Upon his death, a hidden drawer in his throne is easily discovered with any search, revealing the spellbook, *The Luminous Codex* (see appendix).

Simultaneously, the palace begins to sink, and the encounter detailed in the Great Escape section begins.

PCs who acquired the book through violence quickly discover the true nature of the lord's curse: He cannot die. At the beginning of the second round of the encounter, the lord materializes in an empty space within 30 feet of his spellbook and rolls initiative. This time, he does not die so easily. He is determined to use his spells to stop the PCs from escaping. Whenever The Sun King dies, he regenerates fully and appears again after 1 minute. The only way to stop this cycle is to destroy his spellbook.

Creatures. The Sun King uses the statistics for an **archmage,** but he has the following additional spells prepared: *fireball*, *sunbeam*, and *sunburst*. His spellbook is currently hidden in his throne, but, as he is attuned to it, he can still use its special magical properties.

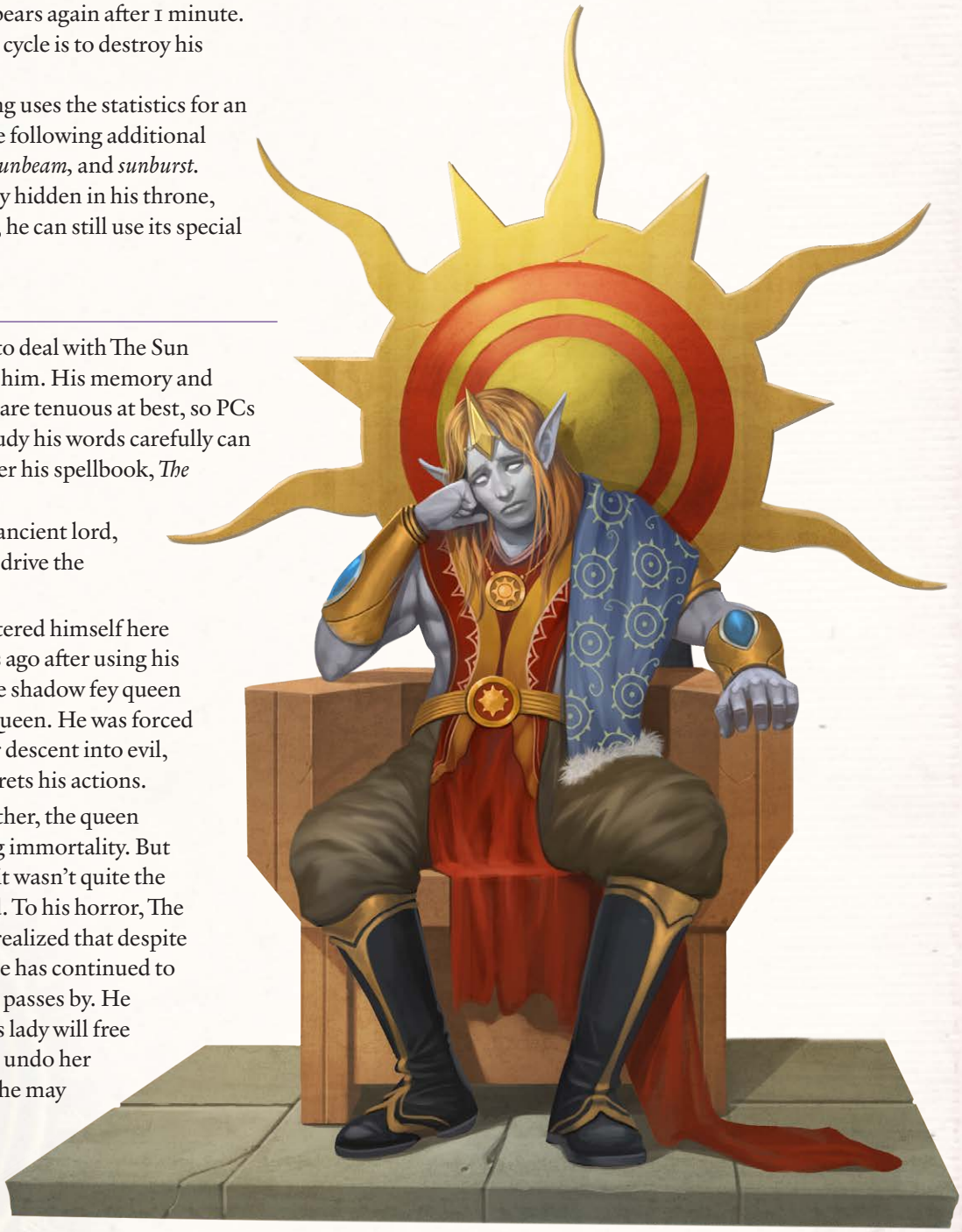
SOCIAL APPROACH

The more favorable way to deal with The Sun King is by speaking with him. His memory and understanding of reality are tenuous at best, so PCs who listen closely and study his words carefully can convince him to hand over his spellbook, *The Luminous Codex*, freely.

When roleplaying the ancient lord, use these motivations to drive the conversation:

- The Sun King sequestered himself here over a thousand years ago after using his magic to imprison the shadow fey queen he loved, The Dusk Queen. He was forced to do this to cease her descent into evil, but he still deeply regrets his actions.
- While they were together, the queen granted The Sun King immortality. But like much fey magic, it wasn't quite the gift it initially seemed. To his horror, The Sun King eventually realized that despite being unable to die, he has continued to age and decay as time passes by. He waits here, hoping his lady will free herself, find him, and undo her enchantment so that he may finally rest eternally.
- The Sun King's magic allowed him to seal the Queen away, and he has come to resent and fear his own power. He only agrees to hand over his spellbook if convinced it will be used to free the Queen or to perform an act of great good.

While the lord is unwell, he is by no means a fool. Convincing him to hand over his spellbook requires three successful DC 16 Charisma (Deception,



Intimidation, or Persuasion) checks. If the PCs try to manipulate the lord with magic, use the statistics for an **archmage** to determine his saving throws. If your players roleplay the conversation thoughtfully, consider waiving any number of these checks or granting advantage when appropriate.

If the PCs fail three consecutive checks, the lord becomes despondent as he realizes the truth of what is happening. The palace simultaneously begins to sink, and the encounter detailed in the "Great Escape" section begins.

If the PCs successfully convince the lord, he hands over his spellbook and warns them to leave the House of Dawn as quickly as possible. If the PCs heed the lord's advice, give them 1 bonus round to act before the palace begins to sink, as detailed in the "Great Escape" section.

GREAT ESCAPE

When the palace begins to sink, read or paraphrase the following:

The walls and floor shudder violently as if some great weight below the building has broken. A chorus of creaking wood and stone surrounds you as the palace begins to sink. If you intend to escape the same watery fate, you'll have to move quickly.

To run the escape, have every player roll initiative with the House of Dawn moving on initiative 20. Each time the palace's initiative comes up, the entire building sinks 60 feet deeper into the marsh waters.

The PCs must escape the palace and then swim to the surface to truly escape.

Here are some notes to help you run this encounter:

- Due to the climate controls, the only open exit is the broken dome in area 1. Consider allowing the PCs to escape through the other domes or the courtyard ceiling if they find a way to shatter the thick glass.
- It takes 1 round for an arcane lift to move to the next floor. Each lift can carry a maximum of 1,000 pounds in a single trip.
- The rules for suffocating (drowning) can be found in the *System Reference Document 5.1* or the core rule books. It may be helpful for you to reference those rules and calculate how long each PC can hold their breath before this encounter begins.

Concluding the Adventure

This section details the events that follow the sinking of the House of Dawn.

FAILED ESCAPE

If the PCs fail to escape the palace or die in the effort, their bodies or souls become trapped in the watery grave of the palace. Any trapped PCs have exactly 1 year and 1 day to find a way out of the sunken palace before the lord's magic fades for good and the climate controls dissipate.

If PCs become trapped, they can perhaps discover a way to send a message to the surface, or maybe Elmyra can use the lord's research to find a magical way out.

SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE

PCs who successfully escape the palace miraculously surface on the edge of the marshes where they first entered, expelled by the strange magic of the Shadow Realm.

If Elmyra survives and is allowed to keep the lord's spellbook, she pays the full amount promised to the PCs. She eventually uses the spellbook to bully and murder her way back into the favor of the shadow courts. With her new standing, Elmyra becomes a valuable political ally for the PCs moving forward.

If the PCs attempt to betray Elmyra, or she suspects they will betray her and try to take the book, she casts *dimension door* to attempt escape. If Grim still lives, she brings him if possible but sacrifices him if necessary.

If Elmyra does not survive the adventure, but Grim does, the giant insists on taking the spellbook, then leaves to arrange for Elmyra's magical resurrection.

If both Elmyra and Grim die during the adventure, the PCs get to keep whatever spoils they claim but never receive their full payment.



Shadows of the Dusk Queen

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 CHARACTERS OF 8TH LEVEL

Throughout the land, legends of the Dusk Queen persist. They speak of a sometimes kind, other times cruel, yet always mysterious fey queen who ruled from her Dusk Tower—a tall spire of smooth, dark stone in the heart of a great, shadowy forest. Perhaps the most gripping legends, however, whisper of the Dusk Queen's sudden and mysterious disappearance.

Adventure Background

A mysterious shadow fey known as the Dusk Queen left the Winter Court and came to a forest of shadows where she ruled the land from a great stone tower. Although capable of surprising acts of kindness, much of her reign was marked by cruelty, violence, and death. At some point, the Dusk Queen encountered a powerful wizard from a land of pitiless, burning sun and endless sand traveling in her realm for unknown reasons. Against all logic, they fell in love, eventually exchanging dark and secret vows in the queen's throne room. Because of his homeland, the wizard came to be known as the Sun King.

The two were happy in their own, strange way until the Dusk Queen had a magical mirror created. This powerful item, which was infused with shadowy strands of the Dusk Queen's very life essence, greatly expanded her powers and her ambition. It allowed her to spy on her enemies (both real and imagined), cast powerful spells through it across vast distances, and even magically transport herself or her minions to the farthest locations. The Dusk Queen used her mirror with rapidly growing paranoia and zeal, wreaking havoc and death throughout the land. The Sun King found it more and more difficult to overlook the queen's escalating acts of evil and violence. When he learned the Dusk Queen was secretly plotting to invade his homeland, the Sun King knew he had to act.

In the deepest part of a cold, moonless night, the Sun King wove his most powerful spells while the Dusk Queen slept, magically banishing her to a hidden and unknown prison. Once she was gone, the wizard smashed the Dusk Queen's mirror and departed the tower, vowing never to return.

The Sun King's magic did not work as he had planned, however. Due perhaps to the lingering spark of love he still harbored within his heart, the Dusk Queen's magical imprisonment was not permanent. Likewise, the destruction of her mirror was also incomplete—five shards of glass exploded from the mirror and, impossibly, came to rest in various locations throughout the surrounding forest, waiting to be found. . . .

Getting Started

The adventure begins with the characters coming upon a dark and mysterious forest filled with deep, ever-shifting shadows. When they first approach the forest, read the following:

Before you stretches a dark forest with trees rising as much as a hundred feet into the air. Foreboding and sorrow seem to emanate from within. Occasionally, shadowy creatures, only glimpsed, move among the trees. Slow, plaintive howls echo among the dark branches as a cool wind begins to blow, as if whispering barely discernible words . . .

"She has returned. She has returned. She has returned!"

The trees directly before you slowly part, forming a natural opening that leads into the shadowy woods beyond.

1. THE WEEPING TREANT

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check by anyone peering into the dark forest reveals the following:

As your eyes slowly adjust to the dim light, you see the silhouette of a large, tree-like creature emerge from perhaps 30 paces into the woods and step onto the path. The strange creature completely blocks the way and seems to be watching you and waiting.

Creature. The shadowy silhouette is a **weeping treant** (see appendix). It does not respond or react to the PCs in any way unless they enter the forest and approach it. Once the PCs get within 30 feet, read:

A large, living tree with dark, cracked bark blocks the trail in front of you. Black eyes watch you intently. Thick, dark sap runs unchecked like tears down its gnarled face. The strange creature shows no other sign of emotion. Suddenly, it speaks in a deep, powerful voice:

"She has returned! The Dusk Queen has returned! Have you come to retrieve the mirror shards for her?"



Running This Adventure from the Shadow Realm

"Shadows of the Dusk Queen" is a classic Kobold Press adventure updated and reprinted in this volume alongside the other, new adventures of the Shadow Realm. All the adventures in this book are designed to stand alone, but they can also be run one after another if a GM were so inclined. If you do run them together, or if your PCs are already in the Shadow Realm, "Shadows of the Dusk Queen" requires a little bit of tinkering, since, as written, it doesn't take place in the Shadow Realm, but in a shadowy forest on the Material Plane that is essentially a partial portal to the Shadow Realm. If you do wish to set "Shadows of the Dusk Queen" in the Shadow Realm, the adventure can start in essentially any forest area that's isolated or remote, but a good location to place it would be the northern part of the forest approximately 30 miles southwest of Sable.

