

UNGAGED

VOLUME I



UNGAAGED

25 ORIGINAL ADVENTURES FOR TIERS 1-4

VOLUME I



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UNCAGED ANTHOLOGY

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PRODUCER'S NOTE

Who would have thought a simple Tweet would kick-start an epic global project?

I certainly didn't. In August 2018, I posted a question I had been thinking about for a while: wouldn't a collection of mythology-themed one-shot adventures be cool? With creatures like medusas and harpies in the *Monster Manual*, this felt like the right time for a project that could put a new spin on these familiar stories.

Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition — and all fantasy, really — is heavily influenced by a millennia's worth of mythology and folklore from around the world. But I was eager for a different take. I was inspired by a sculpture created by Luciano Garbati, which depicts a defiantly nude Medusa carrying a sword in one hand and the head of Perseus in the other. An immersive tabletop adventure seemed to be the perfect medium for retelling Medusa's story from a new perspective: hers.

Apparently the RPG community thought so, too. The project quickly became so much bigger, and more meaningful, than I could have ever anticipated. Now you hold in your hands the first volume of this huge collaboration, featuring more than 100 writers, artists, playtesters, and editors. I am indebted to everyone who believed in this idea and contributed to it in any way. (Please view the acknowledgments in the back of the book for a more comprehensive list.) On behalf of the entire *Uncaged* community, we're so proud of our unapologetically fierce and feminist project. We hope it changes your life the way that it's changed ours.

Ashley Warren | *Founder/Editor*
Twitter: @ashleynhwarren

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword & Introduction 4

TIER 1

Maid in Waterdeep 7
Cry of the Sea 15
From the Forest They Fled 23
Lai of the Sea Hag 31
The Weeping Woman 39
Lost Children, Found Family 47
A Wild Hunt 57
Death's Agents 65
The Tale of Sepha and Adé 73
The Banshee's Tail 81
Swamped 87
The Demon's Heart 95
Lost Gods 101
The Secret of Shadow Grove 109

TIER 2

Shadows and Talons 123
The Guardians of the Forest 131
A Family Reunion 139
Maidens of the Weave 147
Appalling Morass 157
Heart of the Goddess 167
The Lauma 175

TIER 3

Galateya's Will 179
Legend of the White Snake 187
Madness of the Valkyries 193
Ghastly Grins 201

TIER 4

The Tale of Two Sphinxes 211

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Featured Creatures 218
Appendix B: Original Creatures 219
Appendix C: Maps for Players 220
Acknowledgments and Biographies 233

FOREWORD

I remember the first time I read *Beowulf* as part of a college assignment. After the slew of Old English epics we had just read I felt so jarred by this one in particular. It wasn't that I disliked it, I was just left with so many questions. The discussions in class seemed to place Grendel and Beowulf front and center. This was unfortunate since, from my perspective, clearly the most fascinating character in the story was Grendel's mother. She was barely described in the text at all, but her haunting story was all I could think about when I was finished reading.

One of the first *Dungeons & Dragons* campaigns I ever wrote was heavily inspired by her. I wanted to give her a name; more importantly I wanted to give her a voice. I knew going in she wasn't going to be one of the good guys, but I wanted her to be a villain that my adventurers thought about long after they defeated her (if they could defeat her). The campaign never really saw the light of day. The group I tried to run it with fell apart shortly after it started. I still feel like one day I'll give her story the telling it deserves.

When I first heard about *Uncaged* I was thrilled by the concept. The first thing that flashed into my mind was my own little campaign from years ago. I was tickled pink by idea that there could be a veritable treasure trove of stories with grotesque, monstrous and horrifying women at the center of them. I was excited because they wouldn't just be monsters, they wouldn't just be someone's mother or someone's lover... they would have names and voices. More importantly, they would have their own stories to tell. Stories that didn't revolve around the shiny knights we know and love so well; but stories about the frightening but tortured soul that goes bump in the night.

I've had the pleasure of running games for a variety of talented players. So many of them have surprised and delighted me with the unexpected and often foolish things their characters do. Those players deserve to meet their match with villains that are equally nuanced and profound. It's time to uncage your adventure.



Jasmine Bhullar
Actress, Relics and Rarities
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Uncaged*, an epic collection of adventures spanning the multiverse. Each adventure features a creature from the world's vault of mythology, folklore, fairytale, and legend — including the beloved mythos of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Many of the creatures may be recognizable, although some are lesser-known monsters. We are excited to illuminate these stories.

VOLUME OVERVIEW

Dungeon Masters will find adventures designed for every tier. The adventures are not connected, although clever DMs are encouraged to find ways to weave the stories together to form a longer campaign. Regardless, every adventure is designed to be a one-session module that can be completed between 1 to 5 hours.

GENERAL NOTES

DMs will need the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (denoted as *DMG*) and the *Monster Manual* (denoted as *MM*) to run these adventures. Creatures/monsters that are **bolded** are found in the *MM*. Items that are *italicized* are found in the *DMG*. Stat blocks are included for new or reskinned creatures, as well as creatures found in books outside of the *MM*. See *Appendices A and B*, pgs. 218-219, for a list of creatures in this volume.

Due to the nature of the anthology, some adventures are preceded with a relevant **content warning**. We encourage you to set clear boundaries and expectations at your gaming table, ensuring that our hobby remains inclusive and inviting to all.

Most of the adventures in this anthology rely on “theater of the mind” and do not include maps. Blank player maps are found in *Appendix C*.

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players.



TIER 1



ILLUSTRATION BY HLA ROSA

MAID IN WATERDEEP

by Bianca Bickford

CREATURE: *Merfolk* | LEVEL: 1

SYNOPSIS

Characters are ready to make their mark as adventurers and travel to the City of Splendors to begin their careers. Their first job in Waterdeep promises to be a memorable one: a mermaid has hired them to rescue a kidnapped bard and bring justice to the witch who stole her voice.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Looking for a new start in the City of Splendors, characters visit the famous Yawning Portal in the Castle Ward of Waterdeep. They find a job board featuring a poster that promises 10 gold per adventurer to find a kidnapped woman, no previous experience required. The note says to meet in the tavern tonight an hour before sundown. The tavernkeeper, Durnan, points out the table for the meeting, where several other adventurers have gathered. A beautiful human woman approaches the party with determination set on her face.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The party has been hired by Lily, a young human rogue and former mermaid from Thar Qualnaar.

A month ago, the mermaid Lily rose to the surface to watch one of the frequent party caravels in the Great Harbor. She was entranced by the fireworks, but the voice of a young bard was more astounding than the lights. A red-haired human woman performed mesmerizing ballads to the delight of a noble — and Lily. The bard sang about new love and whispered promises as an unexpected storm quickly rolled in. The guests took cover inside the quarterdeck. Lily watched in horror as lightning struck the mast and split the ship in half. As the boat sank, Lily frantically searched

and found both the noble and the bard sinking to the sea floor. Making an impossible choice, Lily rushed the bard to the surface and carried her to the shore.

Lily watched from the safety of the water as the survivors were rescued and returned home. After a little time passed, Lily found her thoughts often returning to the bard and wondered about her fate. She confided in her sisters about the encounter. Shortly after, her sisters excitedly returned with the news they had gathered — that the bard lived in the Dock Ward of Waterdeep.

Lily went to the beach where she left the bard in hope of seeing her, and saw a witch obscured by black robes and a hood walking on the sands. Optimistic, she described the woman to the witch and asked for help in finding her. The witch knows the bard, named Sanger, and offered legs to Lily to find her — but for the price of a voice.

Lily agreed to give her voice and the witch chuckled. The witch straightened and said that he wasn't asking for Lily's voice. He murmured a magical message into his hands and Lily felt daggers in her tail as it transformed into legs.

He revealed himself as Heks Vand, the noble who was on the caravel that hired Sanger. He saw the mermaid save Sanger and was livid that she did not choose to save him since he was the most important person on the vessel. Even though he was rescued by a fishing boat a day later, he was taking his revenge for the suffered indignity. Having already kidnapped Sanger in retribution, Vand has ordered his men to cut out her tongue as a sacrifice to his patron. He gloated to Lily that Sanger's tongue was forfeit at the next full moon, in two tenday's time.

Lily picked herself up off the beach after he left, and decided to save Sanger no matter the cost. In desperation Lily found she was good at picking pockets,

and through new connections, odd jobs, and gathered coin, she uncovered a lead on rescuing Sanger and posted the flyer in the Yawning Portal. It is now two days until the full moon.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **LILY:** Formerly a **merfolk** and now a human **spy**.
- **SANGER:** A human **bard**.
- **HEKS VAND:** A human noble (uses stats of a **cult fanatic**).
- **LOPER:** A half-elf servant (**commoner**) to Heks Vand.
- **DURNAN:** A human tavernkeeper and retired adventurer, owner of the Yawning Portal.

CHAPTER 1 – THE MERMAID

It's a cool afternoon in the city of Waterdeep. The sun is starting to set as the party gathers in the Yawning Portal. Durnan, the tavernkeeper, directs inquiries about the job to a table near the fire. The party gathers; prompt players to introduce their characters.

As you look around at your fellow adventurers, you see a raven-haired human woman with dusky skin walk toward the table with determination. *"I'm glad you're here for the job,"* she says, cutting through any conversation. *"10 gold each upon rescue of a dear friend of mine. My name is Lily. Do you have any questions before we get started? Time is short."*

The characters may ask questions about her or the job which is detailed in the *Adventure Background*. Any Wisdom (Insight) check about her background passes, as Lily (CG human **spy**) is completely genuine. If specifically asked how she gathered the coin to pay the party, she says it was from odd jobs. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Lily is embarrassed that she pickpocketed most of the coin from nobles who won't miss it.

WHAT IS THAR QUALNAAR?

Some Waterdavians know that merfolk are a part of the city's defenses, living in the Deep Harbor long before Waterdeep was founded. In recent years, merfolk work with the Lords of Waterdeep and are considered a part of the City Guard if they patrol the waters and help with attackers, sunken vessels, and spilled cargo. The merfolk city has a population close to 500 with a few sea elves in residence. It is located near Deepwater Isle within the Great Harbor.

After Lily answers, read or paraphrase the following:

"You know my story," she says and she looks at each of you. *"Now it's time to see if there's a happy ending."*

"We're looking for a man in this tavern by the name of Loper. He works for Heks Vand and can lead us to him, or to Sanger, if we can persuade him. It doesn't matter to me how we convince him, but he's the best lead I have."

Lily describes Loper as he was described to her: a half-elf with a sallow complexion, dirty blonde hair, and wearing a blue sash around his neck.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check spots Loper on the upper floor two levels above the party, deep in an earnest conversation with a blue dragonborn in wizard's robes. If the party fails the Perception check, Lily finds Loper after a few moments and quietly points him out. She asks the party how they would like to proceed.

THE SERVANT

Loper (CN half-elf **commoner**) is a middle-aged man who often visits the Yawning Portal to escape the boring routine of running Heks Vand's households.

If more than one party member approaches Loper, he gets nervous and immediately flees through a window; jump to *The Servant's Flight*, pg. 9. If only one party member engages Loper in conversation, the blue dragonborn stands up and gestures for them to take his seat as he walks away.

THE SERVANT'S PRICE

Wary of being approached, Loper listens for about a minute before he gets suspicious and flees. A DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check makes Loper comfortable enough to offer his information about Sanger at a price of 30 gold. He barter to 25 gold. If the character refuses to pay, or attempts an Intimidation check, Loper escapes out a window. If Loper is successfully convinced, see *The Servant's Information*. He leaves the Yawning Portal immediately after the conversation concludes.

THE SERVANT'S FLIGHT

If the party follows Loper, they find that he has climbed to the rooftop to run away. Have the pursuers roll initiative to determine how the chase plays out.

The chase begins at Cook Street and Rainrun Street. Loper is running to Hek's secret house, located along The Way of the Dragon at Drakiir Street in the Trades Ward three blocks east from the tavern. Lily passively follows the chase but does not cause any damage to Loper. Use the "Chases" mechanic in Chapter 8 of the *DMG* with the "Rooftop Chase Complications" table in Chapter 4 of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.

If captured, the party can press Loper for information. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) check, or a bribe of 20 gp, loosens Loper's tongue; proceed to *The Servant's Information*.

THE SERVANT'S INFORMATION

Loper is reluctant to answer questions. His eyes flit about as he gives in.

"Look, just don't say it was me, a'right? Heks'll do worse than just kill me if he finds out.

"He keeps a secret house, separate from his manor, over in the Trades Ward, where he does his dirty work. Gotta keep it away from the fancy folk, y'know. He casts his rituals there and it's where he's keeping that pretty red-headed woman. Maybe you'll get lucky and she'll still be alive when you get there.

"Look for the blue house with the white shingle roof at Drakiir Street, near The Way of the Dragon. That's the place."

Loper smirks at you. "That's all I know, so I'll just be on my way now that you got what ya wanted."

A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check draws attention to the keying on Loper's belt with keys to Heks Vand's houses.

THE SERVANT'S ESCAPE

If the party fails to capture Loper or kills him before obtaining the address, Lily tells the party that she will meet them in the morning. When they regroup the next day, Lily has the address to the secret house. She owes an unspecified favor to the Zhentarim and is concerned about the debt.

DEVELOPMENT

Equipped with the house address, the party knows where Sanger is held and plans their approach.



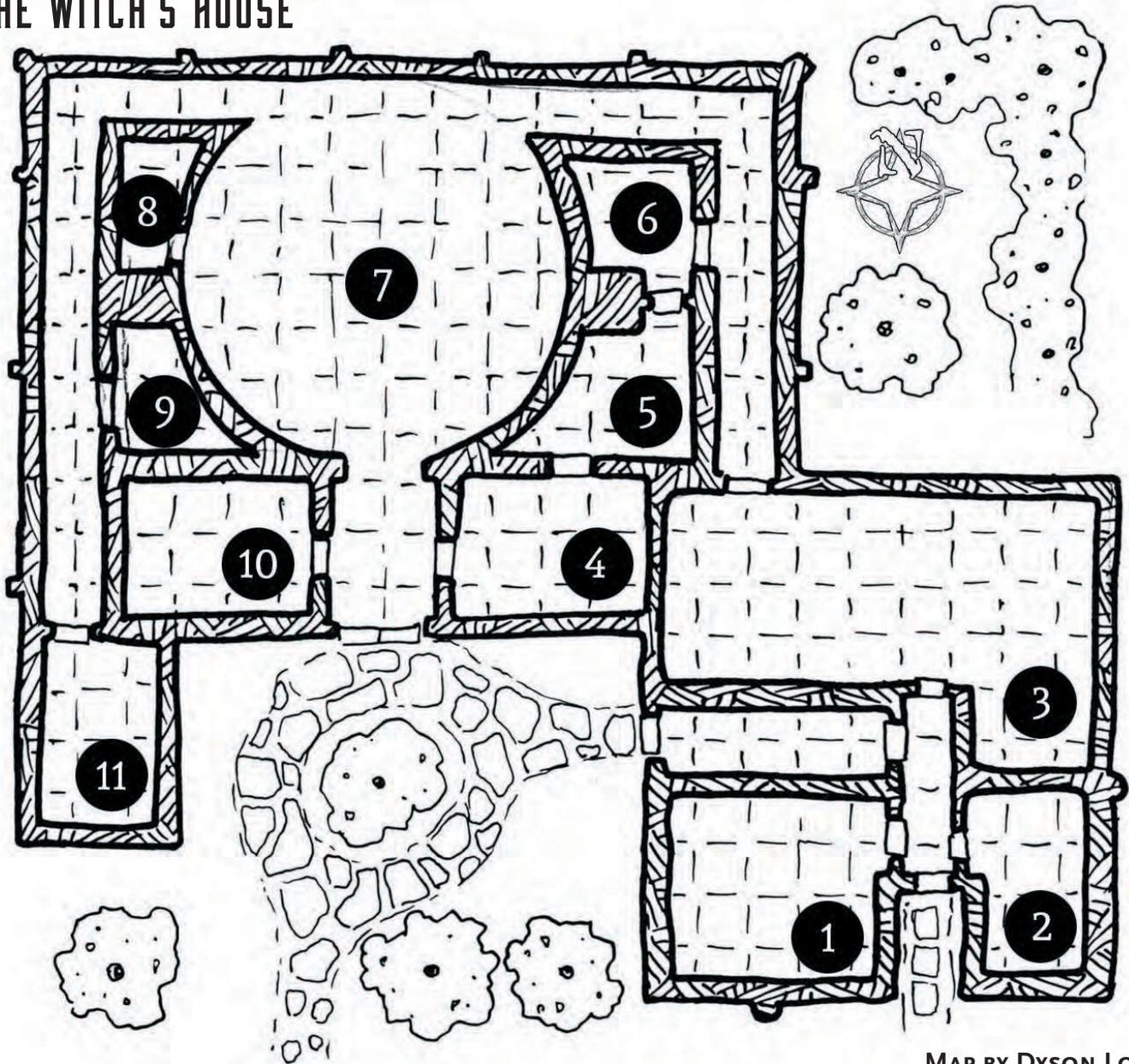
MAP LEGEND

1. KITCHEN
2. SERVANT'S ROOM
3. DINING HALL
4. LIBRARY
5. WITCH'S WORKROOM
6. STORAGE ROOM

7. RITUAL ROOM
8. CELL
9. CELL
10. CLOSET
11. TORTURE ROOM

BLANK PLAYER MAP IS IN APPENDIX C.

THE WITCH'S HOUSE



MAP BY DYSON LOGOS

CHAPTER 2 – THE WITCH

THE WITCH'S HOUSE

The blue house with a white roof belonging to Heks Vand (CE human **cult fanatic**) is found easily enough. It fits the same style as the surrounding buildings with nothing standing out to attract attention.

The plain blue house stands among many homes along the east-west road of Drakiir Street. Well-kept bushes and trees tastefully decorate the quiet property.

A stone pathway leads to the white double doors that appears to be the main entrance, with a smaller path meeting a wood door to the east. You can see a side entrance from the road that leads to another wooden door. All of the white-washed shutters on the windows are closed.

A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the front double doors are barred from the inside and cannot be opened. Upon inspection, the shutters are sealed shut and bar access through the windows. Both the door located to the east of the main doors and the door on the south side are locked. Traps on both doors can be detected with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check and disarmed with a DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the disarm attempt fails, a needle pierces the character's hand and they take 1 piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage. The doors can be opened with a DC 12 Dexterity check using the thieves' tools or a DC 15 Strength check to force it open. The keys from Loper unlock the doors without setting off the traps.

