

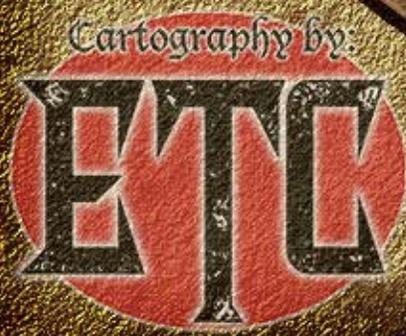
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#122

Food for the GM's Mind



Elven Tower



Cartography

Elven Tower Cartography

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The intent with this material is to create ideas and extra material for the illustrations I create. You're free to use this information or change it in any way to adapt it to your own game and players.

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Map 122 - Abyssal Engine

Cartography by:



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Abyssal Engine

What follows is a short story that serves as the background for the illustration below. As it is, it can help spice up a game where a Warlock is involved, or any other kind of player character where a deal with a powerful entity is involved. You can use it to directly influence the pact contract of a Warlock in your game, or simply as the backbone lore for the illustrated location. The short story can be relayed to the players in the form of a prop as they find an old tome or letter. Alternatively, you can paraphrase the story as they decipher it from hieroglyphs or murals in the walls.

Tzun's Betrayal

(As translated from the Book of Li)



Tzun found himself wondering whether that was a good idea or not. His brother Tharzun followed closed behind. They could touch both walls of the cave, it was that narrow. Tzun imagined the end of the cave was near, after all, he saw the great chamber in his dreams. It was so vivid after dreaming about it so many times, he could trace it in his mind with detail, the faces of the three statues looking at him, red eyed and angry looking.

Tharzun agreed to come with Tzun in search of that place that held great promise according to his gut feeling. Tzun was always a gifted child, even the priests said that. He had the gift of the arcane running through his veins. From an early age Tzun could manipulate the weave of magic to fit his needs. Gifted children often used this premature ability to do simple tricks to impress their friends or get treats they otherwise could not. As Tzun grew up he became more powerful. He never had a mentor or teacher, he was alone in that matter, and that was unfortunate. As Tzun became a man, he felt stunted. He felt the power flowing through him, but found himself unable to fully take advantage of it. Like trying to wield a sword underwater, the very weight of matter impeding his own manipulation of the weave. His thirst for freedom and absolute control became a force in his life. There wasn't

much he could do about it, no sages or mentors were known in miles. Then he started dreaming about the great chamber with the runic circles on the floor. A place guarded by three fiendish beings. No explanation was ever offered by the oneiric visions, but a hunch of power and promise was all that prevailed the morning after.

Following his heart, Tzun found an old cave a few miles from town and decided to explore it, his brother Tharzun came along, he was a fair fighter and would prove helpful, in case there was something dangerous inside.

After following the narrow cave for what seemed like hours, they found the fabled location. A large chamber identic to the one in his dreams was before them. The ceiling hidden in darkness, farther than their torches' lights. There was a great marble circle in the center of the room, the border lined in gold, apparently. Following the circumference of it, a string of unreadable runes adorned the floor. A faint reddish light ebbed from the runes, flowing like vapor. In the center of the marble circle, a smaller circle with an embedded rune glowed brighter. The light coming from it was brighter and more real than the others. Strands of light flowed and danced to unheard music, taking an almost material form. This reddish light extended up five feet.

Standing on the circle borders were three creatures. Their skins pale green, dry and sick-looking. They turned their heads and looked directly at Tzun and Tharzun. Their eyes were red, their faces hateful. Still they did not move. Tharzun begged his brother to forget this nonsense and just go back, now that they still could. He knew himself, if those beasts were as strong as they looked, they would have no chance at all. Tzun did not listen, he walked towards the center of the room, his brother close behind.

A voice rang inside Tzun's head as soon as he stepped on the circle. It seemed to come from the flame in the center, but the sensation was eerie. Air didn't vibrate and the sound was not perceived by his brother Tharzun. Tzun assumed it was a form of telepathy, he had not encountered something quite

like that before. It was a female raspy voice, like one you'd expect from an old bitter woman in the market.

The voice greeted him and introduced itself as Fraz-Urb'luu, prince of deceit and information. Tzun answered likewise.

"I know why you have come here, Tzun, dreamer of power," said Fraz-Urb'luu.

After realizing he could answer in his mind, Tzun continued the conversation, "How can you presume to know my goals, fiend?"

"Uncanny, but it is I who created them," answered Fraz-Urb'luu, "Have you never wondered where your power really comes from? Who makes it real? Are you so naïve to believe it is all your own doing?"



Abyssal Engine

1 Square = 5 ft.

"I know what I am capable of. And I know very well the effort my magic has cost me," answered Tzun with a shaky thought.

Tharzun was unaware of the voices, but it was clear to him that something was happening. The three fiends looked at them hungrily, something was holding them, but for how long? He took Tzun by the arm and said, "Brother, we must go now."