How and why the PCs have come to the Shadow Forest is left to the GM and the needs of the campaign. The party could simply happen upon the forest while traveling through some desolate or otherwise unexplored area and decide to investigate. Alternatively, the forest could be a place well known but avoided by locals that the PCs have specifically come to explore. Local leadership might even hire the PCs to enter the forest, find out if the rumors of the Dusk Queen's return are true and, if so, rid the forest of her foul taint once and for all.

Reluctant PCs can be tempted with legends of specific magical treasures rumored to be within the forest. The party wizard, for example, might hear of a powerful, intelligent spellbook hidden somewhere in the forest and decide to investigate.

The weeping treant watches the PCs, silently waiting for an answer. The creature completely blocks the path and lets no one pass until it receives a satisfactory response.

PCs attempting to gain information from the weeping treant, convince it they have indeed come to retrieve the shards for the Dusk Queen, or otherwise deceive it in any way must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the PCs manage to fool the treant, it reveals the locations of the five shards throughout the forest:

One rests at the bottom of a dark pool

One is embedded in the trunk of the Hanging Tree

One lies beneath a mound of smooth, black stones

One has fallen into a deep pit of shadows

One is somewhere within the Putrid Bog

Once the weeping treant has given this cryptic information, it insists the PCs leave immediately to retrieve the shards for the Dusk Queen, who resides once again in her tower. The weeping treant might be persuaded to answer a few additional questions, but very quickly becomes impatient and suspicious.

Should the PCs at any point fail to convince the weeping treant, or if it determines the PCs have been deceiving it, the creature furiously and relentlessly attacks!

The Shadow Forest

When the PCs enter the forest itself, the feeling of foreboding and sorrow subtly intensifies.

The mysterious, plaintive howls continue to echo among the branches, and the chilling wind continues to whisper . . .

"She has returned. She has returned. She has returned!"

A powerful abjuration aura permeates the entire forest, limiting magical transportation such as *dimension door* or *teleport* to a maximum of 30 feet at a time, regardless of the spell's normal range.

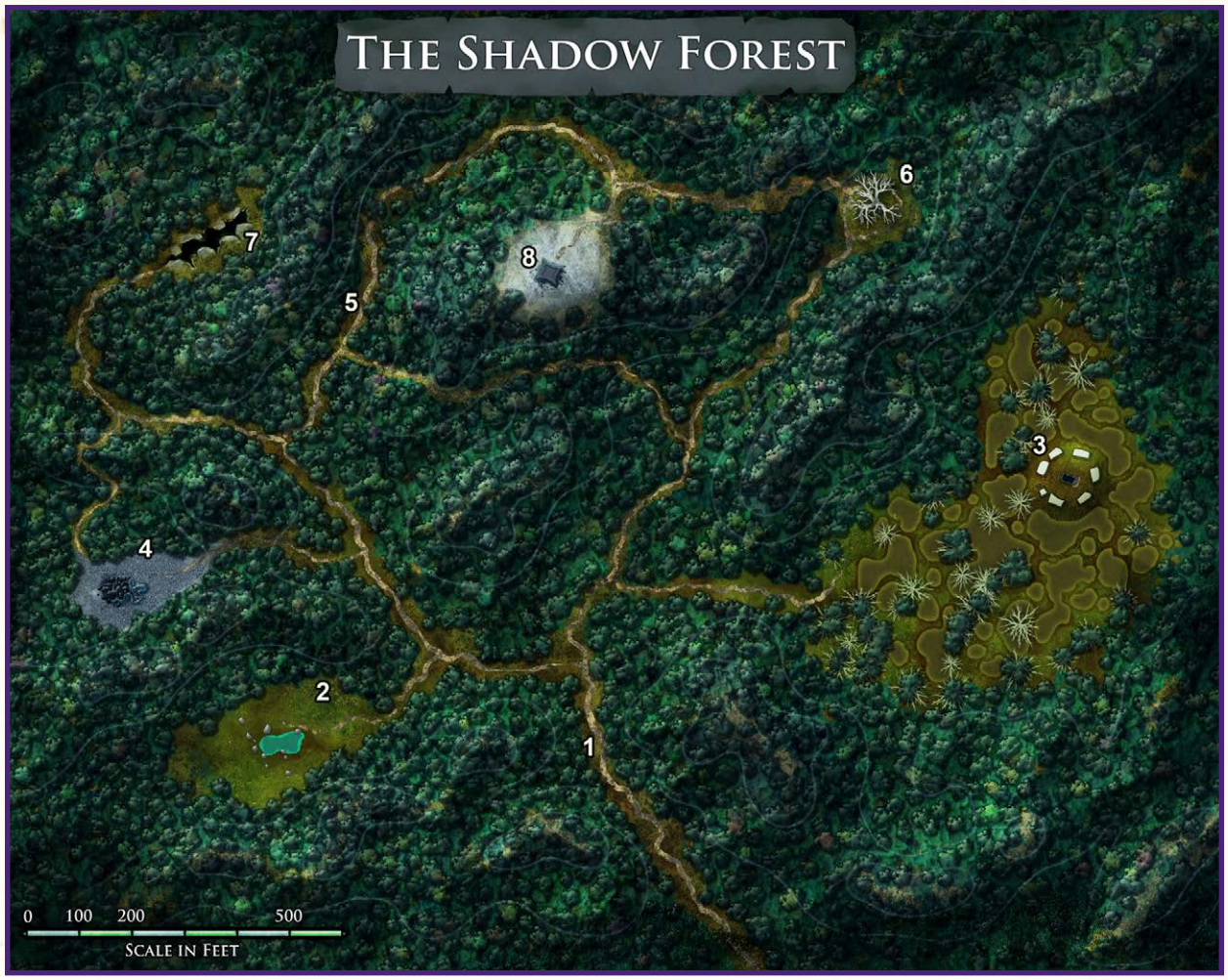
Swarms of **black stirges** (use **stirges** with the changes noted below) dwell in the upper reaches of the treetops. They viciously attack any who attempt to climb or fly into the forest's thick upper canopy.



CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE

An Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (History) check can recall the following about the Dusk Queen:

DC	Result
5	The Dusk Queen ruled the Shadow Forest and surrounding lands for many years until she vanished mysteriously.
8	The Dusk Queen possessed a powerful magic mirror that she used to control and terrorize her subjects; someone known as the Sun King smashed the mirror shortly before the Dusk Queen's mysterious disappearance.
12	The Shadow Forest is thought to be inhabited by frightening creatures, many of which come from the Shadow Realm itself!
16	The Dusk Queen was protected by a dark paladin; many whispered that this dread guard was much more to her than simply a royal guard.
20	The Dusk Queen was a shadow fey who journeyed to the Shadow Forest from the fey realm of the Winter Court. She was also said to be able to wield magic in powerful and unique ways.



Creature Change. Treat as **stirges** with the following changes:

Shadow Blend: While not in sunlight, the black stirge can become invisible as a bonus action. It can end this effect as a bonus action.

Strength Drain: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the stirge attaches to the target. While attached, the stirge doesn't attack. Instead, the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. The stirge can detach itself by spending 5 feet of its movement. It does so after it drains 4 points of Strength from the target, or the target dies. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach the stirge. This replaces the stirge's Blood Drain action.

The Search for the Shards

Remember to continually reinforce the dark and mysterious atmosphere as the PCs move throughout the forest. Long, thick shadows obscure vision; the heroes randomly hear animals and other, even stranger beasts in the distance; and the cold wind whistles and howls through the trees. During moments of inactivity, the wind again seems to wail . . .

She has returned. She has returned. She has returned.

2. The Shadow Nymphs' Pool

A small pool of calm, dark water lies nestled in a secluded clearing. As you watch, two delicate figures rise gracefully from the still pool. The painfully beautiful creatures have long black hair that falls down their bare backs before gathering around their waists on the surface of the dark water.

The two dark beauties stare at you for a moment with calm, suspicious eyes before at last speaking:

"Why have you come to our pool? Are you here to harm us?"

Sapphyl and Lasralith, two **shadow nymphs** (see appendix) guard one of the shards. They keep it extremely well hidden at the bottom of their deep, dark pool (DC 22 Wisdom [Perception] check to find). The shadow nymphs have no love for the Dusk Queen and are not happy she has escaped from her long imprisonment. A successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the distrustful shadow nymphs the PCs are not loyal to the Dusk Queen and mean them no harm.

Sapphyl and Lasralith show great relief and beg the PCs to destroy the Dusk Queen once and for all. If the PCs agree, the shadow nymphs gladly volunteer to give the PCs the mirror shard they have been hiding since they first found it.

The nymphs are desperate to see the Dusk Queen destroyed. However, Sapphyl and Lasralith also fear for their lives should the queen learn they've aided the PCs and are unwilling to offer any additional assistance beyond what has been detailed here.

The Shadow Nymphs reveal (or confirm) the locations of the other four shards. They stress that the forest is extremely dangerous, and the PCs should remain on the trails at all costs. Additionally, they share a rumor that says if all five shards can be found and placed physically together, the combined shards can produce a magic powerful enough to greatly aid in any battle against the Dusk Queen.



Treasure. Sapphyl and Lasralith have three *potions of greater healing* and one *scroll of lesser restoration* which they gladly give the PCs to help them in their quest.

GM Note. It is important to remember Sapphyl and Lasralith have lived in the forest a very, very long time and can answer most questions the PCs might have regarding the Dusk Queen and her tower (essentially, the GM should use the shadow nymphs to move the story along, clear up any confusion the players might have so far, and fill in missing plot points).

Wandering Monsters

Although the paths are relatively safe and easy to travel, the same cannot be said if the PCs attempt to stray from the paths and venture into the dense woods themselves, which is considered difficult terrain. There is a 50% chance of a random encounter for every 2d6 rounds spent in the forest depths instead of on the paths. PCs might decide to stay and fight the creatures if they have little trouble with some of the fights. It is at the GM's discretion to increase the difficulty of the random encounters to emphasize the danger of straying or decrease the likelihood of PCs fighting endless battles.

WANDERING MONSTERS TABLE

d%	Encounter
1-10	2d4 giant spiders
11-17	1d6 awakened shrubs
18–25	1d4 giant bats
26–32	1d3 worgs
33–38	1 shrieker and 1d6 zombies
39–50	1d4 shadows
51–56	1d4 winter wolves
57–64	3d6 ettercaps and 2d8 giant spiders
65–75	2d8 skeletons
76–84	2d4 awakened trees
85–90	1 shambling mound
95–100	1 wraith

3. THE PUTRID BOG

As the characters approach this clearing in the forest, read the following:

The forest gives way suddenly to a thick bog of twisted trees and dripping vines. A few small hillocks and other areas of soft, damp ground peek out from the stagnant water and foul-smelling muck.

A strange gray mist hangs in the air, slowly swirling and drifting though the misshapen trees and vines as if possessing a mysterious sentience. The putrid stench of rot and decay threatens to nauseate even those with the stoutest fortitude.

The Putrid Bog is covered in dank brackish water and thick mud ranging from only a few inches deep at most points to as much as a few feet at others. It is difficult terrain.

Hazard. Any non-resident of the bog must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or gain the poisoned condition from the bog's putrid stench for as long as they remain within its confines. A successful save renders them immune to the effects of the bog's stench for the duration of the visit. A *protection from poison* spell removes the effect from a sickened creature and renders them immune to the effects for the remainder of the visit. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures with poison resistance receive their normal advantage on the saving throws.

Despite the overwhelming smell of death and decay, the Putrid Bog is, in fact, teeming with life, most of it festering and vile.

At the heart of the Putrid Bog lies a ring of ancient standing stones:

An earthen mount rises from the muck. Tall, twisted standing stones form a ring on the center of the mound, like some misshapen stone claw. The mysterious rocks encircle an ancient stone altar of black rock carved with strange, barely discernible symbols. A mirror shard lies on the altar's surface.

A palpable feeling of evil and dark magic radiates from the entire area and the black altar in particular.

The mound is solid enough to walk on unimpeded and is one of the few areas within the bog not considered difficult terrain. The mound is about 50 feet across and rises 5 feet above the swampy waters of the bog. The ring of standing stones, each anywhere from nine to 12 feet tall, is approximately 30 feet in diameter.

The black rock altar radiates a permanent *symbol of stunning* (successful DC 16 Wisdom saving throw negates), which is triggered by anyone not of evil alignment passing through the ring of standing stones.

The Mirror Shards

Each mirror shard is as wide as a man's fist and just under an inch in thickness. Although apparently made of normal glass, they are extremely difficult to break.

Because the shards have the Dusk Queen's essence within them, they possess a spark of quasi-intelligence. The mirror shards' primary goal is to be rejoined with the Dusk Queen's mirror. A shard continually urges any PC possessing it to take it to the Queen's Tower. If a PC attempts to damage a mirror shard, remove it from the forest, or do anything else contrary to the shard's goal, it attempts to force the PC into compliance (DC 11 Wisdom saving throw to resist).