THE WITCH'S MANNERS

Both entrances lead to the southeast corner of the house, an area that Heks maintains to keep up normal appearances when there are unexpected visitors. The larger room to the southwest is the kitchen (1 on map), and the room across the hall is a servant's room (2). Looking around the servant's room at various books and journals will identify the room as belonging to Loper. A DC 16 Intelligence (History) check plus

proficiency in Abyssal (or a successful check at DC 20 without) indicates that many of the texts detail rituals to show devotion to a demon.

The large room down the hallway is a dining hall (3) with a sitting area on the east side of the room. The furniture, while clean, looks like it has never been used.

THE WITCH'S WORK

The east hallway wraps around the building. The first door to the west reveals a storage room (6), filled with dried herbs and vials. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Medicine) check hints that the ingredients are used in poisons and spellcasting. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals two daggers hidden on a shelf.

The connecting door leads into the witch's workroom (5). Alchemy benches along with a 6½ foot table line this neatly organized room. A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the longer table shows dried blood and other liquids that have soaked into the wood over time.

The southern door of the workroom leads into a large library (4). It almost seems out of place compared to the previous room; it has deep carpeting, a luscious reading chair, and a table with brandy and glassware decorate the room. A large fireplace makes the room deceptively cozy. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the dry bar reveals two fine cigars (valued at 1 gp each).

Exiting the west door of the library places the party in the foyer. The double doors have a large wooden beam barring them shut. The party can lift the bar to unlock the door with success on a DC 13 Strength check.

The western door from the foyer leads to a simple closet (10). Several hooded black robes hang on pegs next to a pair of worn, blood-stained boots. A basin, filled with fresh water, sits atop a small table. A long bench is pushed up against the wall.

When the party enters the large circular ritual room (7) at the heart of the building, read the following:

You enter the large, lowlit circular room. A large sigil is painted on the floor, surrounded by manacles mounted to the walls. A wide eye centered in the middle of a pentagram stands out in white paint with deep grooves gouged into the floor. Evenly spaced unlit candles complete the circle's sinister implications. To the west sits a dark cage.

The dimly lit cell (8) is unlocked. When the party investigates, they find it completely clean and empty with no evidence of anyone recently imprisoned. A DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check confirms this is a summoning circle for a demon.

If the party made noise at any point upon entering the house, four **skeletons** come around the northwest corner into the ritual room and attack them. Lily can join the fight to aid in combat. A passive Perception (DC 10) alerts them to the skeletons' presence; otherwise they begin the round **surprised**.

After the encounter, the party can explore down the west hallway. As the party approaches the next cell (9), it is empty if they have defeated the skeletons. If not, the cell door opens as they approach and the four skeletons attack.

SCALING THE BATTLE

Add or remove the number of skeletons in the room depending on the number of players.

THE WITCH'S REVENGE

The room in the southwest of the house is locked (11 on map). The door can be opened with a DC 12 Dexterity check using the thieves' tools or a DC 15 Strength check to force it open. Once the party opens the door, read the following.

A nobleman in loose black robes sits on a velvet dining chair, flanked by two skeletons standing in a guard position. He raises his glass of wine to Lily as you enter the room.

"Honestly, I thought you'd be here days ago. We've been so bored waiting for your arrival."

He jerks his head behind him and you see a beautiful redheaded woman chained to the wall. She yanks against the bonds and glares at the man.

"My apologies, where are my manners? My name is Heks Vand, and you have all broken into my workshop."

He stands to give a mocking bow, picks up his quarterstaff from next to the chair, and continues. *"Now that you're here, sweet mermaid, you can join the sacrifice to my patron. Money is simple to procure. Power is not. Your legs came at the cost of Sanger's voice, but the reward I will get for all of you will make my revenge even sweeter. I'll make sure to kill her first so you can watch."*

Lily draws her dagger and looks to you, then makes eye contact with Sanger. *"On your go,"* she murmurs.

The party can question Heks about his motivations, but he, along with the two skeletons, attack after one or two questions.



CONCLUSION

If Heks and his guards are defeated, Lily releases Sanger from her bindings.

Lily supports Sanger as the bard tries to stand and straighten out stiff muscles. “Um, hello,” Lily says to her, sounding a bit insecure.

“I’m Lily. I’m sorry I got you into this mess, but I’m not sorry to have met you. I will cherish the memory of hearing you sing aboard that caravel, and I am at your service.”

Sanger smiles and wraps an arm around Lily in a loose embrace.

Lily looks at you and grins for the first time since you’ve met her. “Thank you, all of you. Let me get Sanger someplace safe and I’ll meet you shortly at the Yawning Portal.”

Lily and Sanger do not immediately leave if the party wishes to talk to them further or check Heks for valuables. A DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a scroll of *hellish rebuke* folded up inside Heks’s left boot.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

At this point, Lily and Sanger can leave. They pay 10 gp per party member later at the Yawning Portal.

However, if the party chooses to restore Sanger’s voice, reward each player with an additional 50 to 100 XP. There is no one way to accomplish this; reward creativity at the table.

CHANGING THE ADVENTURE FOR YOUNGER PLAYERS

You can choose to use these optional adjustments for players ages 9 to 12:

- Sanger’s voice is magically removed, and her tongue stays intact.
- Instead of a human, use a **sea hag** in place of Heks.

REWARDS

Each character receives 10 gp for completing the story.

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE/FOE	XP
Loper	10
Skeleton	50
Heks Vand	250

NON-COMBAT REWARDS

TASK/ACCOMPLISHMENT	XP PER CHARACTER
Did not kill Loper	10
Restored Sanger’s voice	50 to 100

AUTHOR’S NOTES

This module was influenced by *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen, where I re-imagined a fierce and capable mermaid who refused to fade away. Thank you to my sister Kelly Knox for her incredible editing skills and my fiancé Cory Arnold for his expert guidance (and making dinner when I was living in Waterdeep). So much appreciation for Ashley Warren for writing inspo and creating the *Uncaged* anthology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bianca Bickford is a lifelong geek living deep in the Heart of Texas. She can be found running around the jungles of Chult or pulling off the biggest heist in Waterdavian history. Bianca DMs for friends and one-shot adventures for girls ages 9 to 12 to introduce them to the imaginative world of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Specializing in digital and content marketing, Bianca works for a non-profit organization that moves more women into leadership positions.



CRY OF THE SEA

by *Alicia Furness*

CREATURE: *Siren* | LEVEL(S): 1-3 | CW: *Sexism*

SYNOPSIS

The town of Canticle Bay has long been dependent on ocean fishing for its economy, and as demand has grown, the town has increased its efforts to supply the inland cities with the best seafood. Recently, however, the men who go out on the boats haven't been coming back. A newly formed group of adventurers have been sent by the guild to investigate the missing men. Where are they? Those that are still alive can be found in the watery depths amongst the Sirens sworn to protect the ocean. Faced with the truth, whose side will the party take? *Cry of the Sea* is designed for characters of levels 1-3.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Canticle Bay is a large harbour town, renowned for its fisheries. The party could be adventurers for hire or locals who are trying to solve the mystery on their own.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The people of Canticle Bay have always lived by a strict gendered division of labour. The missing men are having a significant impact on the economy, but in their place, young women have been stepping up and taking over more of the physical work.



CHAPTER 1 – CANTICLE BAY

In this chapter, characters are introduced to Canticle Bay and given their mission.

Canticle Bay is a bustling port town. Warm wind blows off the sea, moving the palm trees and carrying the smell of fish and salt water further into town. The houses are mostly white, with bright orange roofs. Carts of fish are pulled from the market by the sea to edge of town, to head off to the inland communities. At night, you can hear what sounds like singing floating over the water and into the bay. Locals call it "*the cry of the sea.*"

The party has been summoned to meet with the mayor, Hamish Grindle. He can be found at the government residence, a vast mansion overlooking the sea. Grindle is a human man (**noble**) with delusions of grandeur. Grindle's main concern about the missing men is that they are needed to work and keep the economy going. He is dismissive of the 'emotional' concerns of women whose family members are missing. He tells the group that when the fish started disappearing about 10 weeks ago, the men went further out to sea and started to disappear.

Hamish offers the group a substantial reward (500 gp, with 250 gp up front) if they can figure out where the men have gone and stop it from happening again. Hamish directs them to the Shrivelled Barnacle, a tavern popular with seafaring types right near the harbour, to find a ship and crew. If the group contains any men, Hamish directs all of his commentary to them. If the group is comprised solely of women, he treats them dismissively, and it's clear he believes they cannot solve the problem but allows them to try anyway.

THE SHRIVELLED BARNACLE

When they arrive at the Shrivelled Barnacle, the characters interrupt an escalating argument. Two people stand in the middle of the room, with the crowd circled around them. One is Rax Vander (**veteran**), a burly combative half orc, shaking a fist in her opponent's face. The opponent is Yorin Handal (**noble**), a weasley looking half-elf, dressed in fine clothes.

They are arguing about whose ship is better. Rax shouts about her sailing prowess, and taunts Yorin for the loss of two of his crew members last week. The crowd heckles her, shouting that women aren't made to sail. Her two dwarven crew members (**scouts**) toss insults back at the crowd. Yorin brags of the speed and size of his ship, boasting that it's the newest and finest you can buy along the coast. His sizeable crew of young men backs him up.

If the characters don't step in, the barkeep will eventually break up the argument. Rax, Yorin, and their respective crews move to opposite sides of the tavern, glaring at each other. If the characters do step in, the NPCs they defend thank them when the dust settles. If the characters divulge their mission, each captain offers to accompany the group for a fee.

WHAT RAX KNOWS

If the characters speak with Rax, she reveals the following information:

- She arrived in Canticle Bay to assist in finding the missing men, but everyone has refused to hire her.
- She has a small sloop-type ship (see "Keelboat Stats," Chapter 9, *DMG*) that she plans to use to explore the sea and islands around Canticle Bay.
- She has been investigating the singing and knows the general area it comes from.
- She will accompany them on their mission for 40 gp (halved if they stepped in to defend her during the argument).

WHAT YORIN KNOWS

If the characters speak with Yorin, he reveals the following information:

- His father has outfitted him with the most expensive ship, a galleon type ship (see Chapter 9, *DMG*), less than a year old, and the best crew money can buy.

- His ship can withstand almost any monster the sea has to offer.
- He's heard rumour of survivors taking refuge on an island.
- He will accompany them on their mission for 100 gp (halved if they stepped in to defend him during the argument).

Whomever the characters choose, the captain and their crew escort the characters to their ship in the harbour, and plans are made to set out at dawn the next day.

CHAPTER 2 – TRAVEL TO THE ISLANDS

In this chapter, characters can explore the sea and islands around Canticle Bay by ship, while searching for the men and/or the beast(s) who took them

The ease of exploring Canticle Bay depends on which captain the group has hired. If they hired Rax, her small boat easily navigates in and around islands, allowing the crew to come up nearly to the shore. However, it is more susceptible to bad weather or attacks by large sea monsters. If they hired Yorin, the boat easily withstands bad weather and deflects monsters, but it must be moored a significant distance from the islands, making it more difficult to explore or make a hasty getaway if necessary. The weather on the sea can be unpredictable. If you would like to include weather as a factor, refer to the weather table in Chapter 5, "Adventure Environments" (*DMG*).

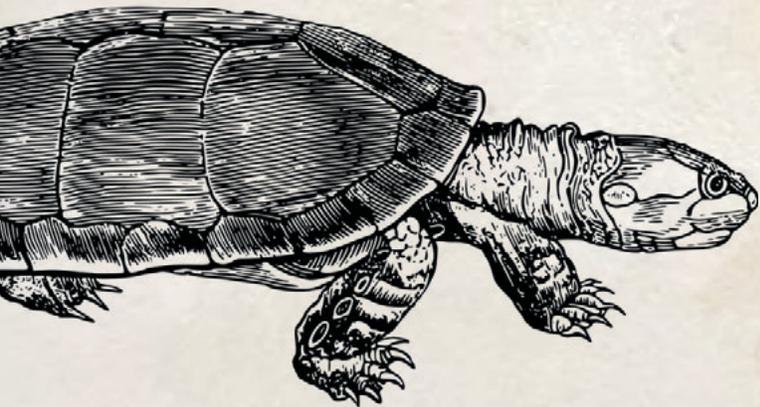
Environmental destruction and ocean collapse from overfishing are easily seen while exploring the area around the bay. Characters might see collapsing or dead coral reef, little to no fish or marine life, and limited birds.

While exploring the islands, a **siren** scout may investigate (see the siren's stat block on pg. 20). She can lead the players in the right direction, or may use her luring song to try and capture any men in the party.

ISLAND EXPLORATION

Two islands are outlined below in more detail, but, if the party wants to explore more, roll on the chart for things found on or near islands around Canticle Bay:

D6	CANTICLE BAY ENCOUNTER
1	2d4 + 1 dolphins surround and swim with the boat, begging for food (see the dolphin stat block on pg. 20).
2	An island that is an inactive volcano. A band of monkeys (apes , each with 9 HP) live on the island, and they constantly try to steal things from the party.
3	An island that is home to a sahuagin priestess and her followers. They may try to recruit the party into their cult.
4	A corrupted island that is home to a lonely sea hag . She is grateful for the visitors, and may try to trick them into staying.
5	A mother plesiosaur aggressively defends her two babies when the boat gets too close.
6	A message in a bottle floats near the boat or the shore of an island. The message contains a treasure map. Following the map leads to a child's toys buried in the sand (a bag of marbles, strangely shaped rocks, and a small wood carving of a ship).



DRAGON TURTLE ISLAND

You approach a small island, populated mostly by shrubs and a ridge of jutting 'rocks' covered in lichen and barnacles.

This island is actually the back of an ancient **dragon turtle** (with the following changes: speaks common and draconic). The creature is easily identified if the players are underwater, however approaching by boat makes it impossible to identify. If the players land on the island, a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a low pulsating thump and tremor, consistent with a heartbeat. If the players moor their boat and spend the night on the island, they wake up a significant distance away from their boat, as the dragon turtle has floated overnight.

If the characters identify the island as a dragon turtle, they can get the following information on a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check:

- Her name is Ovra, and she has lived in the area around Canticle Bay for almost 1000 years
- She has little care for the war between the land dwellers and the Sirens, because she will outlive them all anyway.
- She has remained hidden from the humans by hiding in plain sight.
- She is aware of the location of a shipwreck that holds treasure, and can direct the players to it (see Shipwreck Island below).

Ovra is disinclined to fight, and it should be telegraphed to the players that combat with her is a fool's errand. If pushed, she discharges one use of her steam breath before diving deep into the ocean and swimming away.

SHIPWRECK ISLAND

This island is home to a forgotten shipwreck. The island is large, and its most distinguishing feature is the bow of the tattered ship, sticking up out of the sand. The ship is massive, and the back half is actually submerged under water.

If the characters explore the underwater part of the shipwreck, it is home to 1d6 **hunter sharks** and they discover enough *cap(s) of water breathing* for each character. These caps can be used to access the nearby underwater Siren city.

This island is the one rumoured to contain survivors. Succeeding on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals humanoid footprints and evidence of a fire pit. The men won't be found, but there are strange marks in the sand that look as though bodies have been dragged into the water.

This island also contains a waterfall, which hides a secret passage. It can be identified with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check. At the end of the passage, there are three treasure chests. Each chest is locked, and marked with a symbol. One chest has a symbol of a potion bottle (contains a *potion of healing*), one has a symbol of a dagger (contains a *+1 dagger*), and one has a symbol of a scroll (contains a scroll of *water breathing*). Above the chests, a pictogram of a key is carved into the wall, along with the words "Sometimes to open all you need is a knock. But return to dust, everything must. Choose carefully."

The characters can reveal the key by knocking on the pictogram. Doing so makes a brass key slide out from a small hole beneath the picture. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the hole. A DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the key has magical runes lightly sculpted into it. The key fits into each lock, but turns to dust after 1 use. After 1 chest has been opened, the other two chests will also turn to dust.

From this island, a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a small island with what appears to be a temple in the distance surrounded by statues of sea creatures and sirens (this is the entrance to the Siren city).

CHAPTER 3 — THE SIREN CITY

In this chapter, players discover the Siren city, get answers about what has happened to the missing men, and must choose a side.

The sirens are located around an island that houses an old temple. This island, unlike the others, is still teeming with fish and ocean wildlife. Singing can be heard coming from this island at night. The city can be accessed through the top of the temple. Eventually, players will need to breathe under water. Their previous island exploration should have provided them with items they need to accomplish this.

The temple itself is a large pyramid-like structure, with a staircase leading to the top. It is covered in art depicting siren warriors defending the ocean from human invaders. At the top of the temple is the entrance to a shaft leading deep into the temple (200 ft. deep), covered by vines and leaves.

The shaft has no ladder, but a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) allows the characters to climb down using the holes from fallen or crumbling bricks. The shaft is very dark, and has many long, stringy filaments like spider webbing hanging throughout it. Characters who fall can attempt the check again to catch themselves, or they fall 25 ft. before being caught in the webbing. Approximately halfway down the shaft is a large opening, like a small cave. Without a light source, it is almost completely undetectable. With a light source, it can be detected by a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check. Living in the hole is a **cave fisher** (see stat block on pg. 21). If it goes undetected by players, it attempts to grab one of them as they climb down the shaft. If confronted directly, the cave fisher retreats into its hole to avoid a fight.

At the bottom of the shaft there is a long tunnel. To the right, a wall is covered with a large mosaic of a siren, brandishing a trident and surrounded by the bodies of dead men. As the players traverse the tunnel they find more mosaics depicting the siren way of life; protecting the ocean, befriending the creatures, grand parties and feasts. At the end of the tunnel is a large watery hole, which is the entrance to the city.

The siren city is breathtaking. They have made their home on the base of a sunken city, of which only the top of the great temple remains peeking out of the water. The buildings have been taken over by seaweed and coral, and many of the plants and creatures glow with a gorgeous bioluminescence. The city is teeming with life, as sirens move through their daily activities.

SIREN CITY

If characters enter the city through the hole without sneaking, they are immediately approached by two **merfolk** guards. The guards are surprised that land dwellers have made their way to the city. Any men in the party are treated as suspect and taken into custody

to face the Siren Queen. Other characters are politely invited to a meeting with the queen. If players taken into custody try to escape, more armed Siren guards arrive to subdue them. Proceed to *Meeting the Siren Queen*.

If the characters succeed on a group DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check, they enter the city without drawing immediate attention of the guards. This provides the opportunity to explore the city more before meeting the Siren Queen. The characters should be making continuous group stealth checks while exploring. (On a failed check, they are discovered by two **merfolk** guards.) They might discover hostages, unique cultural buildings, or more moderate sirens during their exploration.