"Don't you feel like a cripple when handling your, what did you call it? Magic," Fraz-Urb'luu mocked him, "You do not have a way to know what real power feels like, it flows through you, it makes you strong and there is nothing that can stand between you and what you want. I can show you the way.

"How can I know I can trust you?" asked Tzun.

"You can't! That's the beauty of life, nothing is trustworthy. If I were you I would not even trust myself to make the right call in this situation. But I can show you, oh yes! I can give you a glimpse of what real potential you have. If only you agree, I'll give you a second of it."

Tzun considered for a moment. The direness of the situation was not lost to him, this could be their demise. There was no reason to trust the voice from the flame except greed. After a second he nodded, fearful but hopeful at the same time.

The runes glowed red and energy made matter flowed from the marble floor through Tzun's feet and up through his body. The sensation was impossible to describe, pleasure and power combined in a single feeling, so strong it was almost unbearable and difficult to distinguish from pain. It reached his hands and the real power was suddenly there for him to wield. Like opening a door to let the winter winds enter in full strength. Power so strong it felt unlimited for a moment, before collapsing on itself and disappearing completely into the ground again. Tzun felt cheated and robbed. It had felt so real he now felt incomplete, as if the flame had taken his hands and tongue for him. He struggled to create a thought for a moment.

"What the hell just happened, Tzun?" Tharzun yelled. His sword was already out, the three fiends had finally moved and taken a step towards them.

"Give it back to me!" Tzun yelled in his mind, "That is my power, it came from me. I have always known I am capable of that, do not take it from

me!"

"You seem rather confused, Tzun. The power was never mine to give or yours to take. I just lifted the curtain that holds it back for a second. Only a blood ritual can really free it for good. It is unfortunate that you cannot perform such ceremony. But I can and it has a cost, and the cost is dear," Fraz-Urb'luu explained mockingly.

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"You are losing time. I will explain now. Magic was never a gift you had, it is a gift I gave you. But arcane gifts given this way have a limit, and you have reached it. This magic comes from the fiendish realm, and your material body is unable to hold it. You need to transcend and become less of a man, only then can you achieve the true potential," Explained Fraz-Urb'luu.

"How can I do that? I need to know," greed was driving Tzun ever farther. The sensation of real power was something he had to recover, this was his chance to get it once and for all.

"Your brother's blood will seal the deal. His unmoving body and flowing blood on my runes will open the channels of power in you transcendent body. It is known. It is the way of magic, unknown to men. You only need to strike a killing blow, and let my pets do the rest." Fraz-Urb'luu said as if explaining a cooking recipe.

Tzun was paralyzed for seconds. Thinking. His brother's blood was too expensive a price to pay for a simple promise from a demon. Greed fought from the other side of his mind, promises of power and strength. Back in town they were farmers. Humble people. Nothing great would ever be achieved by the likes of them. That was a true fact, a thing hard to swallow. Not that they were particularly unhappy or anything, they weren't. But while Tharzun was ignorant and happy in his farmer's life. Tzun dreamt bigger. With this power he could become a force to fear. A mage at the noble court, an advisor to lords and kings. Finally there was a path to follow that would lead him away from the harvest fields and into the real world, the world of the wealthy and respected.

As greed and madness took over his body he prepared a spell. A simple but effective one. He turned around and shot a compact burst of magic fire right

at his brother's chest. Tharzun felt on his back, still conscious but badly hurt. His chest burnt, his leather armor melting on his flesh.

"Brother! What have you done?" Tharzun cried, "It is the flame, it is controlling you, fight it!"

"It is not, brother. I believe that ultimately I'm doing you an act of kindness, shall you never return to your peasant life of working the fields. Rejoice in the eternal world brother, for I shall stay here quite longer and really make a name for our family," said Tzun.

Tears of physical and emotional pain ran down Tharzun's face as the three fiendish humanoids dragged him to the center of the circle, to the flame itself, and butchered him.

"The contract is now complete. The deed is done and the power is yours," declared Fraz-Urb'luu just as the great power flowed inside Tzun again, this time it stayed at his command, "Do not, however, deceive yourself in fantasies of power and glory. In the great scheme of things you are nothing but a pawn. We, the ones who play the game hold all the cards. One day maybe you'll become a real player, I sincerely doubt it. Very few do, and even fewer survive."

Tzun felt weak and cheated. He understood that the fiend lord had complete control. He was more powerful now, that was his sole comfort.

"I can now act through you, and you will be my tool and my eyes. You are free, for the most part. Do what you want with your powers, they will probably get you killed for all I know. But if you make it, expect my call, I will have things for you to do. And you will do them, or else you can say good bye to your powers and puny life," said Fraz-Urb'luu as the flame faded. The three fiends stood still and evaporated. Tzun felt a mix of good and bad feelings, they would settle in time.

But feelings and emotions were for the weak. Power now flowed inside him, real power from another world.