A mirror shard has: **AC** 13; **hp** 5 (2d4); damage threshold 20; **INT** 4 (–3), **WIS** 20 (+5), **CHA** 21 (+5) (as long as the Dusk Queen is alive)

Combined Mirror Shards

Wondrous item, legendary

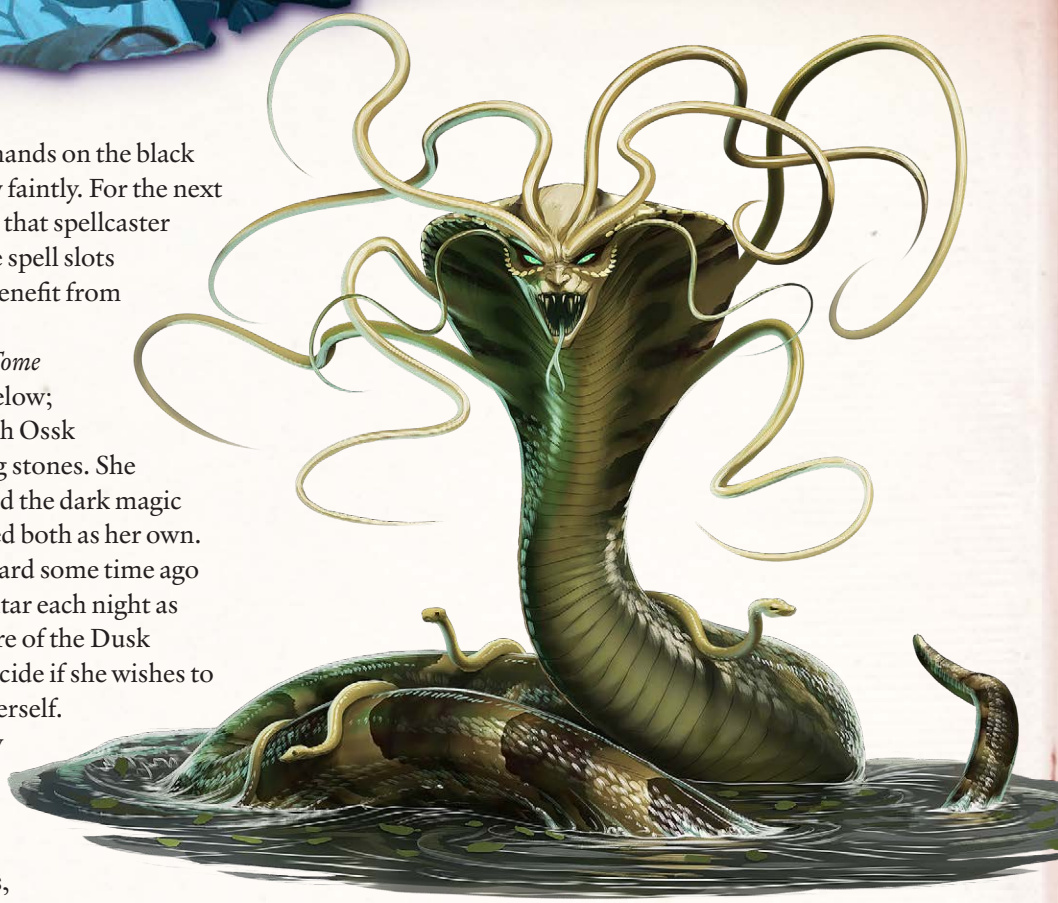
If all five mirror shards are held together so they are stacked front to back, front to back, they have the following powers:

- Wielder can cast *sacred flame* three times per day as if by an 11th-level caster
- Instead of the above, the wielder can opt to cast a single robust *sacred flame* spell once per day. This causes maximum (24) damage, and any target creature with vulnerability to radiant damage rolls its saving throw with disadvantage

Anyone can use the five mirror shards in this way, even non-spellcasters.

Although the shards' edges are certainly sharp, reasonably careful PCs should be in no danger of cutting themselves when using the shards in this way. A clever PC might even bind the five shards together with strong cord, wire, or rope to keep them together and make it easier to use them.





Any spellcaster placing both hands on the black altar causes the symbols to glow faintly. For the next 24 hours, any necromancy spell that spellcaster casts functions as if cast at three spell slots higher. A spellcaster may only benefit from this effect once per week.

Creature. The **swamp naga** (*Tome of Beasts 2* with changes noted below; or substitute a **spirit naga**) Vessh Ossk lurks within the ring of standing stones. She was drawn to the stone circle and the dark magic of the black altar and has claimed both as her own. Vessh Ossk found the mirror shard some time ago and has been placing it on the altar each night as an experiment. The naga is aware of the Dusk Queen's return but has yet to decide if she wishes to return the shard or keep it for herself.

The swamp naga is supremely evil, highly intelligent, and extremely manipulative. If she learns the PCs possess any of the other shards, she uses lies, deception, and then outright threats to get them for herself. If the PCs refuse, she viciously attacks. Vessh Ossk does not give up her own shard under any circumstances and fights to protect it. She does not leave the confines of the bog for any reason, however.

Creature Change. Treat the swamp naga as a 10th-level caster (rather than 8th), with three 4th-level slots, two 5th-level slots, and the following 5th-level spells: *cloudkill, insect plague.*

Treasure. Vessh Ossk has a collection of gems buried near the altar. The collection consists of one small ruby (100 gp), two diamonds (150 gp each), and a pyramid carved from deep green jade (260 gp).

4. THE DEAD BEHIR

When the characters enter this clearing, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Countless pebbles and other small stones litter this large clearing. In the center, you see a large mound of smooth, black stones. Lying on the ground in front of the mound is the dead body of a large, black, reptilian creature, its fearsome head crowned with two large curling horns.

Surrounding the carcass stand several hulking, dark-furred creatures with tiny, milk-white eyes.

The large pile of black stones is approximately 30 feet in diameter and 20 feet tall. Each stone is perfectly smooth and about the size of a man's head. Both the mound and clearing are considered difficult terrain.

The strange, black, carcass is a dead behir, approximately 40 feet long, and it fills much of the area directly in front of the mound of black stones.

Creatures. A band of **bugbears** has recently ventured into the forest, hoping to claim it as new hunting grounds. Three bugbears are focused on picking over the recently slain carcass of the black behir, while six others are spread out across the clearing, busily repairing weapons or performing other chores. The bugbears are all focused on their tasks and most likely unaware (passive Perception 10) of reasonably cautious PCs.

The bugbears are led by **Gothrolg** (see appendix), a powerful half-umbral dragon bugbear who is currently out of view on the far side of the mound but quickly flies up on top of the black stones at the first sign of trouble.

Gothrolg is a sadistic creature who delights in torture, pain, and suffering and has a taste for flesh, both living and undead. The half-umbral dragon bugbear recently recovered the shard, which the slain black behir had been guarding, and is unsure what to do with it. He is more than willing to fight to keep the shard and will happily sacrifice the bugbears in the process. However, Gothrolg has no allegiance to the Dusk Queen and is unwilling to die for her or the shard; if reduced to 5 hp or fewer, he attempts to flee.

Treasure. Gothrolg wears a suit of *+1 leather armor* and a *+1 ring of protection*.

Searching the mound of black stones requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Buried within the mound are a broken potion bottle (empty), a *ring of resistance (cold)*, and a *wand of secrets*.

5. MESSAGE FROM THE SHADOWS

When the characters reach this point along the path in the forest, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

A hauntingly beautiful woman silently emerges from the shadows and stares at you with cold, dark eyes. The surrounding shadows seem to pool around her, and power pours from her body. She smiles, but her dark eyes remain cold as she speaks to you in soft, soothing tones.

"You are gathering my shards for me, and for that I am eternally grateful. Once you have all five, I trust you will bring them to me at once. If you do, I will reward each of you handsomely. I assure you, the rumors about me have been greatly exaggerated; I am not the monster many believe me to be. Bring me the shards and I shall be pleased. Keep them for yourself, though . . ."

The woman's voice slowly trails off and her cold eyes narrow menacingly.

The Dusk Queen is using *major image* to manipulate the PCs. Once the message has been delivered, the image continues to regard the PCs quietly for a few moments before slowly fading away.

GM Note. Although keyed to a specific location on the map, this encounter can occur at any point along the path, after the PCs have acquired two or three of the shards. Ideally, this should take place during a lull in the action and should be used for maximum dramatic effect.

6. THE HANGING TREE

When the characters approach this point in the forest, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

A lone, twisted tree rises from a small hill ahead of you. Skeletons, some with their hands still bound behind their backs, hang from strong branches high up in the tree. The branches creak as the skeletons twist and sway in the wind. By all appearances, these gruesome remains have been here for a very long time.

High up on the trunk, a mirror shard is deeply embedded in a thick branch.

This was once known as the Hanging Tree. The skeletons belonged to people who displeased the Dusk Queen during her reign. Unless the PCs possess magical means to reach the shard, they will need to climb to reach it (DC 12 Strength [Athletics] or Dexterity [Acrobatics] check).

The shard is embedded in a thick branch 40 feet up the tree. A PC who reaches the shard can attempt to pry it loose (DC 10 Dexterity check) or forcibly yank it free (DC 10 Strength check). Failing either of these checks by 3 or more requires a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being cut by the shard for 3 (1d6) slashing damage. Failing either check by 10 or more requires a successful DC 17 Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling from the tree for 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage.

The shard is too firmly embedded in the tree for *mage hand* or similar magic to pull free.





Creatures. A **specter** and two **wraiths** guard the shard. They swarm out suddenly from the surrounding shadows and attack as soon as the shard is disturbed.

Treasure. A *ring of the ram* rests on one of the skeleton's fingers.

7. THE PIT OF SHADOWS

When the party approaches the pit, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

An oblong pit yawns like a jagged wound in the ground in front of you. It is perhaps 20 feet across and at least twice that in length. A dense, almost palpable blackness seems to rise from the depths of the pit.

It is difficult to see very far into the pit. PCs without darkvision cannot see more than a few feet. PCs with darkvision have the limits of their sight halved.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a partially worn and eroded set of ancient stone steps cut into the sides of the pit. The steps wind their way precariously downward into the darkness before eventually ending 60 feet below at a stone ledge that juts out abruptly.

Hazard. The steps are extremely steep and uneven, making them difficult to navigate. PCs failing a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check fall from the steps and crash to the stone ledge below, taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage.

If the PCs take precautionary measures, such as using rope or other climbing gear, the checks are made with advantage.

GM Note. Although characters falling from the steps should normally have a chance of missing the stone ledge and falling into the swirling darkness, doing so would certainly take the character out of the adventure! Therefore, be sure to play up the dramatic impact of a falling character barely managing to grab hold of something as they crash onto the ledge and to avoid falling farther.

The Pit. Once the PCs are close enough to the stone ledge, read:

Peering over the edge of the stone outcrop, you see a swirling miasma of inky blackness some 50 feet farther down. This strange vortex of darkness resembles impossibly dense storm clouds which completely fill the remainder of the deep pit.

This mysterious, swirling cloud of darkness is, in fact, a portal to the Shadow Realm (if you have already set this adventure in the Shadow Realm, assume this portal transports anyone passing through it to another location on the plane—perhaps into some powerful fey noble's dungeon).

Once on the ledge, the PCs discover a cave opening. Like the rest of the shadowy darkness within the pit, visibility is difficult even for those with darkvision.

The Cave. The cave opening leads directly into a natural cavern 60 feet across and 40 feet high. At the center of the cavern, narrow steps leading up to a stone ring are just barely discernible.

The stone ring is approximately two feet high, 10 feet in diameter, and encloses a pool of dark water 15 feet deep. A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a glint from a mirror shard lying at the very bottom of the pool.

Creature. Ilmareth, an **elder shadow drake** (see appendix), dwells here with his two "pet" **shadows.** Ilmareth, who had been the Dusk Queen's fiercely devoted mount, was devastated and confused by her sudden disappearance. He retreated here to his lair and sank into a long, deep depression. Ilmareth knew of the shard in his pool, but until the recent whispers of his Queen's return, he was unsure what to do with it.

As soon as anyone touches or otherwise interacts with the water, read:

A large dragon-like creature with black scales and shadowy wings emerges suddenly from the darkness. The creature's red eyes glare at you as it speaks in a deep, monotone voice:

"I know why you have come, but I am a loyal servant of the queen. You'll not take this shard; the only thing I will give you is DEATH!"

Ilmareth attacks with reckless abandon to protect his shard, as do the two shadows that share his cave with him. If the battle goes particularly poorly for him, he attempts to escape the cave with the shard and retreat to the Dusk Tower.

Treasure. A *bead of force*, a slightly rusted *mace of disruption* with the word "Nanroc" faintly carved into the head, and pouch with 120 gp can be found at the bottom of the well.