MEETING THE SIREN QUEEN

The party is escorted to a grand palace to meet the Siren Queen, Aquila. Aquila is a large imposing woman. Characters who studied the mosaic in the temple will recognize her.

Aquila is a **siren**, with the following change: she has 70 hit points. The Sirens have long been the protectors of the ocean. Overfishing by the land dwellers has caused ecological collapse in large parts of the sea around Canticle Bay.

- Violence against the fishermen is retribution for violence against the ocean.
- They lure they men with their songs and their sexuality. They view the men as weak and simple minded. The men's disrespect of the ocean and of women is seen as one and the same.

Aquila is eager to speak with the party, particularly if they show interest in learning about the Sirens' ways. If the party is neutral or sympathetic towards her, she speaks with them voluntarily. If party is hostile towards her, she only reveals the following information on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check:

- If the party is comprised entirely of women, or if they seem sympathetic to the cause, Aquila attempts to recruit them to her side.
- If the party agrees not to prevent the sirens from continuing their work, she will ally herself with them (see *Conclusion A*).
- If the party decides to honour their agreement with the mayor, Aquila and her 4 Siren guards attempt to take the party hostage, violently if necessary (see *Conclusion B*).

CONCLUSION A

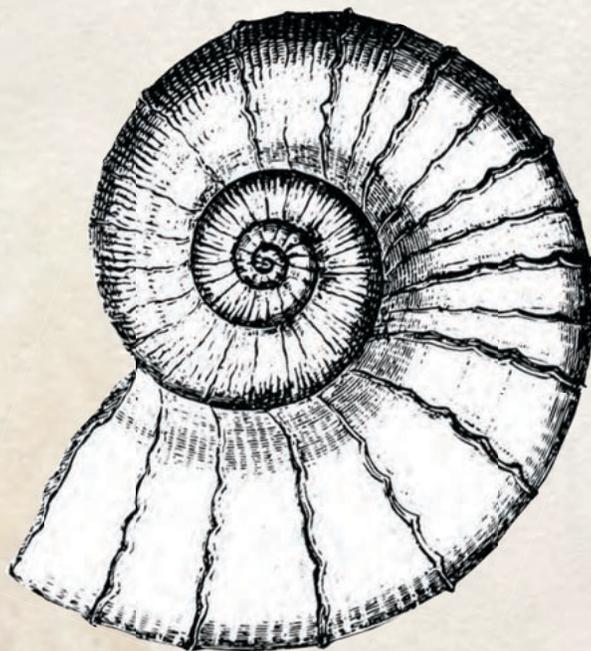
If the party allies with Aquila and the sirens, she offers them the opportunity to join her cause. She provides them each with a common magic item from her treasure trove, along with 500 gp. The party has made a powerful ally who will happily aid them in future missions. If the party hired Rax, she continues to aid them in future adventures. If the party hired Yerin, he abandons them in the Siren city, and returns to Canticle Bay, threatening to reveal the Sirens unless he is stopped.

CONCLUSION B

If the party is taken hostage, they are threatened with death by drowning. However, Aquila lets the party go if they agree to help her sacrifice another land dwelling man. If the party is able to escape (either by making the deal or escaping back to the boat) and return to the city, Hamish is waiting to greet them. If the players did not kill Aquila, he only pays them half of what he promised.

REWARDS

Regardless of which conclusion the characters encounter, they earn 600 XP upon completion of the adventure.



SIREN

Medium humanoid, lawful neutral

Armor Class 11
Hit points 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed Swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	10 (0)	13 (+1)

Senses darkvision, passive
Perception 11
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 xp)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Siren makes two attacks: one with its claws and one with its trident.

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5ft., one target, Hit: 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage

Trident. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target, Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage (Versatile: Hit: 5 (1d8 + 1))

Luring Song. The siren sings a magical melody. Every humanoid and giant within 300 feet of the siren that can hear the song must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed until the song ends. The siren must take a bonus action on its subsequent turns to continue singing. It can stop singing at any time. The song ends if the siren is incapacitated.

While charmed by the Siren, a target is incapacitated and ignores the songs of other sirens. If the charmed target is more than 5 feet away from the siren, the target must move on its turn toward the siren by the most direct route, trying to get within 5 feet. It doesn't avoid opportunity attacks, but before moving into damaging terrain, such as lava or a pit, and whenever it takes damage from a source other than the siren, the target can repeat the saving throw. A charmed target can also repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns. If the saving throw is successful, the effect ends on it.

A target that successfully saves is immune to this siren's song for the next 24 hours.

DOLPHIN

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 0 ft., Swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive
Perception 13
Languages --
Challenge 1/8 (25 xp)

Charge. If the dolphin moves at least 30 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a slam attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Hold Breath. The dolphin can hold its breath for 20 minutes.

ACTIONS

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

CAVE FISHER

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 20 ft., Climb 20 ft.

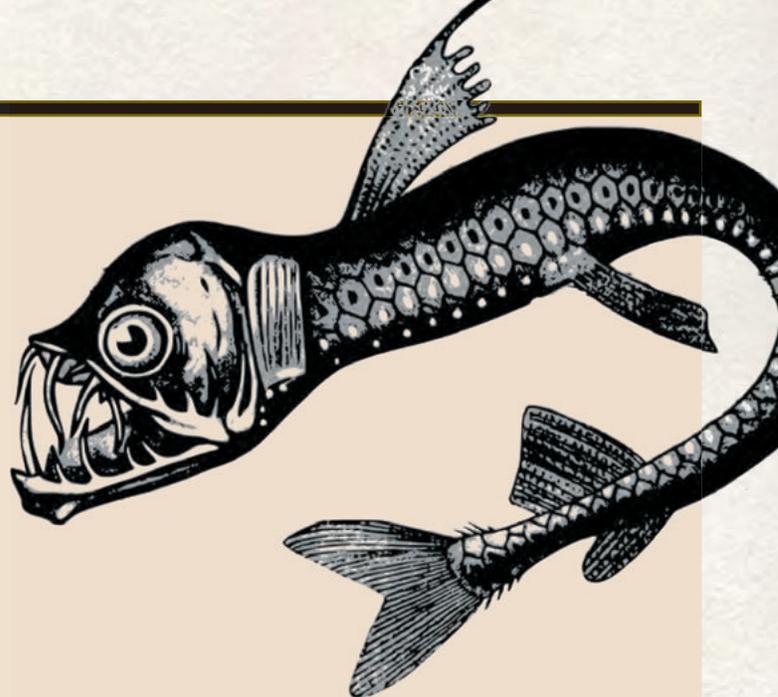
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	10 (0)	3 (-4)

Skills Perception +2,
Stealth +5
Senses Blindsight 60 ft., passive
Perception 12
Languages --
Challenge 3 (700 xp)

Adhesive Filament. The cave fisher can use its action to extend a sticky filament up to 60 feet, and the filament adheres to anything that touches it. A creature adhered to the filament is grappled by the cave fisher (escape DC 13), and ability checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage. The filament can be attacked (AC 15; 5 hit points; immunity to poison and psychic damage), but a weapon that fails to sever it becomes stuck to it, requiring an action and a successful DC 13 Strength check to pull free. Destroying the filament deals no damage to the cave fisher, which can extrude a replacement filament on its next turn.

Flammable Blood. If the cave fisher drops to half its hit points or fewer, it gains vulnerability to fire damage.

Spider Climb. The cave fisher can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.



ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cave fisher makes two attacks with its claws.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Filament. One creature grappled by the cave fisher's adhesive filament must make a DC 13 Strength saving throw, provided that the target weighs 200 pounds or less. On a failure, the target is pulled into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the cave fisher, and the cave fisher makes a claw attack against it as a bonus action. Reeling up the target releases anyone else who was attached to the filament. Until the grapple ends on the target, the cave fisher can't extrude another filament.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This adventure was largely inspired by issues of eco-feminism. Some scholars have argued that there is a strong correlation between the treatment of women, and the treatment of the planet. This adventure seeks to get players thinking about that relationship. The blatant misogyny exhibited on behalf of an NPC in this adventure does not condone that behavior, but seeks to highlight its ignorance. I would like to thank my playtesters, as well as Heather Pantan, Ignacio Santander-Alfonso, and Jordan Richer for their detailed feedback.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alicia grew up in rural Canada. She is passionate about bringing new players into *D&D*, and using the game to dig deep into social justice issues. She is a producer at Iron & Ice Productions, running multiple streaming TTRPG games. She can be found on Twitter @aliciafurness



ILLUSTRATION BY GWENDY BEE

FROM THE FOREST THEY FLED

by Alison Huang

CREATURE: *Dryad* | **LEVEL(S):** 1-3 | **CW:** *Forest fires*

SYNOPSIS

Ashvale is a simple village, full of people who live their simple lives without knowing anything about the world outside their simple valley. But there is one thing that they know: animals can sense danger. And, for the last few days, animals have been running out of the woods. Characters are hired to investigate and must venture into the forest. But the culprit, a dryad, may have a good reason for chasing all of those animals away. *From The Forest They Fled* is intended for levels 1-3.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party may be adventurers traveling through the town, or they might have heard word from a neighboring town.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Ashvale is a nondescript farming village located in the middle of a valley. It consists of a number of farmhouses, with one of them acting as a makeshift tavern of sorts where farmers go to drink after a long day.

The nearby forest, simply named Ashvale Forest, looks unremarkable at first sight, but it is actually home to a rare species of tree known as the Ash Gum. Ash Gums, like their real life equivalent Eucalyptus Regnans, require fire to germinate their seeds.

It is healthy for Ash Gums to be exposed to fire every five years, but since Ashvale was established fifty years ago, the villagers have prevented any fires from happening. The desperate trees have been silently pleading for help. A dryad recently arrived to aid them. Using her ability to speak with beasts, she asked all of the animals to leave so that they won't be harmed by the controlled fire she plans on causing. She intends to extinguish the fire herself if it gets out of hand.

As she is a fey, the dryad has a true name that she won't reveal to anyone. If an adventurer asks her what her name is, she says her name is Calypta.

CHAPTER 1 – INTO THE WOODS

A nondescript farming village, Ashvale would just be like any other settlement in this part of the world if not for the numerous animal tracks scattered all over the valley side: deer tracks, wolf tracks, even bear tracks. Though their owners have clearly gone in different directions, they all originate from the forest... the same forest that you've been hired to enter, to figure out why all of these animals have fled.

It's the middle of the day. The sun is shining down, and the edge of the forest looms in front of you. Sooner or later, you'll have to enter. Who will be the first to step in?

TRAVERSING THROUGH THE FOREST

Though this is not a horror adventure, it is important to make sure the characters do feel cautious about the forest and what they might find within it. Keep characters on their toes with the following suggestions.

- **DC 10 WISDOM (PERCEPTION) CHECK:** On a success, they hear a crashing sound in the distance. It is a tree branch that fell. On a failure, they hear nothing.
- **DC 12 DEXTERITY SAVING THROW:** On a success, they notice the ground beneath them is unstable, and move out of the way safely. On a failure, the ground beneath them falls 2 feet into an abandoned burrow, and they are knocked prone.

- **DC 12 WISDOM (PERCEPTION) CHECK:** On a success, they don't notice anything. On a failure, they feel something brushing against their leg. It is a bush that they hadn't realized was there.

FIRST HOUR

Once the characters have started walking through the forest, immediately bring to their attention that it is extremely quiet. Forest sounds that they would take for granted, like bird song, are missing. It is so quiet that the loudest sounds that they can hear are their footsteps and their heartbeats (if they have one).

As they walk, encourage your characters to speculate on what they think has happened.

Despite the unnerving nature of the forest, the first hour of travel is uneventful.

SECOND HOUR

At the start of the second hour, ask the player with the highest Wisdom (Survival) bonus to roll 1d4, or 2d4 if the party is at 3rd level. Their roll will determine what random encounter the party will face. If the player rolled 2d4, the random encounter includes the enemies from both results.

D4	ENCOUNTERS
1	Six crawling claws that are plants instead of undead, and look like they're made out of twigs
2	Four twig blights
3	One vine blight and one needle blight
4	Two piercers that are plants instead of monstrosities, and look like tree branches

THIRD HOUR

If the characters want to have a short rest, tell them they can do so while still moving forward, but they will have disadvantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks and Initiative rolls for the duration.

Regardless if the party takes a short rest or not, ask them each to make a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. On a success, tell them that they notice trees of a different species than the ones they have seen so far. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check is required to recognize these trees as Ash Gums.

As they continue forward, tell the player with the highest passive perception that they smell smoke in the distance, further into the forest.

A DC 5 Wisdom (Survival) check is required to figure out the exact direction the smoke is coming from.

If no one succeeds on this check, tell the character with the highest passive Perception that while they can't see anything unusual up ahead, they do sense that something is watching them. Undetectable due to its false appearance, a **vine blight** surprises and attacks the party.

By the time the encounter finishes, the smoke increases to the point the direction is clear.

DEVELOPMENT

When the characters have successfully tracked direction of the smoke, proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 – CALYPTA

The smell of smoke grows and grows as you move forward, until you can see it. It spills out between the trees before you like water. Boiling water. Because there's no mistaking that the world in front of you has begun to burn.

HOW THE MIGHTY FALL

One last obstacle separates the party from Calypta: a large fallen tree. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that it was dragged to this spot, but there are no clear tracks. Calypta ordered her vine blights to move it for her.

It is possible to simply bypass this obstacle by walking around it. However, it is faster to climb over it with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. A successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, or enough time and teamwork, pushes the fallen tree out of the way.

THROUGH SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Through the smoke before you, you notice a humanoid shape. As you watch, the shape touches a tree next to them. In an instant, the bark underneath their hand bursts into flame. Satisfied, they move onto the next tree and repeat.

In a clearing beyond the fallen tree, Calypta is systematically lighting Ash Gum trees on fire with *druidcraft*. The clearing is circular, with a diameter of 50 feet. It is full of smoke, which means Calypta is heavily obscured.

If the party attacks her before she notices them, proceed to the *Fighting Calypta* section. Otherwise, once she is aware that the party is there, she will cast create or destroy water to dissipate the smoke.

ROLE-PLAYING CALYPTA

The smoke clears to reveal a feminine figure. You're not sure if the bark that covers her is armour, or merely her skin - either way, it extrudes outwards from her head and shoulders into spikes. Between the wooden plates on her face, her eyes glimmer like hot coals. Her fingertips glow, still slightly alight.

"Tell me," she says, her eyes narrowing.

"Why. Are. You. Here."

Calypta is compassionate — she heeded the plea of the trees, and asked all of the animals to leave so that they don't get hurt. However, her kindness is not for the benefit of humanoids or for civilization.

Although she is fundamentally kind, she is also ruthless and distrustful. While she won't hurt the party, except as a last resort, she won't act gently either. She demands to know why they are there. She firmly tells them to leave before they get caught in the fire. She bluntly states that her task is none of the party's business.

Her demeanor should be hostile enough that some parties will see her as someone who is unable to be reasoned with and attack her. At the same time, she should be approachable enough that continuing to talk with her doesn't seem like a lost cause.

A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check gets her to explain what she is doing. However, each failed check lowers this DC by 5 for subsequent attempts.

If, after explaining herself, any party members ask if they can help her, she is flattered but declines their offer.

FIGHTING CALYPTA

During this encounter, it is important to note that parts of the clearing are on fire. Depending on the level of your party, and how determined they are to fight Calypta, you may consider having this fire come into play.

The encounter starts with two fires, each fire filling a 5-foot cube. These fires are considered magical. A creature takes 1d4 damage when it moves into the fire's space for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there.

If Calypta attacks with Produce Flame and misses, another fire will be created adjacent to the target.

At initiative count 20, 1d4 fires are created adjacent to existing fires. Calypta's stat block is on page 28.

TACTICS: Calypta will not immediately attack. Instead, she will demand that the party leave.

After one round, she will begin using her Fey Charm action in order to try and force them to go.

Only when it is clear to her that the party cannot be persuaded will she attack. Calypta only attacks using *produce flame*.

Whenever possible, Calypta will use her bonus action to Disengage and use her Tree Stride trait to move to another part of the clearing or up into the tree branches. She is notably nonchalant about this, as she is not trying to run away. Instead she finds it quite inconvenient that she is being attacked, and she would rather not be in a position for the attacks to continue.

Letting Calypta die is an unfavourable outcome! If characters are still insistent on fighting her, even if she is not fighting back, chase them away from the clearing with the fire.

DEVELOPMENT

When the characters have left Calypta and the clearing behind, and are leaving the forest, proceed to *Chapter 3*.

CHAPTER 3 – FIRE, FIRE

By the time the party has left the clearing, they have either distracted Calypta long enough that she hasn't been keeping a watchful eye on the fire, or they have caused Calypta to further amplify it. Either way, they need to get out of the forest. If your party did not previously push the fallen tree to the side, they can either succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to climb over it, or take the slower but surer option of walking around the fallen tree.

Any player who fails their Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, or opts to walk around the tree, must succeed at a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 fire damage. If the party fought Calypta, this DC increases to DC 15.

OUT OF THE FIRE

Once the party has passed the fallen tree, they are able to move forward without the danger of being caught on fire. While the flames chase behind them, the gap quickly widens.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the characters are out of danger, proceed to the *Conclusion*.

CONCLUSION

You make your way out of the forest without any further problems. By the time you return to Ashvale, the sun has already set.

One of the villagers notices your approach, and excitedly yells, “*They’re returned!*” Almost immediately, all of the doors to the houses open and the rest of the villagers rush out. They bring you into the house that serves as Ashvale’s watering hole. Drinks and food are shoved into your hands.

It is only then that they ask what happened.

Regardless of what happened in Ashvale Forest, the villagers are grateful for the party’s assistance, and eagerly listen to their tale.

If the party mentions running away from Calypta and leaving the forest to burn, the villagers will be ter-

rified and ask why the party did not stop her. Regardless of how assuring their answer is, the party is paid 100 gp, and the villagers go and make preparations to evacuate Ashvale. The party is not given a place to stay for the night.

- If the party does not mention running away from Calypta, the party is paid 100gp, and shown to warm beds for the night. In the middle of the night, the party is awoken by the sound of heavy rain. Any player that chooses to investigate will discover that it is raining on the edge of Ashvale and over Ashvale Forest. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) reveals that this is most likely the result of the *create or destroy water* spell.

- If the villagers of Ashvale were preparing to leave, this rain will put them at ease. However, in the morning they will encourage the party to go back into the forest to kill Calypta. She has already left.

- If the party left the clearing peacefully, Calypta will approach them once they have left Ashvale.