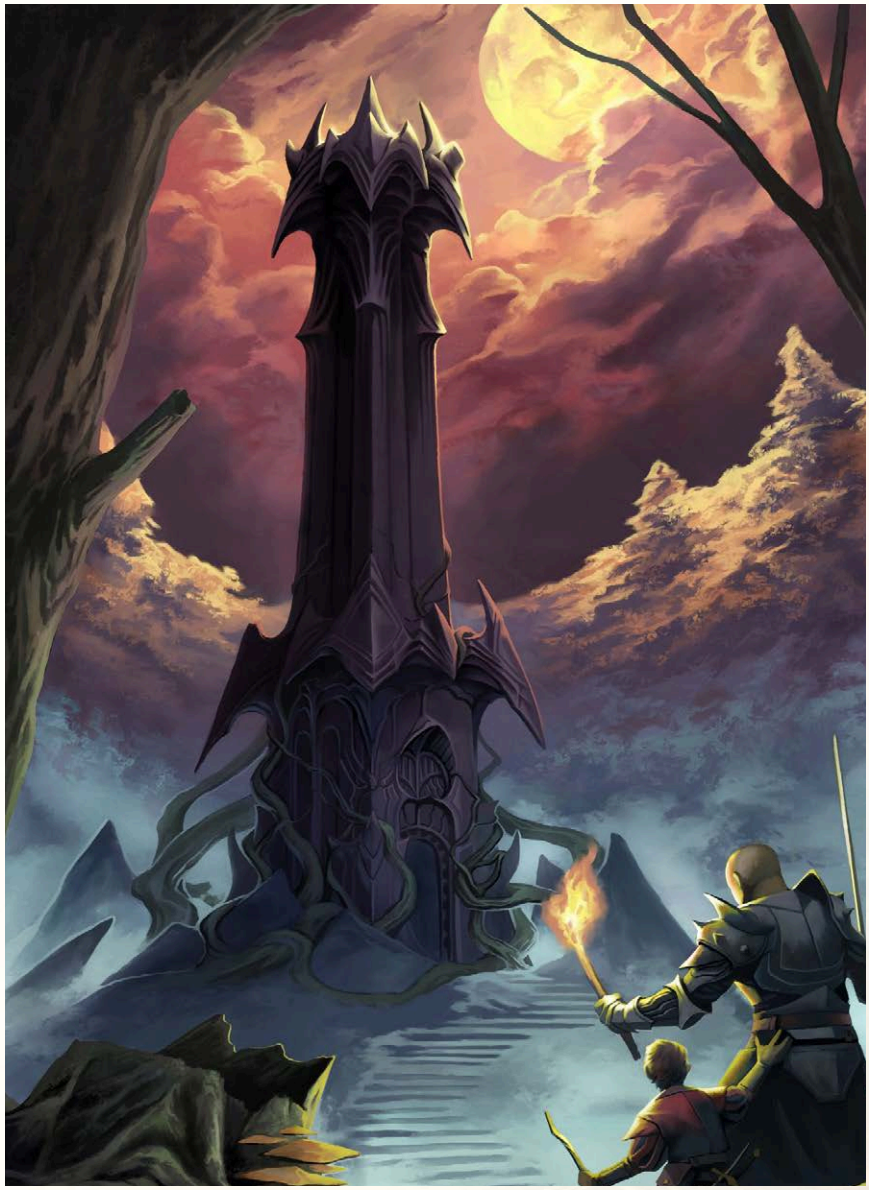
The Queen of Shadows

Once the PCs have all five shards, they must confront the Dusk Queen, making their way to the clearing near the center of the forest and infiltrating the Dusk Tower itself.

8. THE DUSK QUEEN'S TOWER

When the characters approach the tower, read:

The tower appears to be made of smooth black stone. There are no windows and only a single door. The tower is clearly in disrepair; bits of the stone have crumbled away and cracks run like spider webs across its surface. Vines snake up the outside, as if trying to choke the life from the tower or perhaps pull it to the ground.



Front Door. A single ornate door, crafted of sturdy darkwood and reinforced with black iron, is the tower's only entrance. Although the door is not physically locked, it is warded with *arcane lock* and protected by a *glyph of warding* (31 [7d8] cold damage, DC 18 Dexterity saving throw for half). The darkwood door is three inches thick, has AC 15, 18 hit points, and damage threshold 5.

Once the PCs enter the tower, read:

A single large chamber opens before you. There is no ceiling overhead; the wooden floors of the upper levels appear to have crumbled away long ago. A massive chandelier lies twisted and broken in the middle of the floor, apparently having crashed to the floor when the ceiling above rotted away. Thick shadows fill the upper reaches of the tower.

Directly across from you, on a black marble dais at the far end of the chamber, sits an ornate black throne.

To either side of the throne, once-majestic stairs climb the walls, reaching as high as one's head before crumbling away.

To the right of the throne, a large oval mirror in a thick darkwood frame hangs on the stone wall. The frame is carved with delicate runes, many of which look chipped or defaced.



The glass in the mirror has clearly been shattered; thousands of tiny cracks create a chaotic spider-web pattern across its surface. In five distinct spots, large pieces of the glass, each about the size of a man's hand, are missing entirely.

A large tapestry depicts the Dusk Queen riding her shadow drake mount, Ilmareth, against the backdrop of a stormy night sky. Well-worn, the tapestry is of superior workmanship and worth at least 300 gp to the right buyer.

Creatures. The **Dusk Queen** (see appendix) is invisible and flying overhead in the shadowy, upper portion of the chamber. **Aazael** (see appendix), her loyal lieutenant, hides behind the throne. Once the PCs enter the throne room, she addresses them in a soothing and friendly tone, using the strange acoustics of the tower to throw her voice so she does not give away her position:

Greetings, my friends. I trust you have retrieved all of my mirror shards for me? Please kindly place them on my throne and then step back. Once you have done so, I will reward you handsomely as promised. I am, after all, a just queen, true to my word.

The Dusk Queen has been monitoring the party's progress for some time and has had plenty of time to prepare for their arrival. She uses her supply of scrolls to cast *greater invisibility*, *freedom of movement*, *mage armor*, and *true seeing* (these additional boons are noted in the statistics block above and marked with an * where applicable).

The Dusk Queen focuses all her charisma and powers of persuasion to cajole the shards from the PCs. If they foolishly obey her command, Aazael attacks them while she swoops in to claim her precious shards and tries to repair her mirror. She can replace one shard each round.

If she is unsuccessful in convincing the heroes to obey, the Dusk Queen quickly becomes furious and addresses the PCs in a menacing voice:

"FOOLS! If you will not listen to reason, then I will pluck the shards from your cold, lifeless hands!"

As the Dusk Queen's angry words echo in the chamber, an ominous-looking warrior clad in black armor and wielding a glowing black glaive appears out of the shadows. Lifeless eyes burn from inside the creature's hollow skull.

During combat, The Dusk Queen attacks with spells while remaining well-hidden and protected in the shadows high overhead for as long as possible, using every means at her disposal to destroy the PCs and take the shards while the dread knight pummels



them in combat on the ground. Because there are no longer any upper floors, the inside of the tower is essentially a shadowy, 80-foot-high shaft.

GM Note. A PC with all five shards attempting to use the *sacred flame* power against the Dusk Queen or her dread knight must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw each time to force the shards to comply.

Adventure Conclusion

Replacing the five shards into the empty spots on the broken mirror is simple enough, assuming the PCs still wish to. When the first shard is replaced, the mirror's frame begins to glow slightly, but the thousands of spidery cracks remain. Once the final shard is placed into the mirror, all five immediately fuse into the rest of the glass and the cracks magically repair themselves, leaving a perfectly smooth and whole mirror once again. The mirror is firmly attached to the wall with powerful magic and cannot be removed by anything short of a *wish* spell or similar magic.

If repaired, the mirror allows the PCs to step into the glass and magically transport themselves away from the tower, as the *teleport* spell. Without the various command words and intimate knowledge of how the mirror works, however, the PCs are unable to use any of the mirror's other powers.

Clever PCs may realize there is little compelling reason to repair the mirror at all now that the Dusk Queen has been destroyed and might instead decide to keep the five mirror shards. If so, the shards keep their magical qualities. What's more, if the Dusk Queen is dead, the shards no longer possess the queen's life essence and therefore no longer require a Wisdom saving throw when using their *sacred flame* ability. The PCs have acquired a unique and powerful treasure, indeed!

Treasure. In addition to the shards and the considerable magic possessed by the Dusk Queen and her Dread Knight, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a compartment concealed in the base of the throne. Hidden inside is the *Shadow Grimoire* (see appendix).



Tower Destruction. Once the PCs have had time to catch their breath and search the throne room, read the following:

A tremor ripples across the floor of the throne room. Moments later, an even stronger tremor rocks the entire tower. Dust and bits of stone begin to fall as large cracks appear on the stone walls! The shaking quickly grows more and more violent, making it abundantly clear the tower is in danger of collapse!

If the PCs move quickly, they can get out in time and move to a safe distance just as the entire tower crashes to the ground in a cacophonous and deafening roar, leaving nothing but a massive pile of stone, rubble, and absolute destruction!

If, for some reason, the PCs choose to remain inside the tower, they most certainly meet with the same grim fate.

GM Note. The tower's collapse destroys the Dusk Queen's mirror. The force of the collapse is not powerful enough to ruin Aazael's armor, however, which means the dread knight begins to rejuvenate 1d10 days later while still buried under the rubble.

Appendix

The adventures in this book feature a variety of magic items and creatures. The referenced magic items and creatures not present in the core rulebooks, *System Reference Document 5.1*, or *Book of Ebon Tides* are presented here.

Magic Items

Each of the following magic items appears in one of the adventures presented in this book.

Chitinous Club of c'Naazo

Weapon (maul), uncommon (requires attunement)

Once a tentacle of the monstrosity c'Naazo, this massive club made of segmented chitin is suffused with glowing, phosphorescent green magic and emits an unpleasant odor when wielded.

You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Venomous Spray. As an action, you point the weapon at your enemies and spray forth a noxious cone of poison. Each creature in a 15-foot cone must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Goblin Chisel

Wondrous Item, uncommon

Used in the construction of a small goblin community in the Paletree Rise, this chisel is made of hardened grick beak. While using the *goblin chisel*, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses your proficiency with Mason's tools or Woodcarver's tools.

Liliana's Rose

Wondrous item, rare

This rose is fashioned of blood-red crystal affixed to a stem crafted of green gold, complete with hammered green-gold leaves and sharp thorns. The rose glows with an inner light that, when held, seems to pulse to the heartbeat of its bearer. A white silk ribbon is tied to the rose's stem, stitched with Elvish runes of gold thread, representing light, life, and revelation.

While you carry it, you can perform the following actions:

Rose of Radiance. The rose gives off light equal to that of a candle. As a bonus action, you can adjust the brightness of its illumination, extinguishing it entirely or increasing it so that it equals the brightness of a hooded lantern.

Not Yet My Love. As an action, you can, at will, touch a creature with the rose and cast *spare the dying*.

Shared Suffering. As a bonus action, you can prick your finger on one of the thorns of the rose, allowing it to feed on your blood and causing you 7 2d6 points of damage. If you then touch the rose to a creature, you can, as an action, heal it for 2d6 points or provide those points to the creature as temporary hit points. If used in the latter fashion, you cannot heal the damage done to you by the rose until those temporary hit points have been expended. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Inspiration of the Muse. As an action, you can use the rose to provide one creature with inspiration. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest. If the creature does not expend the awarded inspiration by the time you next finish a long rest, the inspiration expires.

The Luminous Codex

Wondrous Item, legendary (requires attunement by a wizard)

The *Luminous Codex* is a spellbook that contains all the spells that an archmage has, plus the following: *fireball*, *sunbeam*, *sunburst*, *plane shift*, *demiplane*, and *imprisonment*.

While you are attuned to it, you gain the following benefits:

Radiant Illumination. You know the *light* cantrip, and you can cast the *daylight* spell at will.

Radiant Blast. You can change the damage type of any spell you cast to radiant damage. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Radiant Resilience. You are immune to radiant damage, and you disregard any penalties you would normally suffer from being in sunlight.

Night Messenger's Coat

Wondrous Item, uncommon

This ankle-length black woolen coat has a high, flared collar and an elbow-length capelet. It has wide, open sleeves and a row of large, silver buttons down one side. At the front corners of the capelet, embroidery of stylized, shadowy horses in a rearing stance appear in silver thread. While wearing the coat, you gain the following benefits:



Shadow-touched Steed. You can, at will, use the coat to cast the spell *find steed* to summon a shadow-touched fey mount of your preferred size and type. Summoning this steed takes 1 round, but once you have chosen your mount and its form, the coat always summons this same companion for you. Removing the *night messenger's coat* causes a mount summoned with it to vanish as though you dismissed it. Summoning mounts via *find steed* from other sources automatically fail while you wear a *night messenger's coat.*

Witchlight Sight. You can see and sense the trails left behind by witchlights.

Shadow Sense. You have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to navigate or avoid getting lost in the Shadow Realm.

Incorruptible. You have advantage on all saving throws made to resist shadow corruption.

Painted Stones

Wondrous item, uncommon

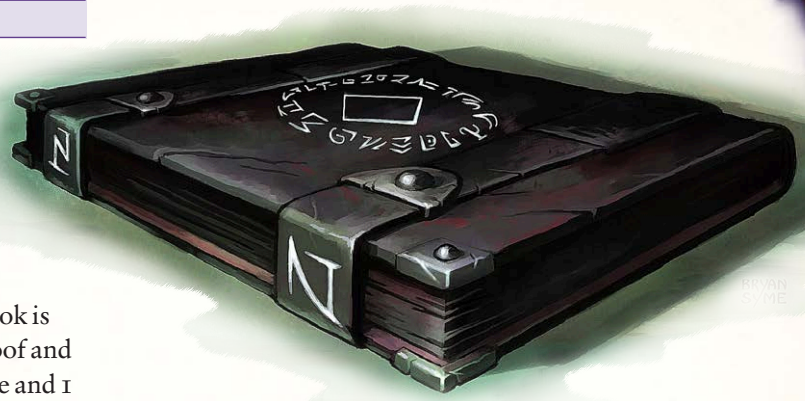
The painted stones are magical and emanate different auras of magic, depending on the color. If the stones are taken from the Whispering Plains, they instantly lose their magical properties. Returning a stone to the Plains does not bring back its magic.

Only one stone can affect a creature at a time. Each stones has one charge. With a bonus action, a creature holding one of the stones can expend its single charge, activating the corresponding effect below:

Color	Emanation	Effect
Puce	Evocation	For 1 minute, your weapon attacks deal additional fire damage equal to twice your proficiency bonus.
Indigo	Illusion	For 1 minute, you become invisible (no concentration required); the effect ends if you attack or cast a spell.
Violet	Enchantment	For 1 minute, you and one willing creature you can see within 30 feet become immune to the frightened and charmed conditions.
Slate	Divination	For 1 minute, all attacks against you are made with disadvantage.
Mustard	Transmutation	For 1 hour, you gain the benefits of the enhance ability spell, choosing two of the spell's effects instead of one (no concentration required).
Juniper	Abjuration	A magical shield that has a number of hit points equal to five times your proficiency bonus surrounds you. When you have the shield active and take damage, the shield's hit points are lost first, and any leftover damage carries over to your normal hit points. The shield lasts for 1 minute, or until the shield's hit points are reduced to 0.
Umber	Conjuration	For 1 minute, you can use your reaction to fling a magical spike at a target you can see within 60 feet. The spike automatically hits its target, causing and amount of force damage equal to your proficiency bonus.
Bone	Necromancy	For 1 minute, each time you damage a creature with a weapon or spell attack, you regain an amount of hit points equal to your proficiency bonus.

Shadow Grimoire

Wondrous item, fabled (5th-level and higher properties require attunement)



This thick tome is covered in inky black nightmare hide and bound with iron overlaid with silver. Delicate silver runes are inlaid in a circular pattern across the cover. The pages within are written in silver ink on jet-black paper. The book is extremely well-crafted, durable, and waterproof and measures just over 12 inches tall, 9 inches wide and 1 inch thick.

While the grimoire is on your person, you have advantage on all skill checks pertaining to shadow or darkness magic, geography, history, and denizens of the Shadow Realm.

Sentience. The *Shadow Grimoire* is a sentient neutral spellbook with an Intelligence of 15, a Wisdom of 15, and a Charisma of 14. It has an Armor Class of 15 and 20 hit points. It regains 1d8 + 4 hit points each evening at dusk. It has hearing and normal vision out to a range of 30 feet and darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.

The book can speak, read, and understand Common and Umbral and can communicate with its owner telepathically out to a range of 60 feet.

Personality. The *Shadow Grimoire* is intelligent, haughty, and extremely proud of its abilities and its unique nature. Once it decides to reveal its sentience and awareness, it expects to be treated in every way like a highly regarded equal. If the grimoire is confident its owner shares its outlook and goals, it reveals its abilities and complies with most requests.

It is often mysterious, cryptic, and prone to falling silent for long periods of time without cause or explanation. If it feels it is being mistreated or not shown the proper level of respect, the grimoire snaps itself shut and refuses to open or use any of its abilities until the situation changes to its satisfaction.

The grimoire has little interest in good or evil, law or chaos. Its primary interests lie in magic, specifically shadow and darkness magic or anything pertaining to the Shadow Realm. The grimoire is single-minded in its desire to learn all it can about shadow magic, and it expects its owner to share this desire. It insists that its owner prepare at least a few of the spells contained within its pages every day (the more, the better, of course). If the owner refuses, the grimoire may (at the GM's discretion) demand to be given to someone more worthy of it, make it impossible for its owner to attune to it, suppress one or more of its properties, or attempt to take control of its owner.

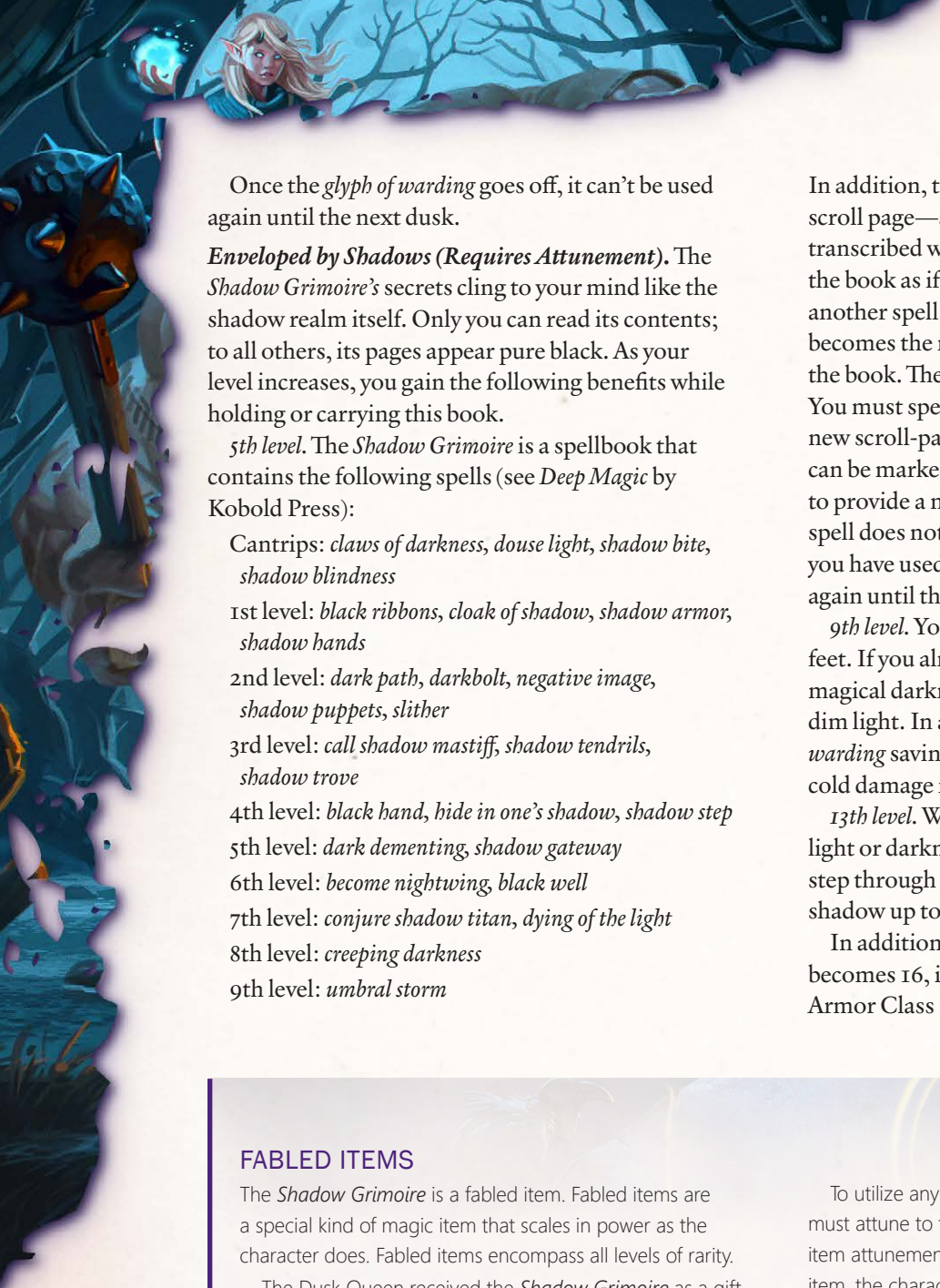
If the *Shadow Grimoire* attempts to take control of its owner, the owner must make a Charisma saving throw with a DC equal to 12 + the grimoire's Charisma modifier. On a failed save, the owner is charmed by the grimoire for 1d12 hours. While charmed, the owner must try to follow the grimoire's commands. Whether the attempt to control its owner succeeds or fails, the *Shadow Grimoire* can't use this power again until the next dusk.

Bookish. As an action, the *Shadow Grimoire* can open and close itself and flip instantly to any page it desires, including the current scroll page (see below). A DC 25 Strength check is required to close it, pry it open, or tear out a page against its will.

Shadow Jump (3/Day). The *Shadow Grimoire* can move from one shadow into another. As a bonus action, when the grimoire is in dim light or darkness, it can teleport up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see that is also in dim light or darkness.

Sunlight Vulnerability. The *Shadow Grimoire* must always remain cloaked in shadow or the darkness of night. The grimoire is damaged if exposed to direct sunlight (not merely a *daylight* spell). For every minute the *Shadow Grimoire* is exposed to sunlight, it takes 1d8 radiant damage. If this damage exceeds the book's total hit points, the *Shadow Grimoire* bursts into gray flame and is forever destroyed.

Warded. The *Shadow Grimoire* is protected by a *glyph of warding*. The glyph can be triggered by the grimoire if it feels threatened. The glyph causes explosive runes to erupt in a 20-foot-radius sphere of crackling, shadowy energy. Each creature in the area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 5d8 cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Once the *glyph of warding* goes off, it can't be used again until the next dusk.

Enveloped by Shadows (Requires Attunement). The *Shadow Grimoire's* secrets cling to your mind like the shadow realm itself. Only you can read its contents; to all others, its pages appear pure black. As your level increases, you gain the following benefits while holding or carrying this book.

5th level. The *Shadow Grimoire* is a spellbook that contains the following spells (see *Deep Magic* by Kobold Press):

Cantrips: *claws of darkness, douse light, shadow bite, shadow blindness*

1st level: *black ribbons, cloak of shadow, shadow armor, shadow hands*

2nd level: *dark path, darkbolt, negative image, shadow puppets, slither*

3rd level: *call shadow mastiff, shadow tendrils, shadow trove*

4th level: *black hand, hide in one's shadow, shadow step*

5th level: *dark dementing, shadow gateway*

6th level: *become nightwing, black well*

7th level: *conjure shadow titan, dying of the light*

8th level: *creeping darkness*

9th level: *umbral storm*

In addition, the *Shadow Grimoire* contains a special scroll page—a single spell from among the spells transcribed within it, that you may cast directly from the book as if it were a scroll. Once the spell is cast, another spell (other than the one just cast) randomly becomes the next spell that can be cast directly from the book. The spell is always of a level you can cast. You must spend an action to flip pages and find the new scroll-page spell. Once found, the scroll page can be marked for future reference. You do not need to provide a material component and casting the spell does not remove it from the spellbook. Once you have used the scroll page 3 times, it can't be used again until the next dusk.

9th level. You gain darkvision out to a range of 30 feet. If you already have darkvision, you can see in magical darkness out to a range of 30 feet as if in dim light. In addition, the *Shadow Grimoire's glyph of warding* saving throw DC increases to 14, and the cold damage increases to 6d8.

13th level. When the area you occupy is in dim light or darkness, you can use a bonus action to step through the shadow and emerge from another shadow up to 200 feet away.

In addition, the *Shadow Grimoire's* Intelligence becomes 16, its Wisdom 16, its Charisma 15, its Armor Class 17, and its hit points 25. Finally, the

FABLED ITEMS

The *Shadow Grimoire* is a fabled item. Fabled items are a special kind of magic item that scales in power as the character does. Fabled items encompass all levels of rarity.

The Dusk Queen received the *Shadow Grimoire* as a gift while she still dwelt in the realm of shadow. Little is known about who gave her the grimoire or the motives behind the gift. Some say it was to aid the Dusk Queen in bringing darkness to the realms of light, others say it was secretly a means for her enemies to thwart her plans.

Whatever the case, the mysterious Dusk Queen bonded with the dark tome and used its strange abilities to amass great power on the Material Plane. Many whisper that the Shadow Grimoire was perhaps the Dusk Queen's most prized possession.

Properties and Attunement

A fabled magic item begins as a common magic item. It grants a small but useful property to any character that possesses it. This minor property does not require attunement to use.