Once you have left Ashvale behind, you notice a figure standing by the road looking in your direction. A fae perhaps? Or a summer eladrin? As you approach, you notice her burning eyes. They seem familiar. When she speaks you recognise her instantly as the dryad you met in the forest.

“*For not interfering with my affairs,*” she says, holding a hand out to you. A piece of amber glistens in the center of her palm, surrounded by cord.

As soon as the amulet is taken from her, she vanishes, leaving behind a faint smell of fire.

She gives the party a *Summer Fey’s Blessing* (see *Rewards*).

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE	XP
Crawling Claw	10
Twig Blight	25
Vine Blight	100
Needle Blight	50
Piercer	100
Moving the fallen tree	20 per person
Reaching the clearing	100 per person
Conversing with Calypta	200 per person

TREASURE REWARDS

ITEM	VALUE
Ashvale's Reward	100 gp

SUMMER FEY'S BLESSING

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This amber amulet softly glows with a warm light, and smells like a campfire. While you are wearing it, you gain the following benefits: You can use the amulet as a spellcasting focus. You have resistance to fire damage, and you don't suffer the effects of extreme heat, as described in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*. Whenever you make a Charisma check when interacting with fey, you have advantage on the check.



CALYPTA

Medium fey, neutral good

Armor Class 16 (permanent barkskin)
Hit Points 40 (5d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	12 (+1)	11 (0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Acrobatics +3, Perception +2

Damage Resistances fire, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Calypta's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Calypta can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *druidcraft*, *produce flame*

3/day each: *entangle*, *goodberry*, *create or destroy water*

1/day each: *barkskin*, *pass without trace*

Magic Resistance. Calypta has advantage on Saving Throws against Spells and other magical effects.

Nimble Escape. Calypta can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. Calypta can communicate with Beasts and Plants as if they shared a language.

Tree Stride. Once on her turn, Calypta can use 10 feet of her movement to step magically into one living tree within her reach and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be large or bigger.



ACTIONS

Fey Charm. Calypta targets one humanoid or beast that she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see Calypta, it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed. The charmed creature regards Calypta as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Calypta's control, it takes Calypta's requests or actions in the most favorable way it can.

Each time Calypta or her allies do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Calypta dies, is on a different plane of existence from the target, or ends the effect as a bonus action. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to Calypta's Fey Charm for the next 24 hours.

Calypta can have no more than one humanoid and up to three beasts charmed at a time.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

When we imagine strong female characters, it's easy to think of characters that are physically strong. But just conferring traditionally masculine qualities implies that traditionally feminine qualities are weak. Just making female characters physically strong doesn't actually change much.

Think about the Tarot Card, Strength. It depicts a maiden and a lion. The lion is strong because of all those traditionally masculine values. Physical strength, ferocity, and so forth. But the maiden is strong as well. It is her kindness and her inner strength that allows her to stroke the lion without fear.

Or consider Medea, from the play of the same name. Though it pains her, though she wishes it didn't have to be that way, she has the conviction to hurt even her own children, as revenge for her husband's callous decision to replace her with a more socially acceptable bride.

Strength doesn't have to be physical strength. It doesn't have to be contrary to compassion, to being open emotionally. It doesn't have to be pretty.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Huang, who lives in Australia, has a deep love for narrative, especially non-violent and queer narratives. She usually expresses this through works of interactive fiction, which can be found at Drazillion.itch.io. Her Twitter handle is [@Drazillion](https://twitter.com/Drazillion).





ILLUSTRATION BY PURPLE ART GAMES

LAI OF THE SEA HAG

by *Maryśka Connolly*

CREATURE(S): *Hags* | LEVEL(S): 2-3

SYNOPSIS

The busy port city of Jute's Landing is built into the white cliffs of a deep, protected harbor. It is an important trade stop for many ships and merchants, but this was not always so. Long ago this quiet harbor was home to a coven of hags. Jute Windbrow killed two of the three when he and his crew claimed the harbor for themselves. Evanore, the surviving hag, has lived for more than 100 years in disguise while the city grew up around her. The legend of the heroic Jute Windbrow defeating the wicked monsters has grown as great as her bitterness and desire for vengeance.

Lai of the Sea Hag is an adventure for 4-5 level 2 characters, but can still be enjoyable, though less of a challenge, for a party of level 3 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Characters arrive in the city by ship, though their reason for being there can vary. The party may have been hired to investigate criminal activity, agreed to offer protection to a ship traversing dangerous waters, or someone could have a connection to an NPCs and have been invited.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The characters enter this busy seaside port of Jute's Landing after a long voyage to find a street play in progress in the dockside market. While watching, they are pickpocketed and must embark on an adventure that leads them to one of the hags in hiding.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **EVANORE VANDRUM:** A **sea hag** who escaped the slaughter of her coven and has lived under an illusion as an elven woman in the city for many years with the descendants of Dasha Reuter helping her. Hearing her story twisted every day by the residents of the city deeply hurts and angers her. She has grown impatient, especially since the current Reuter lord wants to sever their association.
- **REMI "THE FALCON" FALCO:** Remi would rather talk than fight. She's a woman who has worked hard to get where she is at the head of the Dock Rats.
- **MERRICK STONEHAMMER:** A middle-aged dwarf who is proprietor of the Sunken Alehouse. He offers lodging to the characters in exchange for their help.
- **BREETINA GEARHEART:** An absent-minded gnomish engineer in charge of the city waterworks.
- **GERWIN REUTER:** A noble whose family has been allied with the sea hag Evanore since his ancestor Dasha Reuter (companion of Jute Windbrow) took pity on her and helped her hide among the humanoid residents of the newly founded city. Gerwin is unaware of her true nature. He is served by two orc butlers that he has raised from children.



CHAPTER 1 — FRESH OFF THE BOAT

The oak gangplank creaks gently as you make your way, blinking in the mid-afternoon sun, down from the deck of the Far Horizon. Even for those of you accustomed to ocean travel, this voyage has been a rough one. Storms harried your route, forcing adjustments to navigation that significantly lengthened the voyage and requiring non-essential crew and passengers to remain below deck where they would be safe from the punishing winds and rain.

Before you rises the port city of Jute's Landing. A large town straddling a deep, sheltered bay that makes it an important trading stop. As you and the other passengers make your way down the dock, you begin to hear the unmistakable sound of a busy market just ahead. The narrow road from the harbor happens to lead in this direction so you let the reassuring sounds of merchants and street vendors guide you.

The party finds themselves caught up in an enthusiastic crowd watching a street play that tells the story of the founding of the city of Jute's Landing when Jute Windbrow and his crew defeated the sea hags that inhabited the harbor. The crowd cheers mightily as the hags — actors in green body paint, wrapped in green ribbons — fall one-by-one in combat with Captain Windbrow. As the last hag flees, the crowd applauds. A colorfully dressed halfling performer begins to collect donations.

HAVE THE ENTIRE PARTY MAKE A PERCEPTION CHECK (DC 18).

If a party member succeeds

You feel something brush against you and glance down to see a small child bump into your side. He appears startled. Before you can speak — to apologize or admonish him — he dashes off into the crowd

(See *Catching Jost*.)

On a failed roll:

As the halfling approaches you reach down to retrieve a coin or two from your pouch only to find it gone. At that moment, you realize that several other people in the audience are making a similar discovery and are not happy about it.

(See *A Criminal Happening*.)

Note: The party may split here with some following the thief and some questioning other victims.

A CRIMINAL HAPPENING

If the characters ask around, they discover that several other audience members are also victims of the pick-pockets. The following people should engage with the party:

- **MERRICK STONEHAMMER** (dwarven proprietor, **commoner**, of the Sunken Alehouse): he offers the party lodging and food in exchange for their retrieving the 200 gp he had in his purse that was intended to buy ale for his business.
- **BREETINA GEARHEART** (gnomish engineer, **commoner**): the thieves have taken her key to the City Waterworks. She expresses distress that someone might gain access to the drinking supply and offers a cash reward of 150 gp for their help and discretion, and an extra 50 gp if they get the key back before sunset tomorrow.
- None of the performers were robbed but were not involved. Performers include: Selwin (elf; leader); Yan, Olva, Quintin (halfling); Winnie (halfling; Quintin's wife); and Soren. (Note: these NPCs all have the stats of a **commoner**.)

Questioning the audience members reveals that the thieves guild, the Dock Rats, are the likely culprits. They are rumored to have a safehouse located in warehouse district. If asked, someone can draw a rough map.

CATCHING JOST

No matter how many succeed, they lose all but one child in the crowd. He flees into an ally and hides in an ash pit for an unused chimney. On a DC 12 Investigation/Perception check, the party notices the small hatch and finds him squeezed inside. Jost bursts into tears and admits to taking the money and key but has already passed the loot off to another child.

He's heard the Dock Rat's lair can be entered through an abandoned warehouse. If pressed for more information, he insists he's too low in the ranks to know anything else.

DEVELOPMENT

Breetina Gearheart hears the commotion and follows the party in their search for Jost if she's not already engaged talking to a PC (see *A Criminal Happening*).

CHAPTER 2 – MEET THE DOCK RATS

You follow the directions and easily find the deserted warehouse. It's the only one on the street that doesn't have workers bustling around outside and carts coming and going.

Thieves Cant on the back door depicts symbols for "keep out," "property," and "rats." Characters can enter from either the front or back door on a lockpicking check (DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)) or by forcing the door (DC 12 Strength). The warehouse contains trash and an office with an empty desk.

Wisdom (Investigation) OR (Perception) DC 15:

Some dirt in front of the desk has been scrapped like it has recently been moved. Under the desk is a clear outline of a trap door.

TRAP: A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) discovers a fine wire attached to the handle that releases a dart from the wall when lifted or jolted; a DC 15 Dexterity successfully disarms it.

If characters don't disarm the trap, the character lifting the door makes a DC 15 Dexterity save or takes 1d4+1 piercing damage.

The trap door swings open and rests against the desk as if it had been designed to do just that. Stone steps descend into the darkness below you.

ENTERING THE FALCON'S NEST

There are brackets on the walls for torches, but none are lit. The steps are evenly spaced and only slightly worn. The spiral stair emerges into a hallway that extends for 75 ft. Ahead you can make out a faint light and two shapes leaning against the walls facing each other.

Unless the characters are loud coming down the stairs, the guards don't immediately notice their arrival.

THE GUARDS AT THE GATE

The guards (**bandits** named Ambert and Don) are lounging against the walls on either side of the doorway at the end of the hall. Characters may attempt to intimidate or persuade (DC 15 Charisma) the guards into taking them to see the Falcon.

IF THEY FIGHT: On the guards they find a key that opens the door and a letter to Ambert's love interest. It's largely illegible, but a clear phrase printed in the margin reads, "I drink. I die. I eat. I thrive."

THE FALCON

A long table with benches takes up most of the center of the room. On the walls are hooks holding cloaks, a straw hat, and bundled herbs. Shelves hold bottles of ale. There's a pair of muddy boots by door. There are two doors on the right and one across from the entrance.

- **If escorted by the guards, Ambert and Don:** The players are taken to the door directly across from the entrance, where a flame wall springs up, barring the door. One of them speaks a pass phrase to dispel it ("I drink. I die. I eat. I thrive").
- **If they explore without the guards:**
 - First door on the right:** The characters find a small kitchen full of cooking supplies and assorted foodstuff. A small box hidden behind a basket of beets contains 12 gp and 52 sp.
 - Second door on the right:** A large room with a dozen beds and trunks containing personal items. One of the trunks has "I drink. I die. I eat.

I thrive” written in chalk on the inside of the lid. A search yields 14 gp and 10 sp, a jade hair comb, and a map with the Reuter Manor marked.

Door across from the entrance: When they touch the door a wall of fire appears. Any party member who touches it takes 1d4 fire damage every round they remain in contact. Water doesn’t put it out. The door doesn’t burn. The phrase “I drink. I die. I eat. I thrive” dispels the flames. It’s locked (DC 12 Dexterity) or can be forced (DC 12 Strength).

AUDIENCE WITH THE FALCON

The door opens into a room with a single carved chair in the center on a dais. An image of a soaring falcon is woven into a massive tapestry on the wall behind the chair. In the chair is a dark-haired man in glasses.

He claims to be the Falcon, although a Wisdom (Insight) (DC 15) reveals otherwise. He’ll refuse to talk about any of his “business ventures” and demand they leave.

- **If the character are not hostile toward the NPCs:** Remi “the Falcon” Falco steps out from behind the tapestry after a few minutes and introduces herself. She’ll share that she was hired to steal the waterworks key and is concerned that her client, Gerwin Reuter, might have something nefarious in mind. She’ll offer 50gp each to get it back discreetly.
- **If characters are hostile toward the NPCs:**
- The Falcon and her bodyguards attack from an alcove behind the tapestry (see creature stats on pg. 36). Her bodyguards, Blade and Nettie, have the stats of a **bandit**.
- **LOOT:** 48 gp and a letter signed “G. Reuter” promising the second half of the payment upon delivery of the “item.”

CHAPTER 3 – NOBLE IS AS NOBLE DOES

The Reuter estate is not as impressive as others on the street. The wrought iron fence along the front is rusting, and the gate is missing.

- **If they knock:** An orc in an embroidered waistcoat answers and agree to let them speak to his master. He brings the party to Gerwin Rueter. Another orc is pouring Gerwin’s wine.
- **If the party attacks or breaks in:** The two guards (**orcs**) and Gerwin (**noble**) respond to the attack.

GERWIN’S BEHAVIOR AND MOTIVATIONS:

Gerwin locks himself in the closest room when threatened. The orcs fight to protect him. Gerwin surrenders if one of the orcs are harmed.

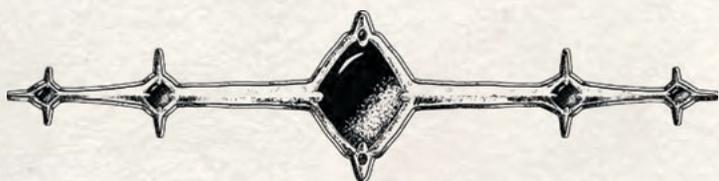
Gerwin is a coward and quickly confesses everything (DC 10 Charisma). Evanore took his son, San’s, spirit when he tried to end their relationship. The Rueter family has been involved with Vandrums since his ancestor, Dasha Reuter, came here with Jute Windbrow. Gerwin does not realize that the Vandrum “family” has always been the same women who just changes her appearance every few years.

Although San died from an illness, Gerwin claims Evanore killed him to convince the party to help rid him of her. Evanore *does* have his spirit, and the rest is true.

Gerwin gives the party a *cap of water breathing* (DMG) if the characters promise to kill Evanore. If the characters kill him instead, the cap can be found on his body. A letter in his desk begs Evanore to release his son’s spirit so he can be at peace. Either Gerwin or a random townspeople can direct them to the Vandrum Estate.

CHAPTER 4 – LAI OF THE SEA HAG

The Vandrum Estate looms before you, large and impressive. A steel portcullis stands open at the entrance to a stone courtyard with a large fountain.



As the party enters, the portcullis slams shut behind them and two **kuo-toa** emerge from the fountain.

- **TACTICS:** The party eventually face six **kuo-toa** who attempt to surround them.
- **LOOT:** The leader is wearing a golden circlet with the words “Be thee not afraid” engraved in elvish on the inside (see *Circlet of Courage*).

GAINING ENTRY

The front door requires DC 25 strength check to force inward. There’s no visible locking mechanism. There’s a door on the balcony (unlocked) and several second-floor windows; a Dexterity (Athletics) can be made with advantage if assisted. Investigating (DC 10 Wisdom) the exterior reveals a trellis under one window that can be easily climbed.

If they explore the fountain, they find an underwater tunnel with alcoves containing seaweed beds, cages of fish, assorted clothing, two rusty spears, and shell jewelry worth 10 gp.

Inside, the party finds an estate with vaulted ceilings and marble floors but little furniture or decorations aside from a large, underwater scene painted in the main hall. The kitchen contains wine, salted fish, cheese, and bread. A search reveals only two other locations of note: an upstairs bedroom and a secret door leading to the basement.

THE UPSTAIRS BEDROOM:

Unlike the other rooms in the manor, this contains some sign of being lived in. A four-poster bed dominates the room. There are two bowls near the wall. One contains water.

If the party investigates, they find a **worg puppy** under the bed. The party can lure it out with *Speak with Animals*, an offering of food, or a Nature (Animal Handling) check (DC 10). The puppy takes them to Evanore (via the secret door).

The secret door can be discovered without the worg’s help if the characters pass a DC 15 Wisdom (Investigation) OR (Perception).

EVANORE VANDRUM

A sunken rectangular pool of water dominates the room, with pillars at each corner. Standing beside the pool is Evanore Vandrum, a slender elven woman wearing a seafoam green gown. She calmly turns to you as you enter.

[If the worg puppy is present] The strange little dog breaks away and runs to the woman. She reaches down absently to scratch its ear.

If the party is respectful, Evanore reveals that she was one of the three hags in the coven Jute Windbrow defeated. Evanore often considered punishing the people responsible but her friendship with Dasha Reuter’s family stayed her hand. Between Gerwin’s betrayal of that trust and the increasing viciousness of the stories, she’s lost patience. The popularity of the play was the final straw. She intends to poison the water supply.

Evanore is angry, but more so hurt and betrayed. If the characters offer a convincing argument for preserving the city or propose a plan to improve her situation, she accepts it, return the key, and release San’s spirit.

Possible resolutions include but are not limited to:

- Finding her another home.
- Appealing to her affection for the previous Reuters.
- Retelling her story using either the theater company or the thieves guild (depending on the party’s relationship with those entities). Be open to creative suggestions from the players.

If they fail, she takes on her true form and attacks.

Unless wearing the *Circlet of Courage* or averting their gaze, each party member should make a fright check per the “Horrific Appearance” trait (see Evanore’s stat block on pg. 37).

TACTICS: Evanore will not be reasoned with once she has decided that the party members are enemies. She won’t hurt the worg, Percy, or attack anyone near him.

Upon Evanore's death (if this occurs):

As the sea hag collapses to the ground, she seems to shrivel and desiccate before your eyes. In moments all that's left is a dried husk that hardly resembles anything that once lived. Amid the remains you catch sight of a glint that could only be one thing: Breetina's key. Your heart swells with sudden dread... were you too late?

LOOT: There is a chest found 5-feet-deep in the pool. It contains four jars of potent poison and a swirling blue mist in a bottle (San, Gerwin's son). Opening the bottle releases his spirit, allowing him to finally rest.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

XP should can be given for successful resolution and friendship, not just defeats.