To utilize any of the higher-level properties, a character must attune to the fabled item per the standard magic item attunement rules. Once attuned to the fabled magic item, the character can use the fabled item's more powerful properties as the character increases in level. When an attuned character reaches a property's specified level, the property listed at that level becomes immediately available to the character. If a character of a level higher than 1st attunes to a fabled item, the item's level-dependent properties, up to the character's current level, become available to the character.

If a character chooses not to become attuned to the fabled item, the item remains a common magic item, granting the character only its minor property, regardless of the character's level. Unless otherwise noted, all properties granted by a fabled item are in effect if the character is wearing, carrying, or touching the item.

For much more information about fabled items, see *Vault of Magic* from Kobold Press.

grimoire's *glyph of warding* saving throw DC increases to 15, and the cold damage increases to 7d8.

17th level. You can use an action to transport yourself and up to eight willing creatures to the Shadow Realm as if you had cast the *plane shift* spell. You can't do this again until you finish a long rest. In addition, as an action, you may now choose which spell in the grimoire becomes a scroll page.

GM Note. The *Shadow Grimoire* is a powerful magic item. It is important to remember the *Shadow Grimoire* is the final authority on if and when its powers are used. The grimoire typically acquiesces to the owner's wishes, but that is hardly absolute—it always retains full control of its abilities. Essentially, the GM should treat the *Shadow Grimoire* as an NPC as well as a magic item, which makes it an excellent tool for dispensing special clues and other campaign information that might not be easy to convey otherwise. The grimoire can be a teacher and mentor as well as a mysterious source of secrets and knowledge.

If a PC decides to keep the grimoire, the GM should observe and cultivate the symbiotic relationship between them carefully. While the *Shadow Grimoire* retains control over its special abilities, it still relies on its owner to carry it around so it can learn and influence events.

Shroud of Kairious

Wondrous Item, very rare

The top of this brass censer has silhouettes of hourglasses and the sun punched through its surface.

When issued its command word, the censer begins to emit a hazy, jasmine-scented shroud of vapor in a 15-foot radius centered on it for 2 hours. The vapor shroud does not affect your vision or the vision or visibility of the creatures inside of it. Creatures standing inside the vapor shroud are immune to Oshragora's temporal distortions and magic spells and effects that alter time, such as *slow*, *haste*, or *time stop*.

Once per day, while the censer is emitting vapor, you can use the command word to jump backwards in time 1 hour, losing any progress or ill effects gained during the erased hour. Once you have used this function, the censer ceases emitting vapor.

Once the censer has been used, it cannot be used again until noon the next day.

Umbril Opal Necklace

Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)

This stunning necklace is crafted from finely wrought silver and sparkling black opals. When attuned to this necklace, your Charisma score increases by 2. Additionally, you have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

Monsters

The following monsters appearing in this book can be found in the titles specified. This table indicates suitable substitutions in cases where you do not have access to the book in question. (In cases where multiple monsters are listed, substitute that many of the core rules monster for each instance of the original monster.)

Original Creature	Source	Core Rules Substitution
arachnocrat devil	TOB2	barbed devil
child of the briar	TOB1	2 sprites
crinaea	TOB2	dryad, change her tree home to a fountain
dream eater	TOB1	incubus or succubus
elder shadow drake	TOB1	young black dragon, breath weapon deals cold damage
hound of the night	TOB1	winter wolf
ink devil	TOB1	2 imps
iron ghoul	TOB1	wight
mirror hag	TOB1	night hag
orphan of the black	TOB2	shadow-touched druid
razorleaf	CC	shambling mound
serpentfolk of Yig	CC	cult fanatic
shadow beast	TOB1	vrock
shadow blight	CC	awakened tree
stryx	TOB1	owl, Int 8 and can cast *comprehend languages* 3/day
trollkin raider	TOB2	bugbear
umbral vampire	TOB1	vampire spawn
weeping treant	TOB1	shadow-touched treant

CC = *Creature Codex*, TOB1 = *Tome of Beasts*, TOB2 = *Tome of Beasts 2*

Aazael, The Dread Knight

Medium Undead, Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 20 (*+1 plate, +1 ring of protection*)

HIT POINTS 85 (9d8 + 45)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES necrotic, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES Abyssal, Common

CHALLENGE 6 (2,300 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Special Equipment. Aazael has *+1 plate*, a *+1 ring of protection*, and a *+1 glaive*.

Dread Knight Weapons: Aazael's weapon attacks are magical. When he hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 3d6 necrotic damage (included in the attack).

Fear Aura: Any creature hostile to Aazael that starts its turn within 20 feet of the dread knight must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, unless Aazael is incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to Aazael's fear aura for the next 24 hours.

Magic Resistance. Aazael has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Rejuvenation. One day after Aazael is destroyed, his armor begins to rebuild the undead body trapped within. This process takes 1d10 days—if the body is destroyed before that time passes, the armor merely starts the process anew. After this time has elapsed, Aazael regains all his hit points and becomes active again (see sidebar for more information).

Undead Nature. Aazael doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Aazael makes two melee attacks.

+1 Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 6) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.



AAZAEL'S DREAD KNIGHT ARMOR

Aazael's armor is a preternatural second skin fused over the desiccated flesh and scarred bones locked within; the undead warrior's life force lingers on in his armor, much like a lich's essence is bound within a phylactery. Unless every part of Aazael's armor is ruined along with his body, Aazael rejuvenates after being destroyed.

Aazael's suit of deep black plate armor has AC 19, 45 hit points, and damage threshold 10. Merely breaking Aazael's armor does not destroy it; it must be ruined, such as by being disintegrated, exposed to the Upper Planes, or thrown into the heart of a volcano.

Summon Pet (1/Day): Aazael may summon Annominc, his fiendish black panther servant, which immediately appears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of him. Annominc remains for 1 hour, until it or Aazael dies, or until Aazael dismisses it as an action.

Annominc

Medium Fiend, Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 14

HIT POINTS 45 (10d8)

SPEED 50 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)	14 (+2)	7 (–2)

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire

SKILLS Perception +4, Stealth +6

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 1 (200 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Keen Smell: Annominc has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Pounce: If Annominc moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, Annominc can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

Claw: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.



Briar Troll

Large Giant, Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 105 (10d10 + 50)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18(+4)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	7 (–2)	11(+0)	6 (–2)

SKILLS Perception +3

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES Common, Giant

CHALLENGE 7 (2,900 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Brambleskin. A creature that hits the troll with a melee attack while within 5 feet of the troll or ends its turn within 5 feet of the troll takes 9 (2d8) piercing damage from the thorny brambles that cover its skin.

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

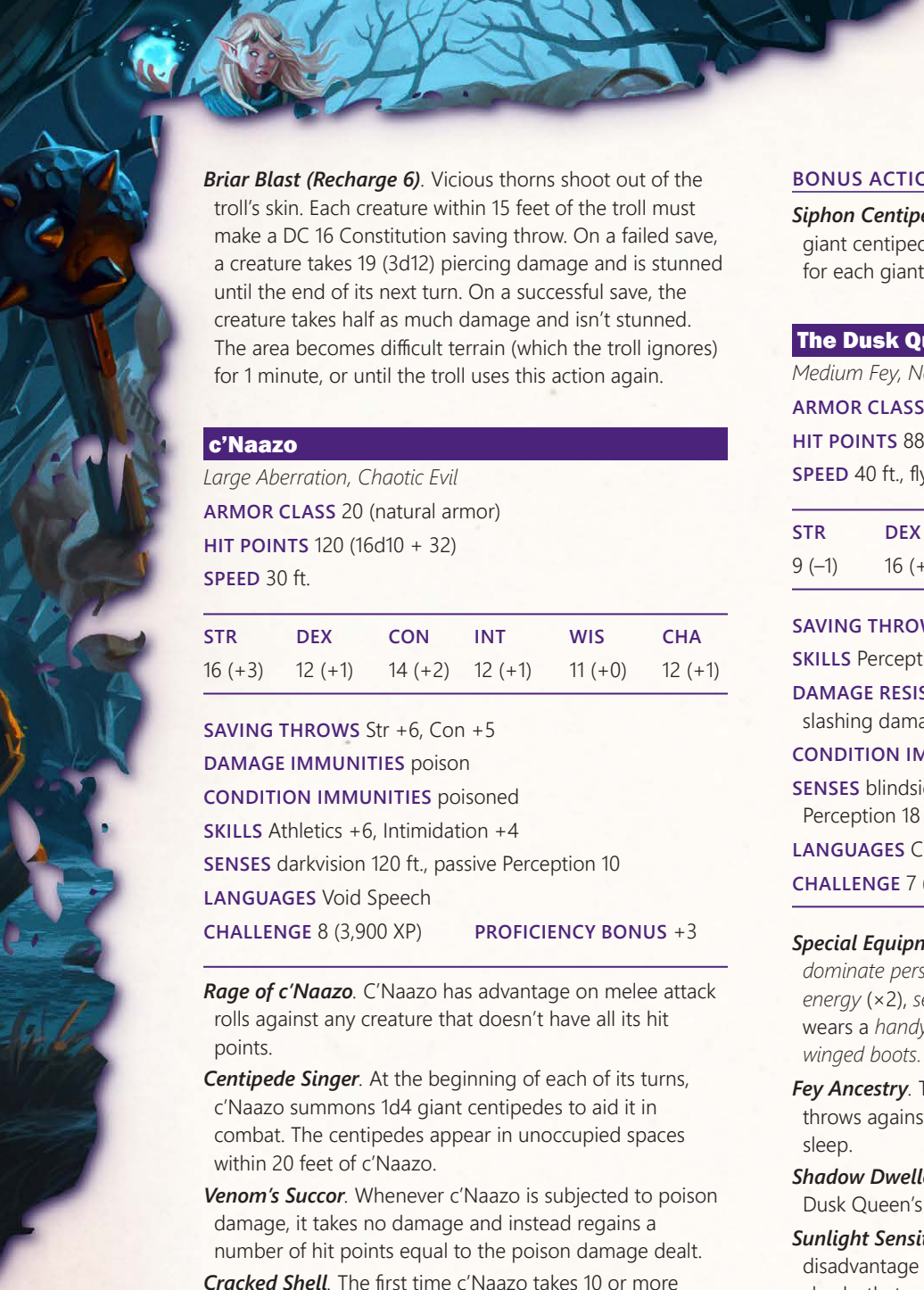
Regeneration. The troll regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The briar troll makes one Bite attack and two Claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, and if the target is a creature it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the troll can't bite another target.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.



Briar Blast (Recharge 6). Vicious thorns shoot out of the troll's skin. Each creature within 15 feet of the troll must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 19 (3d12) piercing damage and is stunned until the end of its next turn. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't stunned. The area becomes difficult terrain (which the troll ignores) for 1 minute, or until the troll uses this action again.

c'Naazo

Large Aberration, Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 20 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 120 (16d10 + 32)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

SAVING THROWS Str +6, Con +5

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES poisoned

SKILLS Athletics +6, Intimidation +4

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES Void Speech

CHALLENGE 8 (3,900 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Rage of c'Naazo. C'Naazo has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Centipede Singer. At the beginning of each of its turns, c'Naazo summons 1d4 giant centipedes to aid it in combat. The centipedes appear in unoccupied spaces within 20 feet of c'Naazo.

Venom's Succor. Whenever c'Naazo is subjected to poison damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the poison damage dealt.

Cracked Shell. The first time c'Naazo takes 10 or more bludgeoning damage at once from any source, its armor class is reduced to 16 until it completes a long rest.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. C'Naazo makes three Segmented Tentacle attacks.

Segmented Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Poison Spray (Recharge 6). C'Naazo sprays poisonous mist in a 15-ft. cone in front of it. Creatures caught within the spray must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) poison damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

BONUS ACTIONS

Siphon Centipedes. C'Naazo consumes any number of giant centipedes with 10 feet of it, regaining 5 hit points for each giant centipede consumed this way.

The Dusk Queen

Medium Fey, Neutral Evil

ARMOR CLASS 16 (with *mage armor*)

HIT POINTS 88 (16d8 + 16)

SPEED 40 ft., fly 40 ft. (with *winged boots*)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	21 (+5)

SAVING THROWS Dex +6, Con +4, Cha +8

SKILLS Perception +8, Stealth +6

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, frightened, exhaustion

SENSES blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

LANGUAGES Common, Elvish, Giant, Sylvan

CHALLENGE 7 (2,900 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Special Equipment. The Dusk Queen has *spell scrolls* of: *dominate person, globe of invulnerability, protection from energy* (×2), *see invisibility, slow,* and *true seeing.* She also wears a *handy haversack,* a *ring of feather falling,* and *winged boots.*

Fey Ancestry. The Dusk Queen has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Shadow Dweller. Magical darkness doesn't impede the Dusk Queen's darkvision.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the Dusk Queen has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The Dusk Queen has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Dusk Queen makes three Shadow Bolt attacks. She can replace one attack with a use of Spellcasting.

Dagger: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Shadow Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) necrotic damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage.

Call the Shadows (Recharge 5–6). The Dusk Queen magically causes shadows to pour out of a point she can

see within 60 feet of her. Each creature within 20 feet of that point must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 21 (6d6) necrotic damage, and its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to half the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. A creature dies if this effect reduces it hit point maximum to 0. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and its hit point maximum isn't reduced. A humanoid slain by this action rises at the start of the Dusk Queen's next turn as a shadow under her control, unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed. The Dusk Queen can have no more than ten shadows under her control at one time.

Spellcasting. The Dusk Queen casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Intelligence as her spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16):

At will: *bane*, *command*, *protection from evil and good*

2/day each: *blur**, *darkness*, *hold person*, *mage armor*, *vampiric touch**

1/day each: *black tentacles**, *dispel magic*, *greater invisibility*

*If using *Deep Magic for 5th Edition*, these spells are instead *shadow puppets*, *shadow tendrils*, and *black hand*, respectively.

BONUS ACTIONS

Shadow Traveler (3/Day). While in shadows, dim light, or darkness, the Dusk Queen disappears into the darkness and reappears in an unoccupied space she can see within 30 feet of her. A tendril of inky smoke appears at the origin and destination when she uses this bonus action.

REACTIONS

Magical Parry. The Dusk Queen adds 3 to her AC against one attack that would hit her. To do so, she must see the attacker and have at least one hand free.

Erestee Loff

Small Humanoid (Goblinoid), Neutral Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (studded leather)

HIT POINTS 49 (9d6 + 18)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

SAVING THROWS Dex +5, Int +5

SKILLS Acrobatics +5, Deception +2, Perception +4, Stealth +7

DAMAGE RESISTANCES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES Common, Goblin, Umbral, Thieves' Cant

CHALLENGE 2 (450 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Assassinate. During her first turn, Erestee has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit Erestee scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, Erestee deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Erestee that isn't incapacitated and Erestee doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

BONUS ACTIONS

Cunning Action. Erestee takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Fast Hands. Erestee makes a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, uses her thieves' tools to disarm a trap or open a lock, or takes the Use an Object action.

Unseemly Unseelie. Erestee uses a combination of rude gestures and sounds to distract one creature she can see within 30 feet. If the target can hear and see Erestee, it has disadvantage on the next attack roll it makes before the end of its next turn.

Gothrolg

Medium Humanoid (Goblinoid), Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (studded leather)

HIT POINTS 90 (12d8 + 36)

SPEED 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

SKILLS Intimidation +3, Stealth +6, Survival +4

DAMAGE RESISTANCES necrotic

SENSES blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Common, Draconic, Goblin

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Gothrolg hits with it (included in the attack).

Indominable Heart. Gothrolg has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned, or put to sleep.

Surprise Attack. If Gothrolg surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage from the attack.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Gothrolg makes three melee attacks.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage if used to make a ranged attack.

Necrotic Breath (Recharge 5–6): Gothrolg exhales a burst of withering energy in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Gruesome Plushy Swarm

Large Swarm of Tiny Constructs, Unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 14 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 67 (9d8 + 27)

SPEED 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	3 (–4)	10 (+0)	3 (–4)

DAMAGE VULNERABILITIES fire

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantine weapons

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Incessant Babble. At the start of its turn, the plushies in the swarm spout inane statements—in extremely saccharine tones—such as "You're my best friend!" "I love you!" "Hugs are my favorite!" "It's time for some fun!" and "Let's play!" The incessant babble has no effect on Fey, Constructs, or Undead. Each other creature within 60 feet of the swarm that can hear it must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage and becomes frightened of the swarm for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the swarm's incessant babble for the next 24 hours.

Immutable Form. The plushy swarm is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The plushy swarm has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The plushy swarm's flensing knives attacks are magical.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and it can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny plushy. The swarm can't regain hp or gain temporary hp.

ACTIONS

Flensing Knives. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) slashing damage, or 10 (3d6) slashing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

Jack Of Strings

Medium Fey, Chaotic Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 14

HIT POINTS 90 (12d8 + 36)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)

SAVING THROWS Dex +7

SKILLS Acrobatics +10, Performance +8, Sleight of Hand +7

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with cold iron weapons

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, frightened

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan, Umbral

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Magic Resistance. The jack of strings has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The jack of strings makes two Mocking Slap attacks.

Mocking Slap. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) psychic damage.

Animate Puppet. The jack of strings animates up to three wooden puppets it can see within 60 feet of it. This works like the animate objects spell, except the wooden puppet uses the statistics of a Small object, regardless of the puppet's actual size. The jack can have no more than five puppets animated at one time.

Puppet Link. One humanoid or beast the jack of strings can see within 60 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become magically linked to the jack's marionette. This link appears as a barely perceptible string between the jack's marionette and the target. A linked creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the link on a success.

While a target is linked, the jack of strings can use its reaction at the start of the target's turn to control the linked target. The jack of strings can make the target move, manipulate objects, attack, or take other purely physical actions. The jack can't make the target cast spells. While controlled, the target moves awkwardly and has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks. If the target receives a suicidal command from the jack of strings, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success.

The jack of strings can have only one target linked at a time. If it links another, the effect on the previous target ends. If a creature dies while linked to the jack's marionette, the creature's body becomes a wooden puppet that resembles the creature.

Nymph

Medium Fey, Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 14

HIT POINTS 60 (8d8 + 24)

SPEED 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

SAVING THROWS Dex +6, Cha +7

SKILLS Perception +4, Stealth +6

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES Common, Elvish, Sylvan

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Amphibious. The nymph can breathe air and water.

Blinding Beauty. When a creature that can see the nymph starts its turn within 30 feet of the nymph, the nymph can force it to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw if the nymph isn't incapacitated and can see the creature. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature is permanently blinded. Otherwise, a creature that fails its save is blinded for 1 minute. A blinded creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Unless surprised, a creature can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If the creature does so, it can't see the nymph until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If the creature looks at the nymph in the meantime, it must immediately make the save.

Water Spirit. While the nymph is in contact with or submerged in a body of water, she ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce her speed or cause her to be restrained. She can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

ACTIONS

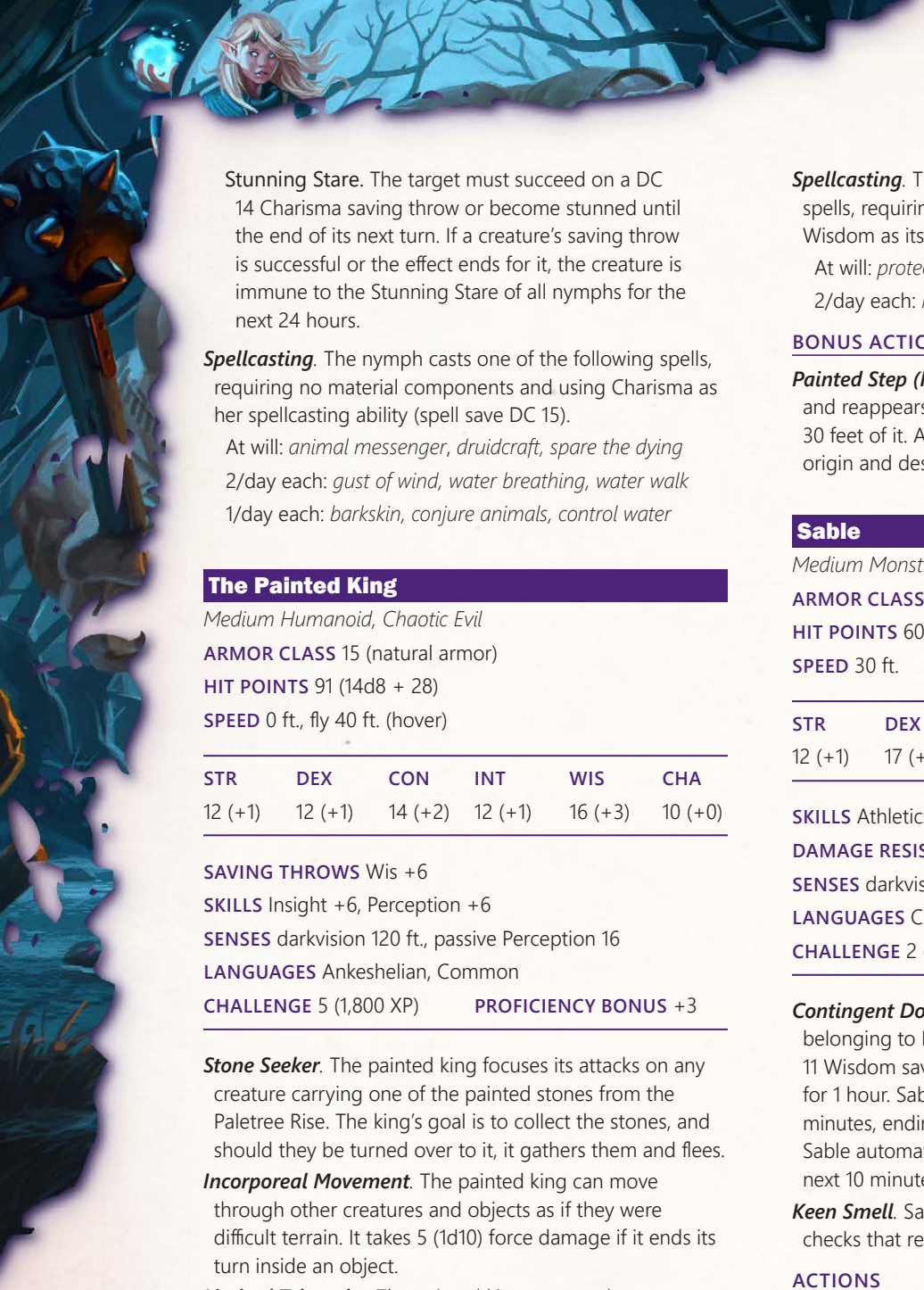
Multiattack. The nymph uses Nymph's Gaze. She then makes two Dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Nymph's Gaze. The nymph directs her gaze at one creature she can see within 30 feet of her, targeting the creature with one of the following effects:

Concerned Look. The target regains 10 (3d6) hit points. Once a creature has regained 20 hit points from this stare, it can't regain more hit points from this nymph's Concerned Gaze until it finishes a long rest.

Glare of Nature's Fury. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Stunning Stare. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or become stunned until the end of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the Stunning Stare of all nymphs for the next 24 hours.

Spellcasting. The nymph casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Charisma as her spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15).

At will: *animal messenger*, *druidcraft, spare the dying*

2/day each: *gust of wind, water breathing, water walk*

1/day each: *barkskin, conjure animals, control water*

The Painted King

Medium Humanoid, Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 91 (14d8 + 28)

SPEED 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

SAVING THROWS Wis +6

SKILLS Insight +6, Perception +6

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

LANGUAGES Ankeshelian, Common

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Stone Seeker. The painted king focuses its attacks on any creature carrying one of the painted stones from the Paletree Rise. The king's goal is to collect the stones, and should they be turned over to it, it gathers them and flees.

Incorporeal Movement. The painted king can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Limited Telepathy. The painted king can speak telepathically with any creature within 60 feet of it that carries a painted stone.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The painted king makes three Claw attacks or Paint Splash attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Paint Splash. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Spellcasting. The painted king casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Wisdom as its spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14):

At will: *protection from energy*

2/day each: *hold person, silence*

BONUS ACTIONS

Painted Step (Recharge 5–6). The painted king disappears and reappears in an unoccupied space it can see within 30 feet of it. A brief splash of colorful paint appears at the origin and destination when it uses this bonus action.

Sable

Medium Monstrosity, Chaotic Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 13

HIT POINTS 60 (8d8 + 24)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	5 (–3)	8 (–1)	11 (+0)

SKILLS Athletics +3, Perception +1, Stealth +5

DAMAGE RESISTANCES necrotic

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Common

CHALLENGE 2 (450 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Contingent Docility. If a creature presents an item belonging to Mery to Sable, Sable must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the creature for 1 hour. Sable can repeat the saving throw every 10 minutes, ending the effect on a success. If the effect ends, Sable automatically succeeds on this saving throw for the next 10 minutes.

Keen Smell. Sable has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sable makes one Bite attack and one Shadow Tendril attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 11 Strength check or be knocked prone.

Shadow Tendril. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 2 (1d4) necrotic damage.

Shadow Nymph

Medium Fey, Neutral Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15

HIT POINTS 93 (11d8 + 44)

SPEED 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)

SAVING THROWS Dex +8, Cha +9

SKILLS Deception +9, Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Stealth +8

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, necrotic

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan, Umbral

CHALLENGE 6 (2,300 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Amphibious. The shadow nymph can breathe air and water.

Blinding Beauty. When a creature that can see the nymph starts its turn within 30 feet of the nymph, the nymph can force it to make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw if the nymph isn't incapacitated and can see the creature. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature is permanently blinded. Otherwise, a creature that fails its save is blinded for 1 minute. A blinded creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Unless surprised, a creature can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If the creature does so, it can't see the nymph until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If the creature looks at the nymph in the meantime, it must immediately make the save.

Shadow Dweller. Magical darkness doesn't impede the shadow nymph's darkvision.