OBSTACLE	XP
Dock Rats guards (Don and Ambert)	25 each
Remi Falco	250
Remi's bodyguards (Blade and Nettie)	25 each
Gerwin Reuter	25
Orc	100 each
Kuo-toa	50 each
Commoner	10 each
Worg puppy	75
Evanore (elder sea hag)	450
Flaming door puzzle	100

TREASURE REWARDS

(Note that the key can only be returned to one person)

ITEM	VALUE
Return the key to Beertina Gearheart	150 gp (+50 gp for completing in 1 day)
Return the key to Remi Falco	50 gp each

REMI "THE FALCON" FALCO

Medium humanoid, true neutral

Armor Class 14 (leather)
Hit points 27
Speed 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0) **DEX** 16 (+3) **CON** 13 (+1) **INT** 15 (+2) **WIS** 8 (-1) **CHA** 12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +4
Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +2, Intimidation +5, Stealth _5
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Halfling

ACTIONS

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Dagger. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

FEATURES AND TRAITS

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, Remi can deal extra 1d6 piercing damage to one creature if an ally is within 5 ft. of the target.

Cunning Action. Once per turn, Remi can use a bonus action to dash, disengage, or attempt to hide.

CIRCLET OF COURAGE

Rare, Requires attunement

A gold circlet with elvish script that reads: *be thee not afraid*. Renders the wearer immune to frighten and fear effects.

CAP OF WATER BREATHING

Dungeon Masters Guide, pg. 157.

PERCY (WORG PUPPY)

Medium monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 10 (natural armor)

Hit points 15

Speed 40 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+0)	6 (-2)	10 (0)	10 (0)

Skills Perception +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Additional traits found under adult worg (MM).

EVANORE VALDRUM

(ELDER SEA HAG)

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit points 105

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+0)	6 (-2)	10 (0)	10 (0)

Additional traits found under sea hag (MM).



AUTHOR'S NOTES

The idea for this adventure arose from a conversation about the erasure of women's stories and perspectives in history. The character of Jute Windbrow embodies men such as Christopher Columbus who are portrayed as heroes but often built their reputation on the backs of disenfranchised peoples. Evanore Vandrum, the namesake sea hag of this story, is a tragic figure in that everything has been taken from her, even her dignity and her story. Her rage is all too sympathetic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maryska Connolly is a writer, librarian, and game designer in central Virginia. She spends much of her time designing escape rooms, hosting murder mysteries, and running *D&D* campaigns for college students and friends. You can follow her on Facebook @queenofthegoblins and on Twitter @maryskaconnolly.



ART BY SCHMIDSI

THE WEEPING WOMAN

by *Kristina Sisto Kindel*

CREATURE(S): *Banshee* | **LEVEL:** 2

CW: *Domestic violence, suicide, infanticide*

SYNOPSIS

This is a reclamation of the classic Mexican horror story designed to keep young adventurers wary of their curfews, La Llorona. In this tale, adventurers will face perilous encounters with beings that lurk in the shadows, and uncover what might have happened to drive a woman long ago to transform into a nightmarish legend. *The Weeping Woman* is designed for level 2 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The town you are staying in has been on high alert since a broken dam upstream routed a fork of the river through a long dried-up bed. You hear from the bartender at the local tavern that a pair of tiefling children have gone missing. They had been out late at night, playing by the riverbed, and have not been seen for a full day now. Their parents, Marna and Rik, have offered a reward of 150 gold for their safe return. So far, no one in the town has ventured into the woods across the old riverbed, stating that an old curse had returned with the water.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is based on the Mexican horror legend of La Llorona, the woman who searches the earth for her children who drowned in the river. She lures curfew-breaking children into the water and leads them to their deaths. There are many different iterations of the story, and the players will be given multiple story options throughout the adventure. The adventure is not designed to have a right or wrong version of the story, but your players might discover more about themselves the more stories they hear about the monster, and what they choose to believe.

CHAPTER 1 – THE FOREST

Looming dark on the opposite side of the newly flowing riverbed, an old forest rises into the sky. A few stones stick out and form a path across the lightly trickling river. A path passes through the town square. No one is willing to hold a long conversation, and the party gets the sense that the whole town is afraid of something that they are unwilling to discuss. The path to the old riverbed is well worn, but overgrowth is beginning to take over. Mud splatters on stones crossing the slow trickle of the old river lead into the dark forest. There are a few stone stacks on the other side of the water, and a small shovel and bucket. This is a place where children play. A deer trail leads into the woods. A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) overhears the following bits of conversation:

“That old riverbed is where all the trouble started. Back when I was young, there was this old tale of a witch who wandered the bank, searching for her children that she drowned long ago when she saw her man with another woman. They say she can’t cross to the other side without them. She done killed them though, seems to me that she has no business crossing over at all!”

“Have you heard it? The crying? I heard it once, when I was a child. I never thought I would have to hear it again... chills me to the bone, it does.”

THE OLD HUT

The ruin of an old home stands crumbling in a glade of overgrowth. The door is covered in winding vines of ivy and moss crawls up onto the lower stones of the hut. A candle burns low in the single window. A faint sob comes from the house, and the door is ajar, with a wide beam that has fallen off the roof covering the entry.

- **INSIDE THE HUT.** The beam is rotting and falls apart when interacted with. Three beds, one large, and two smaller stand in the one-room hut. A fireplace full of ash is in the corner, and a writing desk is tipped over next to it. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a cornhusk doll tucked into one of the small beds, and a tarnished ring in a box near the desk. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check on the desk or the beds also reveals a small leatherbound journal that has slipped under one of the beds.
- **UNDER THE BED.** If characters reach beneath the bed and across the symbol hidden there (a crudely carved symbol of a face with tears streaming down the cheeks, mouth wide open) have them make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the adventurer takes 1d6 psychic damage as sobs fill their head, and is considered frightened until their next short or long rest.
- **ITEM EFFECTS:** If the characters take the items from the hut, they will be haunted with versions of the story of La Llorona throughout their adventure, depending on where they are in the world. Characters must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw, or suffer the item's effects.
 - The **ring** is activated in the hut. **Effect:** A profound sense of guilt.
 - The **doll** is activated on the island. **Effect:** A deep sense of loss.
 - The **journal** is activated once the party begins a short or long rest. **Effect:** An overwhelming sense of fear.
- If they wish, they can lean into the emotion and find out the story anyway.

RING

As you hold the ring in your hands inside the hut, your party members see your eyes roll back into your head as you begin to sob, heavy cries that shake your body to the earthen floor. Before your eyes, like a vision, you see a dark haired woman, young in years, clad all in white. The vision flashes forward to the hut you are in. You see the same woman, embracing a young man as he leaves for the day, the rising sun painting the sky a dark red, their two children playing in the hut behind them. Flashing forward more, you see the woman bent in grief over an empty double bed, ripping a letter to shreds. Flashing forward a final time, you see the man and another woman holding the children, and the dark haired woman screaming from the window of a mule-drawn wagon with iron bars on the windows galloping away from the hut. You awaken with an ache in your chest and tears on your face.

DOLL

A wave of comfort and familiarity washes over you as your party sees you collapse to the ground among the rest of the dolls scattered on the island. The cornhusk doll from the old hut has found its way into your hand from where you stored it, and it smiles up at the party. Visions start to swirl before your eyes, a warm plate of simple food passed to you, your tiny hands grasping at some flatbread. A smiling woman with dark hair tousles your hair, and turns to a pot on the fire. Her clothes are torn, but looking down at yourself, you see your clothes are carefully mended and patched. The vision speeds forward. Your body is shivering but you are drenched in a sheen of sweat. Blearily, you see her, also shivering, holding out some broth for you and your sibling next to you to drink. She is pallid and thinner than before, begging you both to eat. The vision speeds forward and you are next to a spot by the river, looking from a birds-eye view as she sobs alone on the ground, and lays a pair of corn husk dolls on top of two tiny mounds of dirt. You wake with dry earth in your mouth.

JOURNAL

As your vision begins to blur towards rest, you begin to hear a faint crying — dry, heavy sobs. The visions that come to you are violent and disturbing, a woman running from a man, hiding her children from him under the beds, in the town temple, in the reeds of the river. You hear him scream at her, “You will never be enough! You are worthless to me!” You see visions of her, bruised and weeping, searching the reeds. “My children! Come back to me! It is over! My children, where did you go?” You awaken with a gasp, tears salty on your face, lungs racked with crying.

THE FOREST PATH

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals an overgrown path into the dark forest. Following the path for a mile, there are little signs of life other than the buzzing of flies.

- **CREATURES.** One **will o' the wisp** suddenly emerges from the forest, blocking the old path. (This is the spirit of one of the many children claimed by the banshee over the years.) Just off the path, two giant centipedes crawl out of the brush.
- **COMBAT.** The **centipedes** do not engage unless the adventurers venture off the path. After the defeat of the will o' the wisp, the players find the path leads to a glade with trees growing in a circle, and a small garden at the foot of the largest one.

DEVELOPMENT

A small garden grows orange marigolds and white sage at the foot of a large tree, one of six lining a dimly lit glade. The canopy provides a great deal of cover and shade, but the rustling of the leaves above seems strange in the windless forest. Something thuds into the ground near to the bottom of the tree, followed by another. Javelins made of branches tied together, crude and dull, stick out of the soil. The rustling continues above you.

CHAPTER 2 — THE PATH TO THE RIVER

The creature in the tree is an elderly human woman, probably in her seventies, lithe and strong. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that she is terrified. She retreats into the upper branches of the tree after flinging her two javelins and shouting.

THE WOMAN IN THE TREEHOUSE

- **INTERACTING WITH THE WOMAN.** The woman in the tree is more scared than hostile. She is a **druid**.
- **THE WOMAN'S HISTORY.** When asked her name, she says she cannot remember. Her story is detailed in the next column:

"Scared. Woman took me when I was small. She cry at water and I go to help. She grab my hand, she had no eyes, only white. She scream and dragged me to water. I was so scared I make vines that kept her still while I ran into woods and climb this big tree. I make house, eat plants. Keep birds. No scary woman come here. Tree is kind to me and my birds."

"I remember... long ago, a woman who was warm told me a story. A poor woman met a rich man. She wants to spend all her time with him, so leaves her babies behind in the night. When she return in the morning, they are in the river. She cried so hard by the river for them, she stayed there forever. Still trying to save them. Crying all she does."

THE TREEHOUSE

IF THE CHARACTERS ATTACK THE WOMAN: Depending on what your players decide to do about the woman in the treehouse, they could miss out on a story opportunity to hear the woman's version of the tale. If they end up attacking the old woman and entering the treehouse, it contains the following effects:

- Artwork covering the walls, all depicting a dark haired woman with white eyes, reaching out a clawed hand and screaming. These seem to have been painted over a period of many years. The earliest are reminiscent of the crude carving beneath the bed in the hut.
- Dried meats and bowls of berries surround the circular space. Everything is foraged (confirmed with a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check). There are birds feet drying in the window, and a large mortar and pestle in the center of the room. There are woven mats that serve as bedding in the side of the treehouse near the window. There are sixty-eight carved tic marks next to the bed, signifying the years she has been in the treehouse.

THE BROKEN DAM

Before reaching the edge of the forest, the party hears the sound of rushing water. Upon exiting the dark of the forest, they come face to face with the broken dam. The party cannot see the other side of the river.

- **THE BOAT.** At the shore is a boat that glows with an eerie light. If the players get in the boat, proceed to the *Island of the Dolls*. If the players follow the river, they see a cave on the other side. The spectral boat follows them as they move.

DEVELOPMENT

Emerging from the rushing current is the faint outline of an island. Through the fog are trees bearing large, strangely shaped leaves. The ground is strewn with large rocks, and overgrown by gnarled weeds.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FAR SHORE

As the boat crests the shore, you see that the rocks are not rocks. The leaves are not organic material. The island is covered in dolls. Small, large, made of various material, some with faces that gaze up, unblinking; others with no face at all. They litter the ground, propped against trees and hanging by their limbs from the branches. Whoever put them there has been doing so for many years.

ISLAND OF THE DOLLS

- **EXPLORING THE ISLAND.** Upon exploring the island, characters keep running into dolls. They are disturbingly everywhere. As they crest the hill toward the other side of the island, the characters notice a glinting under a pile of logs.
- **COMBAT.** There are 3 dolls on top of the log pile with the glinting underneath. One is a **mimic!** When characters inspect, have them roll initiative and be surprised.
- **THE LOGPILE.** A successful DC 11 Strength check topples the logs, revealing a treasure horde. The party discovers jewels and coin stashed under the logs, worth approximately 300 gold. They also recover 2 healing potions.
- **THE OLD TREE.** There is an old tree next to the log pile. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals an idol carved from pure precious stone. A

DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals that this is a protection idol to an ancient goddess of childbirth, who weeps for the babies lost in childbirth, including her own whom she abandoned long ago; she has power to give guidance for those mothers lost on their path to the other side.

Instead of collapsing, the character who holds the idol feels it pulse with power, the statuette glowing in their hands. Read or paraphrase the following:

Everything shifts, the island is the same, but devoid of dolls; covered in lush vegetation with large flowering blooms. A group of women, adorned in armor and feathered capes approach. They carry shields and spears and are adorned with skull masks and crowns of feathers. They drop to their knees in front of a stone pile. Placing an identical carved idol on the stones, they begin to pray. *“Goddess, bless this warrior’s tomb. Fallen in the battle of childbirth, walk with her and her children to the far great beyond. Do not let go of her hand and let her walk alone, bearing with her the sun.”* The warriors will not interact with the party, and as they stand by the tomb like guards, and the players are once again on the Island of the Dolls. The idol is warm and comforting in their hands, it seems to draw them to the boat, once again at the shore.

THE CAVE

The boat takes the party to the final encounter, which is under the stone bridge, in a natural cave. Water flows freely out of a natural spring in the cavern, and a chill permeates the space. A dense fog rolls out of the depths, slightly obscuring the rocks that create the floor of the cave.

COMBAT. The party encounters the **banshee** and her two **shadow children**. They can choose to fight her, but she does not show them mercy unless they present her with the precious stone icon. Read or paraphrase the following:

IF THE CHARACTERS DEFEAT THE BANSHEE THROUGH COMBAT:

With a final scream, what had once might have been a human woman reaches out a clawed hand and grasps the air where the shadows had been.

(If they took the idol:) The idol in your bag grows heavier as she dies, and when you pull it out, the bright polished stone is now dull and the face has morphed to a familiar face: tear streaked cheeks under black eyes and a gaping mouth.

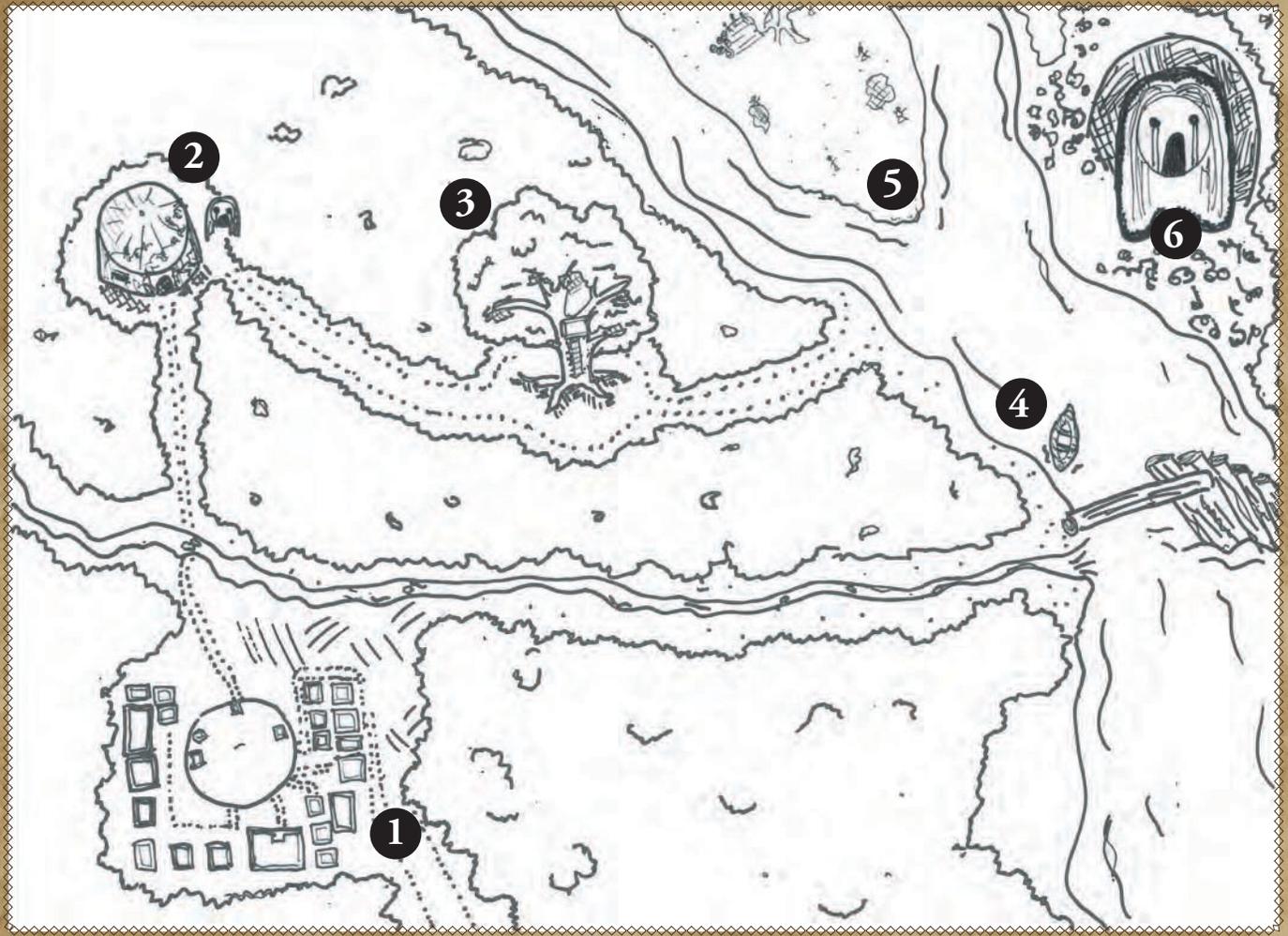
IF THE CHARACTERS OFFER THE IDOL TO THE BANSHEE:

A glimmer of recognition crosses her drawn face. Looking to her right, she sees the shadows, who retreat to her side. With a strange smile, she reaches her arms to them. “My... children...” her voice rasps, tired from years of screaming. She is drawn into the idol as the shadows swirl amorphyously around and then into the idol as well. The statue becomes heavy and the shine dulls. The face has morphed to a familiar face — tear streaked cheeks under black eyes and a gaping mouth.