Water Spirit. While the shadow nymph is in contact with or submerged in a body of water, she ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce her speed or cause her to be restrained. She can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow nymph uses Shadow Nymph's Gaze. She then makes two Dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage.

Shadow Nymph's Gaze. The shadow nymph directs her gaze at one creature she can see within 30 feet of her, targeting the creature with one of the following effects:

Icy Glance. The target must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 10 (3d6) cold damage and is restrained until the end of its next turn as ice forms around its limbs. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't restrained.

Shadow Glare. The target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Stunning Stare. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or become stunned until the end of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the shadow nymph's Stunning Stare for the next 24 hours.

Spellcasting. The shadow nymph casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Charisma as her spellcasting ability (spell save DC 17).

At will: *animal messenger, detect magic, fog cloud*

2/day each: *darkness, faerie fire, water walk*

1/day each: *barkskin, conjure woodland beings, control water*

BONUS ACTIONS

Shadow Blend. The shadow nymph magically turns invisible until she attacks or uses Shadow Nymph's Gaze, until she enters an area of bright light, or until she ends it as a bonus action. She can use this bonus action only while in dim light or darkness.

The Ticktock Man

Found on page 388 of *Creature Codex*, the xiphus is a speedy fey whose heart was replaced with clockwork long ago, granting it some power over time. In *The House of Reciprocities* (see page 110), a particularly successful xiphus, known as the Ticktock Man, resides in the Ticktock Tower in the Shadow Realm, where he collects stolen memories. The Ticktock Tower serves as his lair, and when encountered there, he has a challenging rating of 6 (2,300 XP). All temporal effects created by Ticktock Tower end abruptly when the Ticktock Man dies. All the clock doors become insubstantial and slowly fade from existence, except for the Nexus Portal, which remains.

The Ticktock Man

Small Fey, Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15

HIT POINTS 55 (10d6 + 20)

SPEED 50 ft.

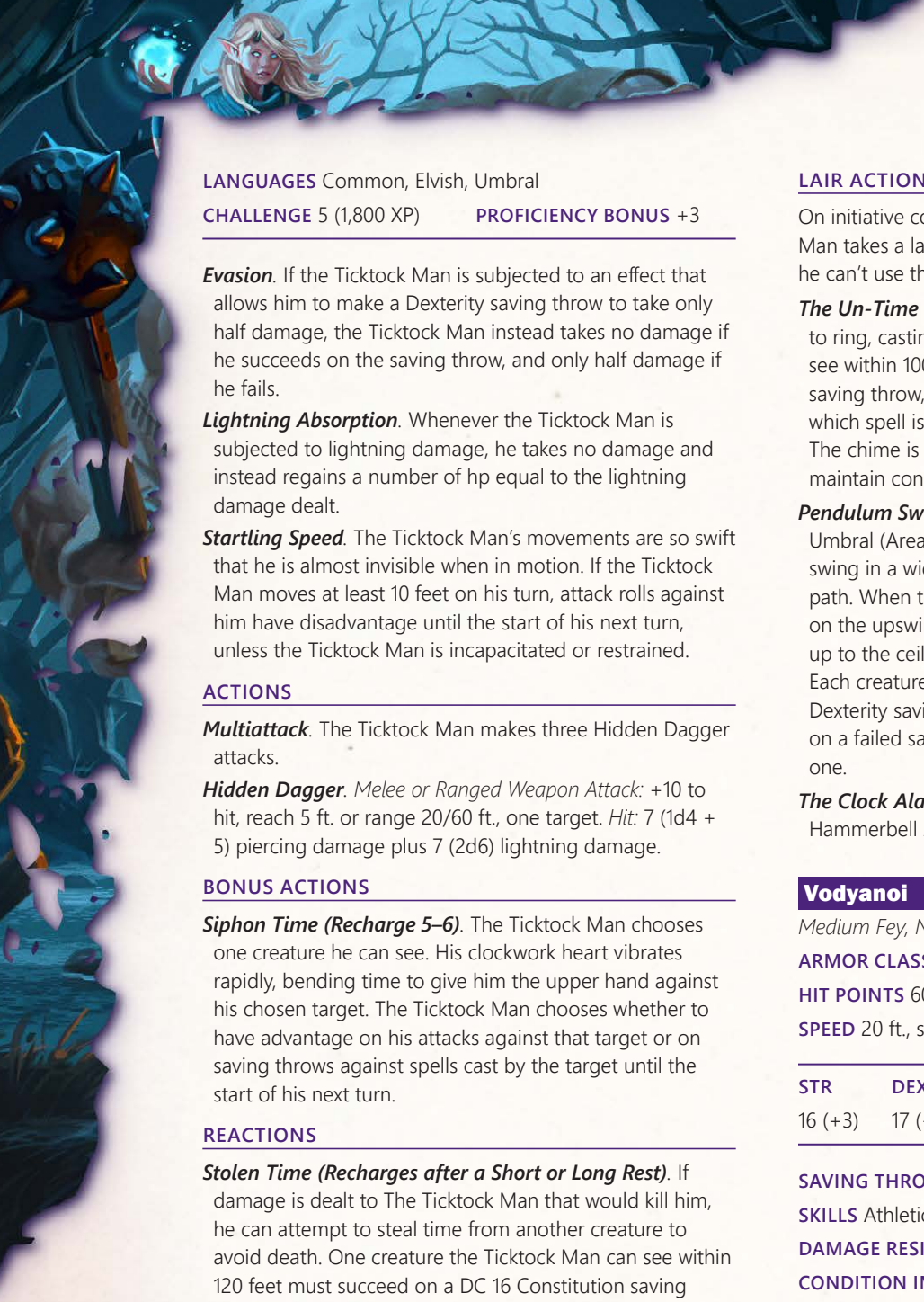
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	21 (+5)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Dex +8

SKILLS Acrobatics +8, Perception +4, Stealth +8

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES lightning

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14



LANGUAGES Common, Elvish, Umbral

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

Evasion. If the Ticktock Man is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the Ticktock Man instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Lightning Absorption. Whenever the Ticktock Man is subjected to lightning damage, he takes no damage and instead regains a number of hp equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Startling Speed. The Ticktock Man's movements are so swift that he is almost invisible when in motion. If the Ticktock Man moves at least 10 feet on his turn, attack rolls against him have disadvantage until the start of his next turn, unless the Ticktock Man is incapacitated or restrained.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Ticktock Man makes three Hidden Dagger attacks.

Hidden Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) lightning damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Siphon Time (Recharge 5–6). The Ticktock Man chooses one creature he can see. His clockwork heart vibrates rapidly, bending time to give him the upper hand against his chosen target. The Ticktock Man chooses whether to have advantage on his attacks against that target or on saving throws against spells cast by the target until the start of his next turn.

REACTIONS

Stolen Time (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If damage is dealt to The Ticktock Man that would kill him, he can attempt to steal time from another creature to avoid death. One creature the Ticktock Man can see within 120 feet must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, and the Ticktock Man regains hp equal to the damage taken. The target is stable and doesn't die if this effect reduces its hp to 0. After 2 rounds, the xiphus takes necrotic damage, and the target regains hp, equal to the original amount borrowed.

THE TICKTOCK MAN'S LAIR

The Ticktock Man channels his obsession with time into the massive tower made of clocks in which he resides. Ticktock Tower is somehow connected to the flow of time itself. The Ticktock Man is a similarly connected to the Tower in a sort of symbiotic relationship, allowing him to further manipulate aspects of time while inside his lair.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing all initiative ties), the Ticktock Man takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; he can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

The Un-Time Chime. The Ticktock Man causes the chime to ring, casting a random spell on one creature he can see within 100 feet of the chime. If the spell requires a saving throw, the spell save DC is 16. Roll 1d4 to determine which spell is cast: 1–2. *slow*; 3. *dispel magic*; 4. *confusion*. The chime is the spell's origin, but the Ticktock Man must maintain concentration if the spell requires concentration.

Pendulum Swing. The Ticktock Man can cause either the Umbral (Area 2) or Penumbral (Area 7) pendulums to swing in a wide arc, potentially striking any creatures in its path. When this effect is triggered, time seems to skip as, on the upswing, the pendulum suddenly goes all the way up to the ceiling, then swings down with blazing speed. Each creature in the pendulum's path must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The Clock Alarms. The Ticktock Man can activate either the Hammerbell Alarm (Area 4) or the Cuckoo Alarm (Area 5).

Vodyanoi

Medium Fey, Neutral Evil

ARMOR CLASS 13

HIT POINTS 60 (8d8 + 24)

SPEED 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Con +5, Wis +4

SKILLS Athletics +5, Perception +4, Stealth +5

DAMAGE RESISTANCES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES poisoned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES Common, Primordial, Sylvan

CHALLENGE 2 (450 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Amphibious. The vodyanoi can breathe air and water.

Water Mastery. The vodyanoi has advantage on attack rolls if both it and its opponent are in contact with the same body of water. If the opponent and the vodyanoi are both on dry ground, the vodyanoi has disadvantage on attack rolls.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vodyanoi makes two Claws attacks.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13).

Crashing Wave (1/Day). The vodyanoi conjures a wave of water in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Strength saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone if on land or pushed up to 10 feet away from the vodyanoi if submerged in water. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone or pushed.

Spellcasting. The vodyanoi casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Charisma as its spellcasting ability (spell save DC 12):

At will: *water breathing, water walk*

1/day: *control water*

BONUS ACTIONS

Change Shape. The vodyanoi magically transforms into a Small or Medium Humanoid that has a challenge rating no higher than its own, or back into its true form. Other than its size, its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by its new form (the vodyanoi's choice). It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Weeper in Shadow

Large Plant, Neutral Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 93 (11d10 + 33)

SPEED 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	6 (–2)

SAVING THROWS Str +4, Con +5

DAMAGE RESISTANCES fire

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned

SENSES blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES understands Common but can't speak

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

Alien Mind. A creature who attempts to communicate with the weeper must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Magic Resistance. The weeper has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The weeper makes three attacks, only one of which can be a Stinger attack.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Lashing Tendril. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 12) if it is a Medium or smaller creature. The weeper has two lashing tendrils, each of which can grapple only one target.

Grasping Tendril. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target is grappled (escape DC 12), and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be pulled to up to 15 feet toward the weeper. It has two grasping tendrils, each of which can grapple only one target. If it is grappling at least one creature with its grasping tendril, the weeper can use this action to pull all creatures grappled in this way up to 30 feet closer to it.

BONUS ACTIONS

Maddening Song (Recharge 4–6). The weeper sings its maddening melody. The song doesn't typically affect sentient creatures but being subjected to it at close range can have deleterious effects. Each creature within 15 feet of the weeper that can hear its song must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the end of its next turn, as the alien song muddles the mind and confuses the senses.

Weeper Sapling

Small Plant, Unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 12 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 7 (2d6)

SPEED 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	2 (–4)	6 (–2)	6 (–2)

DAMAGE RESISTANCES fire

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned

SENSES blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius)

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 0 (10 XP) **PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

ACTIONS

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

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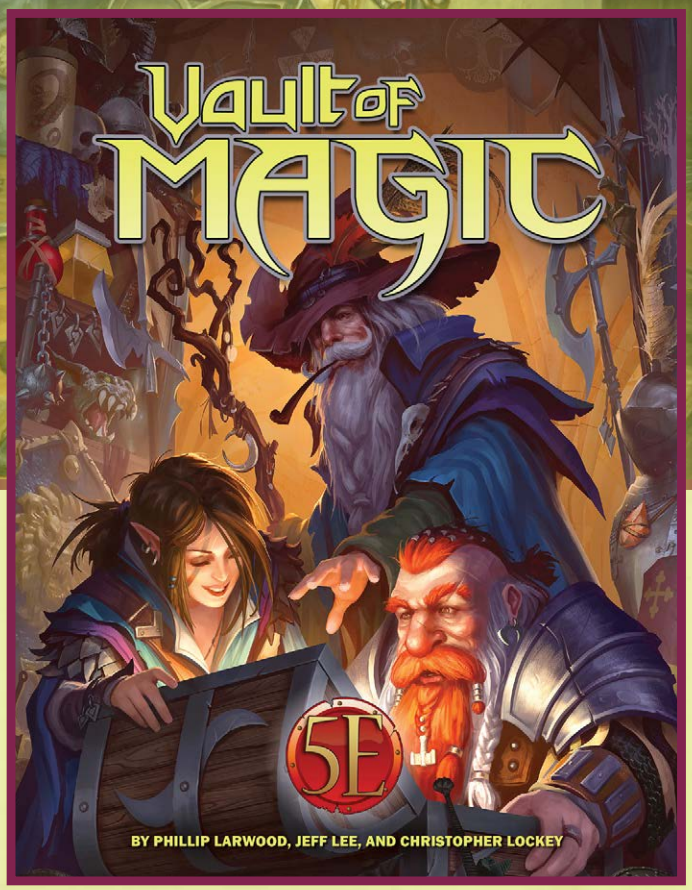
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5E

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