DEVELOPMENT

A faint sobbing is heard from the back of the cave. Scrabbling hands emerge from a small cave in the wet rock. Two children, dirt smeared and tear-streaked emerge from the dark. They run to the characters, crying for their parents. The characters recognize them as Marna and Rik’s children!





MAP BY KRISTINA SISTO KINDEL

MAP LEGEND:

1. THE TOWN
2. THE OLD HUT
3. THE GROVE
4. THE BOAT/BROKEN DAM
5. THE ISLAND
6. THE CAVE

CONCLUSION

With tears of joy upon being reunited with their children, the parents of the village thank the party in between throaty sobs. A woman dressed in a deep red feather robe comes forward and rewards the party with 150 gp.

“Thank you for the safe return of these children, and for braving the curse. What happened? How did you escape the witch? We have always feared her return, some part of her has always been here. What did you find?”

REWARDS

Each adventurer receives the treasure they collected on the island, as well as 150 gold from the village matriarch. If there are healing potions left over, the players can keep those. If they keep the enchanted items, know that if the banshee is defeated, they no longer have any properties.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

All acknowledgement to the indigenous people of Mexico whose story La Llorona comes from, and the storytellers who carry the leyenda to their time, place, and tradition. May her story continue to be known, and may all the stories of women made to be monsters by the world get their day in the sun. Muchas gracias also to my playtesters; Aaron, Brian, Chris, Chris, Elena, Isaac, Laura, Morgan, and Peter. Te amo.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristina lives in Portland, OR with her husband, Isaac, and her sweet dog, Lady Sansa. When she is not playing or running copious amounts of tabletop RPGs, she fills her time with other creative pursuits such as singing, acting, knitting, and cooking.



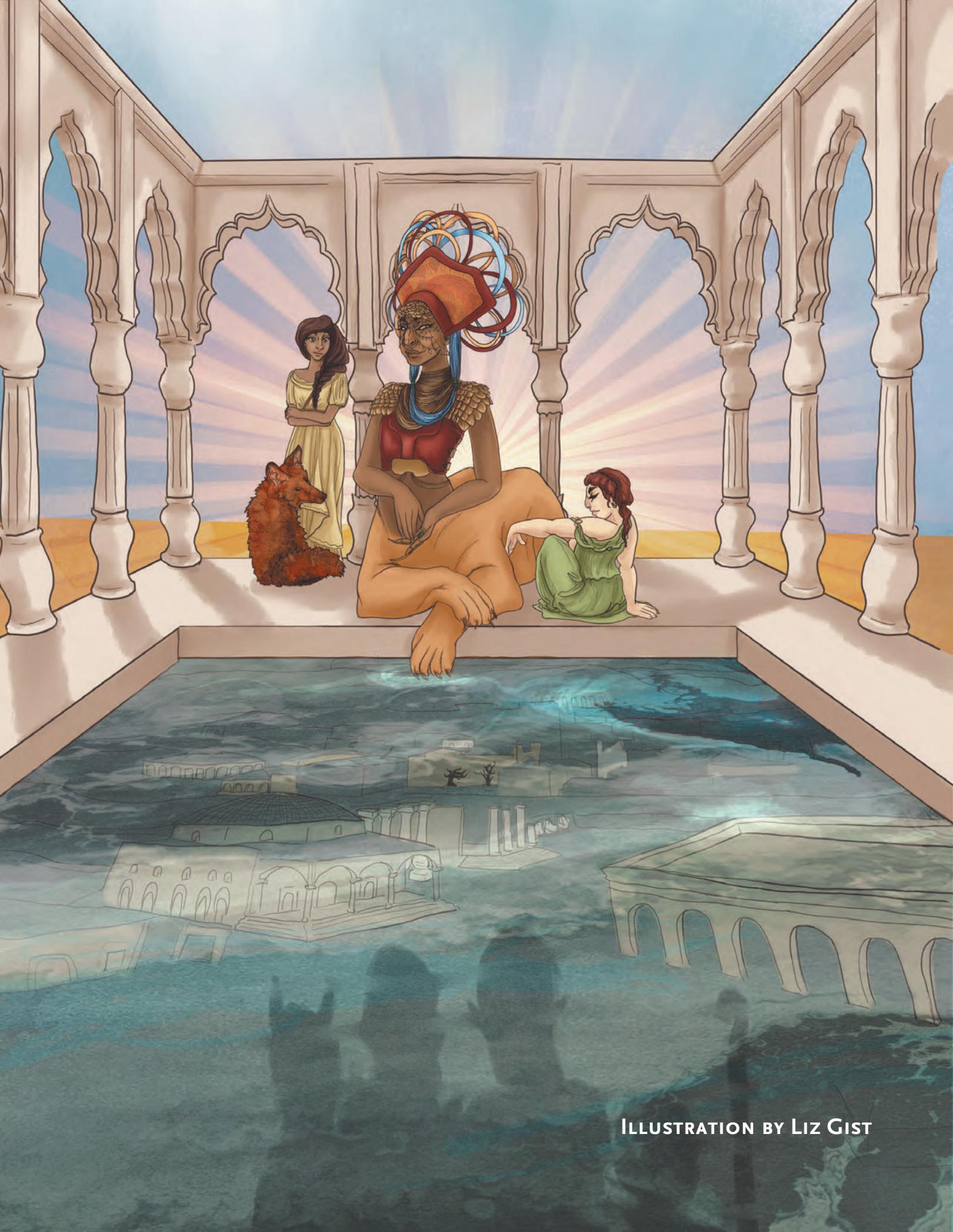


ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ GIST

LOST CHILDREN, FOUND FAMILY

by Catherine Evans

CREATURE: *Lamia* | LEVEL(S): 2-3

SYNOPSIS

The Five Cities are dying. Their water sources are drying up, and the brightest of their youth are leaving, lured out into the desert by an unknown power.

Enaxi, the unifier of the Five Cities, now a lamia, is weary of watching their descendants ruin their great works. The Council won't let young people restore the Five Cities to their former glory, so Enaxi is gathering them. They'll start their own paradise and doom the Five Cities... unless the heroes can convince them otherwise. *Lost Children, Found Family* is designed for level 3 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters are hired to guard a young woman who, unbeknownst to her father is preparing to leave...

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Five hundred years ago, Enaxi united five squabbling towns into a thriving settlement known as the Five Cities. Enaxi was an engineer who transformed desert settlements into rich, fertile places. They were a lawgiver and a troublemaker. Enaxi made too many changes and was exiled... though the Five Cities remember things differently.

When they were overthrown and chased into the desert, Enaxi prayed for sanctuary. They were answered by a demon lord who transformed them into a lamia and gave them a new life in exile.

Enaxi is angry at their children and intent on revenge. In their scrying pool, they've watched the Five Cities rewrite their story and collapse into a handful of struggling hamlets that the desert will eventually consume. The Cities' young people are trying to drive

change, but the rulers are resistant so Enaxi is collecting the adolescents, to 'save' them. Enaxi is also using jackalweres and their knowledge of the Cities' irrigation system to sabotage it.

The best outcome is for the characters to reconcile Enaxi and the Five Cities; slaying the lamia won't help anyone, long-term.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **ALEXANDROS DUKAS:** Overseer of the Council of Five Cities. A middle-aged widower, balding and with a prominent nose. A gentle demeanor except when he is "performing" in the Council Forum.
- **ISMENE DUKAS:** Alexandros' 18-year-old daughter. Small and birdlike, with her father's beak-like nose. A scholar and a genius. Stubborn, fiercely intelligent, and extremely direct once someone has her respect. Usually hides behind a 'perfect daughter' façade.
- **LARISSA:** A **jackalwere**. A brindled, brown and black jackal or a stocky, handsome young woman. A woman of few words except when speaking of Ismene or Enaxi.
- **ENAXI:** A **lamia** and Monarch-In-Exile of the Five Cities. Calm, commanding, and capable of great cruelty when disrespected. Ferociously protective of their children and not at all threatened by adventurers.

ENAXI STAT MODIFICATIONS:

Enaxi uses a modified version of the **lamia** stat block. They have:

- AC 15 (natural armor plus gold scale barding)
- CHA 20(+5); save DC 15

CHAPTER 1 — HIRED

The Five Cities were once a triumph of civilization. Now, five-hundred years after their unification, they're not much grander than any other one-horse town on the edge of the hot, arid Duroc Plateau. The fabled terrace farms and vineyards are dry and the magnificent buildings are ruins. The desert is reclaiming the town and there are almost as many feral jackals as there are people.

THE JOB

The characters have been hired as guards for Ismene Dukas.

MEETING ISMENE

On the characters' first day on the job, Alexandros and Ismene receive the characters in their home (a lavish and well-built house with a small fountain in the courtyard that provides relief from the heat).

ALEXANDROS EXPLAINS:

- Over 24 young people have gone missing from the Five Cities in the last year. He fears for Ismene, so he has hired the characters to keep her safe
- He insists people are not leaving voluntarily; a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals he is not so sure;
- Adventurers will be paid 50 gp in total, per month, to guard Ismene;
- Alexandros hopes they will also assist him in stopping the disappearances. For this, they would receive an additional 500 gp.

Ismene (**commoner** with INT18) contributes nothing unless spoken to directly. If she is addressed, she echoes her father's wishes. She's content to sit and read, and seems meek and obedient. A successful contested Wisdom (Insight) roll against her Charisma (Deception) reveals that it's a performance.

DEVELOPMENT

Characters may wish to familiarize themselves with Ismene, and/or the Five Cities (*Settling In*). Otherwise, run *Assignation*.

CHAPTER 2 — SETTLING IN

The characters can learn the following by asking around, eavesdropping, or observing.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

- Farm yields are dwindling, as no one knows how to maintain the irrigation system and aquifers that once made the Five Cities a wealthy agricultural center in an arid region.
- The water management systems are deep underground.
- The drought has gotten substantially worse in the last year.
- The young people going missing are troublemakers (artists, poets, scholars, etc.).
- Some of those missing were involved in a movement to reduce the age of citizenship (ability to vote and serve on the city council) from twenty-five to eighteen last year.
- The number of jackals creeping in from the desert is increasing.

ISMENE

- Alexandros dotes on Ismene, but is dismissive of her scholarly pursuits.
- She's trying to reconstruct knowledge of the irrigation system to make the Five Cities prosperous again.
- If characters talk to Ismene without Alexandros present — and they seem interested and respectful — she can be persuaded to tell them:
- Her peers are leaving of their own free will
- They're forming a new community in the desert where they are valued, headed by the Unifier of the Five Cities, Enaxi — now a lamia (Ismene does not, and will not, see Enaxi as a monster. They're a hero.)
- Guarding Ismene is easy: she stays in her room and reads, occasionally visiting the decrepit City Library.

ENAXI

- Friezes throughout the city (e.g. marketplace, library, Alexandros' home) show the exile of Enaxi, Unifier of the Cities, after Enaxi offended a goddess by sleeping with her husband
- Most people know this version of the story; Ismene knows the truth from her studies of history

DEVELOPMENT

Give the characters a few days to settle in, then run *Assigation*.

CHAPTER 3 – ASSIGNATION

- Late at night, characters are disturbed by the sound of someone in the courtyard
- Characters find Ismene out there, talking to and petting a jackal... which transforms into a woman (Larissa, N female **jackalwere**)
- They embrace and kiss.
- Stealthy characters overhear Ismene say she is nearly ready to go, but leaving her father is hard.
- Larissa flees if she feels unsafe, and Ismene will do everything short of throwing herself on a sword to guarantee her escape.
- If persuaded or threatened, Ismene tells the heroes everything she knows about Larissa and Enaxi (she does not know Enaxi is hastening the decay of the city's water sources).
- If they tell Alexandros, he'll raise his offer to 1,000 gp to rid the city of the lamia.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters should either want to help Ismene travel into the desert or take up Alexandros' offer to kill the Lamia. One way or another, they're leaving the city.

CHAPTER 4 – TRAVEL

The land around the Five Cities is parched and arid. Spires of red rock jut from the cracked earth; rocky crags and dry riverbeds offer temporary shade. Occasionally, the flash of a jack-rabbit or lizard breaking from cover provides a welcome sign of life.

LARISSA

If Ismene is with the party or Larissa has reason to trust them, Larissa assists them. If the party is being paid by Alexandros or Larissa has reason to mistrust them, she attempts to hinder them; she has every confidence Enaxi will deal with them when they reach the palace, but she enjoys making their life hard. See *Larissa's Assistance*.

PREPARATIONS

The journey should take two days. Camels are available to purchase, but will also need to be fed and watered.

SURVIVING THE HEAT

- Medium creatures need 2 pints of water per hour of daytime activity.
- Refer to the rules for "Extreme Heat" (Chapter 5, *DMG*).

NAVIGATING

A Wisdom (Survival) check determines when characters reach Enaxi's Palace:

- 20+: nightfall, first day
- 15-19: 1.5 days
- 10-14: 2 days
- <10: 3 days

LARISSA'S ASSISTANCE:

Larissa guides the party, giving advantage on rolls to navigate.

DEVELOPMENT

Run *Sandstorm* and *Not Alone* on the final day of travel.

CHAPTER 5 – SANDSTORM

The sun is close to setting when you realize two things: the air is harder to breathe... and you can no longer see birds in the sky. Deep red clouds rise off the earth to the north — there's a sandstorm coming.

Ahead of you, to the east, there is a shallow ravine that would provide some shelter; to the south, the ruin of a building. Time is ticking...

OUTRUNNING THE STORM

This is a race between the party and the storm, with the outcome determined by accumulating points on skill checks. The default is Strength (Athletics) but allow players to suggest other skills.

CONDITION	SCORE
Succeed, DC 10	+1
Every 2 points above 10	+1
Every 10' of Speed above 30'	+1
Every 5' of Speed below 30'	-1

- Let characters decide if stronger party members help weaker (use the average of their rolls to calculate successes) or if each person succeeds or fails on their own (track successes separately).
- Characters start with a 10 point lead.
- The storm accumulates 3 points per round.
- The ravine is 12 points away.
- The ruined building is 18 points away.

POSSIBLE SHELTER

When the storm hits, the party will either be...

- **EXPOSED:** Dexterity or Constitution saving throw (DC 15)
- **IN THE RAVINE:** Dexterity or Constitution saving throw (DC 11)
- **IN THE RUIN:** No save needed

A failed save confers 3d10 bludgeoning damage.

LARISSA'S ASSISTANCE:

Larissa uses the *Help* action to support Ismene/the party.

LARISSA'S HINDRANCE:

Larissa deliberately crosses patches of treacherous ground, hoping the party will follow her (-1 point per round).

DEVELOPMENT

If characters reach the ruins, run *Not Alone*. Otherwise, describe the effects of the storm and run *Enaxi's Palace*.

CHAPTER 6 – NOT ALONE

This encounter takes place in the **Ruins**.

The building still has an almost whole roof. As your eyes adjust to the gloom, you realize it must have been grand, once. You can see weathered friezes on the walls and the crest of the Five Cities above the doorway. There were stairs leading to an upper floor, but they're blocked by rubble left when some upper wall collapsed.

A section of the floor is rubble too. You hear it shift and see the first thick, brown serpent slither from the debris.

SNAKES!

The 30 ft. x 30 ft. ruin is home to one **giant constrictor snake** per three characters, and two **constrictor snakes** per character.

LARISSA'S ASSISTANCE:

Larissa fights alongside the party.

LARISSA'S HINDRANCE:

Larissa attempts to *sleep gaze* the character she thinks has the lowest chance of resisting, but otherwise does not participate (she needs to shelter here, too).

THE RUINS

- Characters proficient in Survival or History, or local to the area, know this is probably a waystation, existing precisely to give travelers shelter from heat and storms.

- The friezes show a great ruler making laws, building farms, and receiving diplomats. DC 12 Intelligence (History) reveals it to be the story of Enaxi/ the Five Cities' unification.

LARISSA

- If Larissa is sheltering in the ruins, characters may confront/question her.
- If Larissa is assisting, she willingly shares information about Enaxi's plan and the utopia at the palace. Otherwise, getting her to talk requires a Charisma (Intimidation) check opposed by her Wisdom (Insight).
- Larissa leaves as soon as the storm is over — regardless of whether she is helping or hindering — unless the party prevents her from doing so.

DEVELOPMENT

The party may rest here. Summarize their remaining travel and run *Enaxi's Palace*.

CHAPTER 7 — ENAXI'S PALACE

The palace is a jewel. There is water everywhere, in pools and fountains and streams, feeding fruit bushes, bean crops, and a small vineyard. Accents of gold on the square stone buildings catch the sun, and the speech and laughter of many voices carries on the air.

EXPLORING THE PALACE

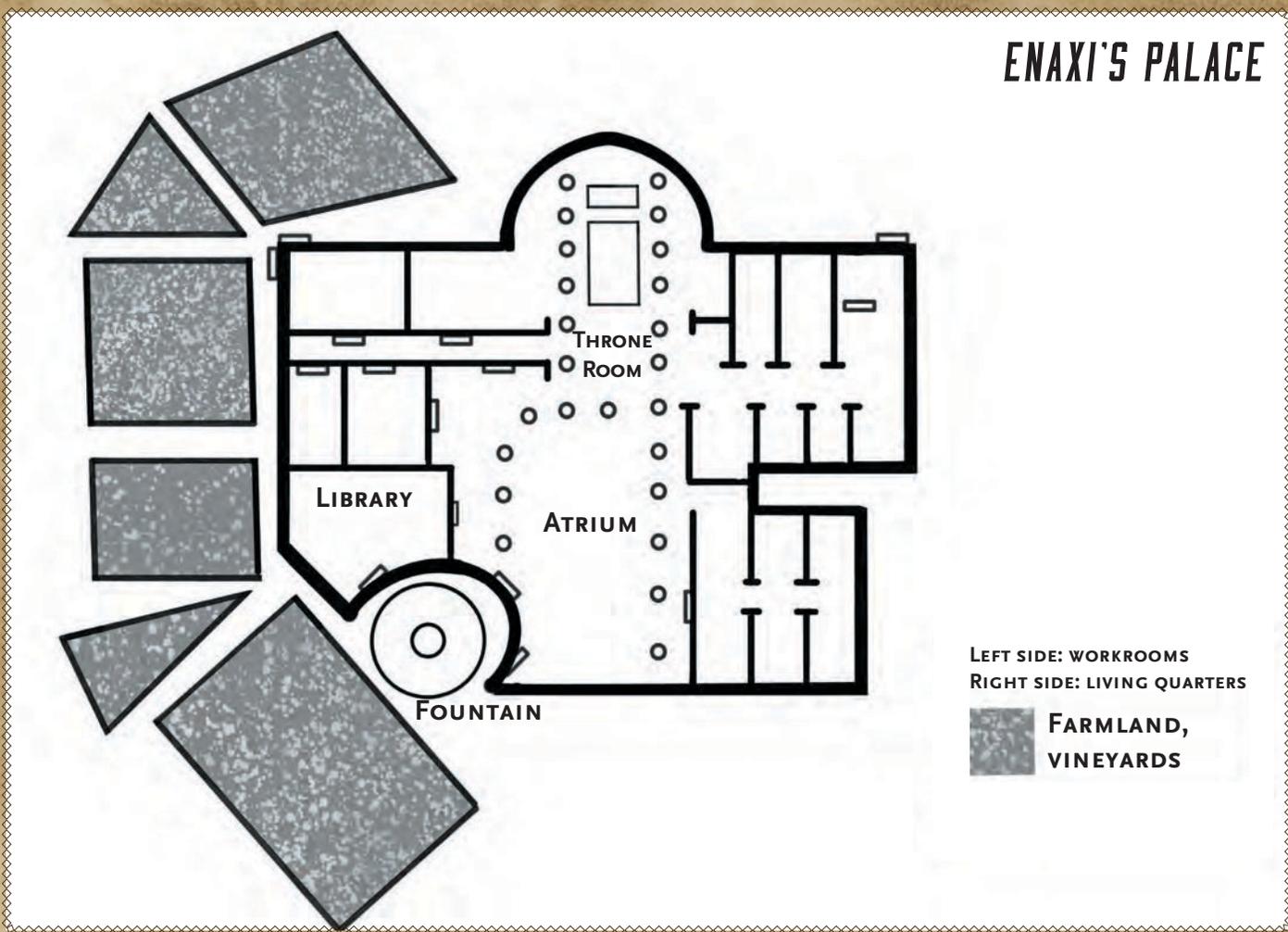
- The palace is under a web of illusion: fine silks, lavish furnishings and painted stonework.
- The illusions don't stand up to touch: stonework is crumbling and furnishings worn and ragged; however, plants and water are real.
- There are numerous "human" and jackal servants (all **jackalweres**); although they're servants, they don't defer to visitors or the court.
- No attempt is made to stop the party entering the palace.

ENAXI'S COURT

- Enaxi has around two dozen young people in their court. The party encounters them around the palace walking, reading, and talking.
- Courtiers adore Enaxi as a liberator, and are excited at the prospect of building a new community here in the desert.
- Some know that Enaxi has exiled or killed "ungrateful" courtiers, but see it as the lamia's right.
- They know their surroundings are illusions but aren't concerned — this is home.
- They are always accompanied by a few jackalwere companions.
- If you need to flesh out a courtier, use the table on pg. 52.



GENDER	OCCUPATION/INTEREST	ATTITUDE
Cis male (1-2)	Scholar (1-2)	Welcoming (1-2)
Cis female (3-4)	Artist (3-4)	Suspicious (3)
Nonbinary/Agender (5-6)	Activist (5-6)	Distracted by company/task (4)
Trans male (7)	Engineer (7-8)	Curious (5-6)
Trans female (8)	Homesick (7)	Uninterested (8)



MAP BY CATHERINE EVANS

CHAPTER 8 – BLOODSHED

If characters threaten jackalweres or courtiers...

At the first sign of trouble the jackalweres begin to howl, messages passing rapidly from one to another...

- 2d6 **jackalweres** arrive every round (max. 20).
- One courtier present is an **acolyte**.
- The others are **commoners** who flee from violence.
- Enaxi arrives in three (3) rounds, accompanied by a further two (2) **jackalweres** per player character.
- If no courtiers are hurt, Enaxi attempts to subdue characters using Suggestion and Charm Person.
- If courtiers are hurt (or if Larissa has been hurt/killed and Enaxi can reasonably know this), Enaxi uses *geas*, *major image*, *mirror image*, and *intoxicating touch* to soften up characters for the jackalweres, focusing on healers, then casters, then martial characters.
- They accept surrender at any point.

DEVELOPMENT

The party will likely surrender or be defeated. In which case, move on to *Enaxi*. If they kill Enaxi, run Enaxi but with a courtier in place of the lamia (use the same role-playing notes).



CHAPTER 9 – ENAXI

Assuming characters encounter Enaxi in their throne room, read:

The lamia awaits you in the palace's central courtyard, basking on a stone dais. One paw dangles in the water of a square reflecting pool whose surface shows the Five Cities. Nestled against their flank, talking in a low, musical, voice, is a plump, androgynous, young person. The two of them seem to be engaged in a teasing debate about some point of ethics.

The lamia turns bright, amber eyes on you. "I've been watching you," they purr, one paw stirring in the water of their pool.

DENOUEMENT

- Regardless of characters' attitudes or previous bloodshed Enaxi is calm, civilised, and entirely in command of the situation. They radiate confidence and power.
- Enaxi openly admits to choking the life out of the Five Cities.
- Enaxi suggests if the characters disapprove, they can return to the Five Cities, explain the situation, and convince them to enfranchise Enaxi's court and the other young people of the Cities.
- Enaxi will in fact offer the characters a *decanter of endless water* (DMG) and 500 gp to do so, to "make it worth their while."
- Characters are free to say no... but Enaxi reminds them that doing so dooms the Five Cities, painting a picture of drought, starvation, and collapse. Enaxi presents the situation as:
Do as Enaxi bids, broker peace between the lamia and the Cities – a win/win.
OR
Reject Enaxi's offer, let the Cities die... and be turned out into the desert with no food or water – a lose/lose.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters either fight Enaxi (run *Bloodshed*); opt out of the situation; or return to the Five Cities to fight the lamia's cause (run *Conclusion*).

CHAPTER 10 – CONCLUSION

On the characters' return, there will be a parade through town for them, ending at the City Forum. Alexandros assumes the threat to the city's children is ended and intends to publicly reward them.

When they deliver the news, read the following:

A sea of lined faces murmurs and shifts in the seats of the ancient, crumbling amphitheater where the Five Cities' business is done. A hundred members of the Council watch, skeptically, waiting for you to present your case. Alexandros stands opposite you in the pit of the amphitheater and gestures for you to begin.

THE DEBATE

THE GOAL IS TO PERSUADE THE COUNCIL TO:

- Allow young people to vote and serve on the Council.
- Correct the myth of Enaxi's overthrow and exile
- The debate opens with the characters at 2 Resolution Points (RP).

THERE ARE FIVE 'ROUNDS' OF DEBATE.

- Each round is a contested skill check between Alexandros (+5 to the roll) and up to two characters. Although only two can participate each round, it need not be the same characters each round.
- Several skills could apply: most Charisma based skills; Intelligence(History) to explain that the desert will swallow up the Five Cities if an agreement with Enaxi isn't reached; Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) to pass messages to the rest of the Council; consider any reasonable suggestions from players.
- Successful checks add 1RP. Good role-playing adds an additional 1RP.
- Threats, intimidation, and failed checks subtract 1RP.
- Making Alexandros lose his temper or lose face adds 1RP.

- If characters reach 5RP, they win! If they reach zero, they are dismissed.
- Violence — to Ismene, Alexandros, or the Cities — is ineffective. Alexandros will try to de-escalate, appearing to concede, but will have the characters arrested by the City Guard (**guards**, 3-4 per character) as soon as practical. Their next adventure may be trying to avoid execution.

DEVELOPMENT

Win or lose, the debate concludes the adventure.

REWARDS

- 1,000 gp (from Alexandros)
- 500 gp and a *Decanter of Endless Water* (from Enaxi)



AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Lamia as we know her is a classic "naughty girl" monster: her power comes from her ability to make young men go all gooey. If you look further back than that she's a queen turned into a baby-eating monster by Hera after she slept with Zeus (not the first nor the last...). But "slept her way to the top" and "unnatural" is something people often say about talented, ambitious women. So my Lamia became an outcast monarch, a proud, vengeful leonine creature brooding in the pale imitation of the city they founded, but still maternal towards those of their descendants they deem worth saving. I don't think there's any denying that Enaxi is evil, but I hope you and your players agreed that in some ways, they have a point.

Finally, thanks to Liz Evans-Gist for the art, the support, and the listening, and to Paige Leitman for reading and reviewing this adventure. Any remaining shortcomings are despite their best efforts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

You can find Catherine talking absolute rubbish on Twitter @perpetualgloom, and find some other *D&D* things she made on Dungeon Masters Guild: <https://www.dmsguild.com/browse.php/?author=-Catherine%20Evans>





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ILLUSTRATION BY JEN VAUGHN

A WILD HUNT

by Kat Kruger

CREATURE(S): *Kumiho* | **LEVEL:** 2 | **CW:** *Dark horror, corpses*

SYNOPSIS

In a remote mountain region, a ranch suffers from grave misfortune that has wiped out both the livestock and the family who once lived there. Rumor has it that a nine-tailed fox is behind the tragedy and continues to plague the area. A well-meaning monk seeks the aid of an adventuring party to put an end to the curse. Inspired by a Korean folk tale, *A Wild Hunt* is a two-hour adventure for 2nd level characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

While traveling through the region, the adventuring party has heard rumors of an abandoned farmstead. The livestock mysteriously died and the family went missing shortly after. Villagers from the surrounding area believe the property to be cursed. A monk who inhabits a mountain forest has posted notice in nearby villages seeking assistance to put to rest the curse that overshadows the ranch. The posting promises riches both material and spiritual.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

A prominent cattle ranching family had three sons. Not content, the father wished for nothing more than a daughter. Although he was granted his wish, little did he know that her birth came with a curse upon the family. When she turned six the daughter went missing in the forest only to return slightly changed. Shortly after, strange things began to happen on the ranch. Every full moon, a cow would be slaughtered as if by a wild animal.

Wanting to protect the herd, the father sent his first son to keep watch overnight. The son reported the culprit was the sister. Outraged by what was clearly a lie, the father banished him. Then the second son was

tasked with keeping watch over the cattle at night. He reported nothing strange until the next full moon when he repeated the oldest brother's account. Unbelieving, the father also exiled this son. Finally, the youngest son was asked to do the same. He fell asleep during many of his watches, including the one during the full moon when another cow was slaughtered. Fearing he would suffer the same fate as his brothers, the son explained the cow must have perished from seeing the full moon.

After a period of time, the cattle were all slaughtered. Unable to find a means of ending the curse, the family descended into poverty and eventually perished. The two exiled brothers were rumored to have wandered the region as paupers until they sought the aid of a monk. Returning to the homestead they discovered the sister was the lone survivor. Neither brother was heard from again.

CHAPTER 1 – THE MONK IN THE MIST

After viewing the posting in a nearby village, the adventuring party makes their way to a forest at the base of a mountain where they find the reclusive, religious monk. He is not trained in martial arts. Allow players to roleplay their journey and discuss how they came together or what motivated them to pursue the posting.

The path into the forest is difficult terrain due to overgrown foliage and visibility in the area is poor due to a heavy mist. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check is able to determine the path has not been used in years. Furthermore, on a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check they note the presence of a creature

in the forest. In fact, they are being stalked by a monster that keeps its distance in order to avoid discovery.

A dense mist blankets the air, silhouetting sparse spruce trees. The forest is still as though even the birds are holding their breath. In the distance, the shape of a small shack appears off the walkway.

A GRAVE UNDERTAKING

The characters eventually find an unassuming hut in the forest about 20 feet from the edge of the path.

Leaving the pathway, characters discover a bamboo hovel. If they choose to investigate the shack, the adventuring party finds it currently unoccupied. Inside they find a rice-straw sleeping mat and a simple wood stove where rice porridge is warming.

Behind the hovel, characters easily discover a monk who meditates over an unmarked grave. The monk introduces himself as Baek Hyeon and confirms he is the one who put up the posting in the nearby village looking for assistance.

WHAT BAEK HYEON KNOWS

- Over a year ago, a young man sought his aid in lifting a curse on his family's homestead.
- A kumiho, or nine-tailed fox, had slaughtered the cows on the ranch before murdering the rest of the man's family.
- The monk offered him a number of potions to help defeat the creature: oil of slipperiness, potion of animal friendship, and potion of fire breath.
- Unfortunately, the man was unsuccessful in his endeavor and the unmarked grave belongs to him.
- The monk believes the potions are in a nearby cave where the body was dragged by wild animals.

If pressed for other solutions to lifting the curse outside of killing the kumiho, Baek Hyeon discloses what he knows as below.

- Ways in which a kumiho can break the curse and return to humanity include:
- It must choose to refrain from killing and eating humanoids for 100 days. If the kumiho makes this choice and does not abstain during the 100 days, it loses any chance of becoming human again and

instead lives out its days as a normal fox.

- Alternatively, the kumiho can embrace its bloodthirst and consume the livers of 1,000 men. If the feat is not accomplished after 10 years, it loses its shapeshifting abilities and lives the rest of its life as a fox.

DEVELOPMENT

Baek Hyeon notes that the family is long-dead, but the young man had confided there was a hidden dowry which the father refused to sell despite their dire circumstances. The monk offers the contents of the chest as a reward for lifting the curse. He also provides directions to the cave where he believes the potions were dragged with the body of the young rancher.

CHAPTER 2 – POTENT POTABLES

Following the directions provided by Baek Hyeon, the adventuring party finds the cave nestled at the base of the mountain. Again, on a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check they note the presence of a creature in the forest that keeps its distance to avoid detection.

DEAD MAN'S CAVE

The mouth of the cave appears at the base of the mountain as indicated by the monk. It is partly hidden by a rock outcropping. Several animal tracks lead in and out of the cave and a rough-hewn clawed paw is etched into the stone entrance.

With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check, any character recognizes the engraved symbol as that of Malar who is god of the hunt, evil lycanthropes, as well as bestial savagery and bloodlust.

The cave entrance is 15 feet long by 10 feet wide with a ceiling of 8 feet. It branches off in two directions with both paths looping around and leading to a den to the north. The cave is unlit. Any character without darkvision requires a light source to see after 10 feet inside. Where the path forks, a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check notes dried blood streaks leading to the eastern passage. Following the drag marks brings them to a smaller chamber where dead prey are scattered about. Closer

inspection reveals the carcasses are small woodland creatures that are easily identifiable as mice, shrews, and weasels.

The den to the north houses five large and savage foxes (**wolf** stats). In order to sneak into the area, characters must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check or the foxes attack. If the adventuring party is able to avoid detection they observe the foxes either at rest during the day or feasting on prey at night. The den is filled with the remains of larger prey. On a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check, any character notes the bones and remains here are humanoid and accompanied by articles of clothing. Some of the clothes belong to small children. On a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check, they recall that foxes normally burrow below ground and it is therefore unusual to see a pack cohabitate within such a large cave.

OUTFOXED

Unbeknownst to the adventuring party, the foxes in this den are all kumiho who have failed in their quests to become human. Many of the clothes were once theirs, although some belong to the men whose livers they consumed in an attempt to lift their curse. Some of the foxes wear remnants of clothes. This strange site should provide a clue to the characters that the creatures were once lycanthropes.

DEVELOPMENT

After defeating the foxes, the characters discover a bundle that once belonged to the young rancher whom the monk attempted to help. The contents of the pack include: moldy bread, an empty waterskin, a journal, and three unidentified potions. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check or has a means to magically identify the potions can determine they are inert. The journal contains mad ramblings about the man's family and how they were suffering from a curse due to his father's wish for a daughter. All their valuables were placed in a dowry for the girl and the brothers were left with very little besides the ranch. He believed his father was under the spell of a beguiling demon-fox that would lead to their ruin. The entries become increasingly incoherent but the adventuring party is able to find a map from the cave to the ranch.

The den has an exit to the north and the adventuring party may take this way out or follow the overgrown path outside around the mountain cave in order to find the ranch.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FOX SISTER

The abandoned farmstead is an hour's journey from the mountain.

HOME SWEET HOME

When the adventuring party arrives at the ranch, read aloud:

The forest ends abruptly at a clear cut acreage. Even from a distance it is evident that the ranch has long been abandoned. The homestead is in a state of disrepair with shingles missing, and the corrals are empty of livestock. Old laundry hangs on a line, the clothes tattered and billowing in a gentle breeze.

Characters may explore the ranch at their leisure. They find the barn to be empty except for the skeleton of one cow. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check determines the bones were picked clean by a small creature.

The clothes on the laundry line include a woman's dress and a man's trousers. A child's doll has been left on the ground beneath these articles. With a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check, any character discovers old tracks in the muddy field and determines they are from cattle and booted humanoid feet. However, there are also fairly fresh fox tracks that lead back and forth from the house and toward the general direction of the mountain cave.

The homestead is a single-story building. There is a door to a below-ground cold cellar outside the kitchen wall. It is padlocked shut. If the characters attempt to enter the cellar, they hear snarls from nearby. The kumiho attempts to lure them away from investigating the cellar.

Without a key, any character proficient with thieves' tools can pick this lock with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check. To break the lock with a tool or weapon requires a character to succeed on a DC 15 Strength check.

If the characters gain access to the cellar, they are interrupted by the screams of a young child as she runs toward them from the forest. The girl, named Ae-Cha (**commoner**), claims she is being pursued by a demon-fox and insists the adventuring party follow her into the homestead. She is, in fact, assisting the kumiho (use **jackalwere** stat block with suggested adjustments below).

The cellar contains a grisly site, with four male human corpses with gashes in their abdomens, hung like butchered animals from metal chains. All of the chains are on a master pulley, and can be brought down with an action. Ae-Cha attempts to prevent characters from entering in order to keep up appearances as a helpless child who is plagued by a demon-fox. If the characters enter the cellar the corpses animate (four **zombies**) and flail at any character within melee reach. They can't move as they can't free themselves of their restraints without assistance.

If the characters fail to break into the cellar or are otherwise uninterested in searching that area, Ae-Cha makes herself known in the homestead as outlined below.

ROLE-PLAYING AE-CHA

The seven-year-old girl is the last member of the Kung family of ranchers. She is a charming child who uses her innocuous stature to her advantage. Her goal is to bring each of the adventurers into the cellar alone where her mother intends to kill them and eat the liver of any male. Playing up her tragic story, she explains the rest of the family died about a year ago and she has managed to survive by trapping small game. She carries the key to the cellar on a twine string around her neck and knows that the area contains her dowry and food stores. The three potions that were gifted to one of her brothers by the monk are also stored there.

Inside, the homestead features a large kitchen and dining area as well as two small bedrooms. A pot of stew simmers on the woodstove. Many items have been overturned. Muddy footprints track throughout, easily distinguishable as small, bare, and humanoid in origin.

One bedroom belonged to the parents who shared the space with their daughter. The other room was shared by the brothers. Characters can find evidence of previous residents through investigation of the remain-

ing furniture and clothes. On the wall of the parents' bedroom there are hundreds of tally marks. If asked about them later, Ae-Cha states they are the number of days since her family died. In fact, they are the number of livers her mother has consumed. After a few moments exploring, if the adventuring party did not encounter her outside, they hear trembling breathing coming from beneath one of the beds where Ae-Cha is hiding.

The characters may coax her out with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Regardless she asks, "Are you here to help me or to hurt me?" If they provide a satisfactory answer, the girl emerges and introduces herself. After she describes how she survived for a year alone on the ranch by hunting during the day and locking herself inside during the night, she asks if the adventuring party will help her end the curse.

Regardless of their answer, she offers accommodation for the evening and serves the characters stew. Throughout their time together, Ae-Cha asks for assistance from individuals with the goal of separating the party one by one in order for her mother and pack of kumiho to kill them and, if they are male, eat their livers. If the party insists on staying together, she warns them that it is dangerous to go as a group because the kumiho can more easily track or sense their presence. Should they ignore her warning, strange noises are heard from the barn but the girl insists some party members stay with her while others investigate.



A FAMILY MATTER

Whether she is able to lure the characters away individually or not, the girl's mother, Mi-Gyeong, eventually attacks with two other kumiho. In addition, Ae-Cha may attempt to release the zombies from the cellar to attack the characters. The zombies do the bidding of the cursed family.

KUMIHO ADJUSTMENTS

To represent kumiho, start with the **jackalwere** stat block and make the following adjustments.

- **SHAPECHANGER.** The kumiho can use its action to polymorph into a specific Medium human, or back into its true form (that of a nine-tailed fox, using the wolf stat block). Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

DEVELOPMENT

The adventuring party may choose to fight the kumiho or reason with them. Either way, before Mi-Gyeong reaches 0 hit points she attempts to reason with the characters. Ae-Cha also pleads her mother's case.

CONCLUSION

There are several ways to end the adventure. Whether they kill the kumiho or negotiate, Mi-Gyeong asks them to spare her daughter and give her a better life. She asks that the dowry remain with the child so that she may make a new start without any hindrances. The monk, Baek Hyeon, is willing to adopt the child if asked as he believes she is a gift for lifting the curse.

Years later, new rumors emerge from the region of a monastic order called the Temple of the Fox. Inspired by Ae-Cha's story, Baek Hyeon works toward restoring balance between nature and civilization with the guidance of his young apprentice.



REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

For all combat experience add up the total for defeated foes and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. The rewards for non-combat experience, are listed per character.

OBSTACLE	XP
5 foxes	50 each
4 zombies	50 each
3 kumiho	100 each

TREASURE REWARDS

ITEM	VALUE
Ae-Cha's dowry	100 gp

OIL OF SLIPPERINESS

Potion, uncommon

This sticky black unguent is thick and heavy in the container, but it flows quickly when poured. The oil can cover a Medium or smaller creature, along with the equipment it's wearing and carrying (one additional vial is required for each size category above Medium). Applying the oil takes 10 minutes. The affected creature then gains the effect of a freedom of movement spell for 8 hours.

Alternatively, the oil can be poured on the ground as an action, where it covers a 10-foot square, duplicating the effect of the grease spell in that area for 8 hours.

POTION OF ANIMAL FRIENDSHIP

Potion, uncommon

When you drink this potion, you can cast the animal friendship spell (save DC 13) for 1 hour at will. Agitating this muddy liquid brings little bits into view: a fish scale, a hummingbird tongue, a cat claw, or a squirrel hair.

POTION OF FIRE BREATH

Potion, uncommon

After drinking this potion, you can use a bonus action to exhale fire at a target within 30 feet of you. The target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The effect ends after you exhale the fire three times or when 1 hour has passed.

This potion's orange liquid flickers, and smoke fills the top of the container and wafts out whenever it is opened.



AUTHOR'S NOTES

This adventure was inspired by the Myths & Legends podcast episode featuring the tale of “The Fox Sister.” In the original Korean folklore, the sister was indeed a kumiho as it was meant to be a cautionary tale regarding wishing for a daughter. In this adventure, the motive of the brothers were altered to undermine their sister with falsehoods because they considered her to be a threat to their inheritance and the mother instead intervened to protect her only daughter from their greed and jealousy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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DEATH'S AGENTS

by D. B. Donlon

CREATURE(S): *Furies* | **LEVEL(S):** 2-4

CW: *War, assault, murder, torture.*

SYNOPSIS

It's not every night that a would-be king crashes into your camp! Elven Prince Orestes, soon to be King Orestes, begs your aid and protection to escort him to the Temple of the Sun. Furies stalk his path at every turn, and delay him from completing the rites of mourning necessary for coronation.

In a world of magic and myth, whose laws reign supreme?

Death's Agents is an adventure designed for a party of four to six adventurers of levels 2-4.

ADVENTURE HOOK

While the characters are resting, a young elf — harried and sweating — bursts into their encampment. He begs them to escort him to the Temple of the Sun God and to protect him from his relentless pursuers.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

While based on the mythology of Orestes and the House of Atreus, familiarity with the classic tale is not necessary. In this adaptation, Orestes is an elven king in name, but a king without a crown. In the shadow of the mysterious demise of his father, King Agamemnon, Orestes and the nation have mourned for a year and a day. Now he attempts the ritual pilgrimage to the Temple of the Sun with offerings, a ritual necessary before coronation.

CHAPTER 1 — AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

As night begins to fall, you make camp along a swift moving stream. The weather has started to turn colder and the nights come earlier. The clear sky offers a spectacular view of the sunset, a bright riot of reds and oranges, silhouetting the forest you have passed through today.

How do you settle in for the night?

MEET THE PRINCE

- **FIRST WATCH:** Passes uneventfully. The characters notice the weather turning colder and the clouds moving in, obscuring the waning crescent moon.
- **SECOND WATCH:** A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the slowly rising mists off the river and from the woods. The moon is almost fully obscured by now and the darkness seems to be waiting as if the whole of nature is holding its breath. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check hears the sounds of a creature crashing through the woods. It is Orestes, attempting to be quiet and unseen, but not succeeding.

The figure is humanoid and tall, although hunched over trying to move quickly through the underbrush rather than attempting to remain unseen. They glance fervidly around, head darting back and forth, at times looking fearfully over their shoulder. Suddenly they catch sight of your camp, the camp fire the only light for miles. They begin moving towards your camp, calling out anxiously in an archaic dialect of High Elven: "Help, help me please!"

Orestes collapses on the nearest party member. A screech is heard in the distance. Some type of bird, perhaps? The mists continue to rise off the water slowly and the night sky begins to darken even further. A character succeeding on a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check notices that Orestes is exhausted and there are appear to be cuts and bruises on his arms and legs. None of Orestes injuries are life-threatening.

Orestes is a male high elf of younger years, but with an elf who can say? He has tan skin and long blonde hair like strands of golden thread. His hair is tied back in a warrior's braid that wisps and pieces are falling out the tight binding. His clothes and armor are of high quality, yet show signs of snags and nettles, rips and small tears. About him are the signs of wealth and status, but they are old, almost ancient.

CONVERSATION WITH ORESTES

Groggy but aware of his surroundings, Orestes reaches out in desperation, speaking with a pained voice:

"Please, you need to help. They won't stop, please I need your help. They won't leave me be!"

Orestes glances around anxiously trying to see if he is still being chased, explaining:

"I am traveling to _____ City (use any city that would fit your campaign setting) to make sacrifices before my coronation. But... These creatures attacked my entourage and separated me from my guards. I managed to slay one but they became too much for me, forcing me to flee for my life."

Characters who succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check notice the sounds of wings beating — three furies! (See stat block on pg. 92).

DEVELOPMENT

The furies attack! Proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 — FURIES HUNTING

ATTACKERS IN THE DARK

IF THE FURIES HAVE NOT BEEN DETECTED:

Orestes explains:

"I have been running for the last three days. Please help me! If you can deliver me safely to the Temple of the Sun, I shall reward you handsomely. I must get to..."

The furies suddenly launch an ambush, gaining surprise! During the combat, the furies focus on Orestes, only attacking the party in self-defense.

IF THE FURIES HAVE BEEN DETECTED, roll initiative and begin combat with neither side gaining surprise. The furies attack Orestes and only attack the party in self-defense. The furies objective is to torture Orestes and drive him mad.

- **GENERAL TACTICS:** Furies begin attack with *discordant song* from the air. The fury may choose to target a specific creature or the whole area with their discordant song. In the first round, they only target Orestes.
- **MORALE:** Roll for morale periodically. If the party manages to kill one of the furies, the other two have disadvantage on morale rolls. If two furies are slain, the last fury flees, cursing the party in Celestial, Primordial and Elvish. “You have angered the gods this night. Their wrath will fall upon you!”
- **TREASURE:** If the party decides to investigate the remains of the furies, the bodies have disappeared but the armor of death’s agent remains for each fury that the party managed to slay.

QUESTIONS FOR A PRINCE

The party may rest as needed, and will not be attacked. Should they attempt to interrogate Orestes, read or paraphrase the following:

Orestes speaks hesitantly, attempting to maintain his regal bearing. “I had been away at school, and became worried when letters from my sister, Electra, became less and less frequent, with one last short letter begging for my help. My father had been away on campaign - at war - for a number of years, so Mother had been regent with Electra’s support. I became convinced that something horrible must have happened, someone had killed Mother and was holding Electra hostage. When I was able to gather some help and returned to the palace, I found a horrible creature, a vampire named Aegisthus had compelled Mother to murder Father, and taken her as a thrall. I then was forced to kill the monster wearing Mother’s face as well as the Evil Aegisthus. That was one year ago. Now that the period of mourning for the death of the former king is completed, I am preparing for my coronation by making a pilgrimage to the Temple of the Sun.

Characters succeeding on a DC 19 Wisdom (Insight) check detect discrepancies in his story, particularly about his mother and Aegisthus. While King Agamemnon was on campaign, Queen Clytemnestra began an affair with Aegisthus, a young man of a noble house feuding with the family of Agamemnon, who had recently become a vampire. Aegisthus arranges for Clytemnestra to meet the vampire that turned him and she is turned into a powerful vampire sorceress. When Agamemnon returned with his captured war prize, Cassandra, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon and Cassandra, allowing Clytemnestra to rule the kingdom. Prince Orestes returned home at the behest of his twin sister Electra and found Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and discovered their crimes. He was able to kill his mother and her lover with the aid of some local heroes. It is the DMs choice how much or how little of that information the party would be able to know from the Wisdom (Insight) check.

As dawn breaks, the sun seems weaker. The chill of late autumn has settled in and the early morning fog makes the day seem duller, as if the very woods around them had been coated in haze and clouds. The damp chill in the air causes you all to see your breath.

DEVELOPMENT

Orestes insists that they head out as soon as possible. The Temple of the Sun is only one more day’s travel. “And I’m quite sure that one of the priests at the temple would be able to aid you with that armor.” What does the party do? Proceed to *Chapter 3*.

CHAPTER 3 – TEMPLE OF THE SUN

JOURNEY TO THE SUN

Determine the marching order, then have the leader make a DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check:

- **FAILURE:** The terrain is difficult, the path old and overgrown in places. You stumble occasionally and lose the path for a few minutes but eventually you come to the Temple of the Sun, much later than expected the sun is already setting, giving a golden glow to the hillside that the temple stands on. The lengthening shadows cast by the temple give an almost eerie feeling.
- **SUCCESS:** While slightly overgrown, you can follow the old path through the wooded areas towards the hillside upon which the Temple of the Sun resides. The bright noon day sun shines directly onto the temple, giving it a radiant halo of light around the large marble edifice.

Characters who succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check hear the occasional screech or flap of wings from the furies. However, they do not appear or attack at this time.

FAMILY REUNION

Upon reaching the temple, have each character make a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. If the party failed the Wisdom (Survival) check to find the temple, they roll with disadvantage.

- **FAILURE:** Two humanoid figures appear to be standing 10-15 feet in front of the doors to the temple, about 45 feet from the party. Their features are extremely difficult to make out with the sun backlighting the temple behind them.
- **SUCCESS:** Two humanoid figures appear to be standing 10-15 feet in front of the doors to the temple, about 45 feet from the party. It is difficult to make out their features but squinting into the sun, it is possible to see two elves; one male, one female. They are both dressed in stately attire, and the shadows of crowns are just visible on their forms.

The figures remain waiting where they are, letting the party approach them. When the party is within 20 feet, Orestes cries out.

Orestes: *"Father, Mother, but, but you are dead, you both are dead why are you here?"*

Ghost of Agamemnon: *"I am here to help you, my son. I am here to aid you."*

Ghost of Clytemnestra: *"You may not enter this holy place. You are as yet unclean. Unburden yourself my son that you may join me in the Light."*

Roll a d2 to determine which of his parents Orestes starts to walk towards. If no one in the party stops him, when he is within 5 feet of his parent, Orestes will be possessed by whichever parent he walked towards. The possessed Orestes then speaks to the party:

Ghost of Agamemnon: *"Bow before your KING. My conquest shall be completed. All shall bow before the great King Agamemnon."*

Ghost of Clytemnestra: *"Bow before your Queen. Now to restore my Aegisthus and rule together, as is my right by the gods."*

If the party bows, the other ghost attacks them. If the party does not bow, the possessed Orestes attacks them. Roll initiative!

Loud screeching can be heard and glancing up, the party can just make out the figures of the furies perched on the roof of the temple. The furies attack all combatants on the field, but special attention will be paid to any party member wearing *Armor of Death's Agent*.

If a party cleric takes two full rounds begging forgiveness and offering to make amends with a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check, or DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check, they cause the furies to pause their attacks against the party. They continue to attack as long as the party members are attacking the furies.

If the party is able to convince the furies not to fight, the furies aid them in defeating the ghosts and the possessed Orestes.

When Orestes drops to 0 hit points, the ghost possessing him attempts to possess the nearest party member.

Furies attempt to frighten and subdue party members rather than kill, so will not attack downed party members.

DEVELOPMENT

The destruction of the attacking ghost ends the combat. Proceed to *Conclusion*.

CONCLUSION

After both ghosts are defeated, or if the furies are slain, the furies evaporate like smoke from a pyre. The doors to the temple slowly open and a figure emerges dressed in formal priestly regalia. Their gender is indeterminate, but their features are of an oddly ethereal elf (Aasimar elf hybrid). Those making a DC 22 Wisdom (Insight) check notice the features of the speaker seem familiar.

The Temple Speaker addresses the party asking to bring their wounded and Orestes inside the temple. They demand that Orestes make a full confession in front of all what really happened and beg forgiveness.

Let the party encourage/convince Orestes to make a full confession in front of the altar. This can be accomplished with a successful DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

As Orestes begins to confess to killing his mother and her lover in response to her mother killing his father, the appearance of the speaker begins to flow into that of the fury. When Orestes is done, the fury nods and speaks in a beautiful, rich voice.

“While your mother’s murder of your father, was a crime, they were not related family and thus it was not kin-slaying. Your attack on your mother, however was, foolish prince. As recompense you will make a pilgrimage to (insert famous temple far away here). You may have no guards and no entourage. You may have only what you currently are wearing and carrying. You may hunt no animals, but may defend yourself if attacked. You may eat no meat nor drink any alcohol.”

She turns to the other characters.

“For your crimes against the gods, you may make recompense by serving the Lord of the Dead for one year and a day. You are of moderate skill, and my Lord has need of some... assistants on the mortal plane to hunt those who attempt to escape his justice. Do you agree?”

As the party leaves, any who wears the armor of death’s agent begins to have names of those who escaped the God of Death engraved on the armor. Roll 2d10 for number of names that appear. Allow the party to suggest some names.

REWARDS

Possibility of the *Armor of Death’s Agent*. The fury blesses the weapons of those who agree to service, making one weapon for each member of the party a +1 weapon.



FURY

Medium monstrosity, lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (*Armor of Death's Agent*)
Hit Points 38 (7d8 +7)
Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	10 (0)	13 (+1)

Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The fury makes two attacks: one with its claws and one with its club.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.

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

Discordant Song. The fury can choose a specific target, or cause every humanoid and giant within 300 feet of the fury that can hear the song to make a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw. If they fail, they become frightened until the song ends, taking 2d4 psychic damage. On a success, they take half damage. The fury must take a bonus action on its subsequent turns to continue singing. It can stop singing at any time. The song ends if the fury is incapacitated. While frightened, a target ignores the songs of other furies. It cannot move closer to the fury and all attacks are at disadvantage. It doesn't avoid opportunity attacks, but before moving into damaging terrain, such as lava or a pit, and whenever it takes damage from a source other than the fury, a target can repeat the saving throw. A creature can also repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the effect ends on it. A target that successfully saves is immune to the fury's song for the next 24 hours

ITEM: ARMOR OF DEATH'S AGENT

- While wearing the armor, your AC becomes 14 + Dex modifier (max 2), similar to a chain shirt +1.
- Once per day, you may cast the *dissonant whispers* spell.
- Standing in direct sunlight causes you to have disadvantage on skill checks and saving throws.
- You suffer 1 hit die psychic damage at the start of each morning.
- You are an agent of death! You cannot die until you have completed your service to the Lord of Death. If you fail three death saves before you have removed all the names engraved on the armor, you instead are stabilized at 0 hit points and require magical healing or a long rest to cover hit points. Anyone who touches the armor must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, they take 2 necrotic damage and are forced to drop the armor. If they fail the save, they take 2d4 necrotic damage, and the armor is instantly equipped as if the character donned it. The armor cannot be removed without the use of a *remove curse* or *greater restoration* spell.



AUTHOR'S NOTES

Frequently, *D&D* players believe that all creatures are to be fought and that NPCs are to be protected. In this adventure, I wanted to examine how the players interact with those creatures who are legally and morally obligated to attack an NPC that the party is defending. I also wanted to give the fury back their respect as agents of the Land of the Dead.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

D. B. Donlon resides in Atlanta, Georgia. A lifelong fan of fantasy and *D&D*, as well as student of Classical mythology and languages, she teaches Latin and plays a variety of tabletop role playing games on a number of twitch channels. She can be reached on Twitter: @DeirdreDonlon





ILLUSTRATION BY SAMANTHA DARCY

THE TALE OF SEPHA & ADÉ

by Kelly Dayton

CREATURE(S): *Hades & Persephone* | LEVEL: 3

SYNOPSIS

Tales of Lady Sepha Lekore are known throughout the lands. Now she's gone missing and her father Lord Lekore is offering a reward to anyone that can find her. With promises of a tidy sum, the adventuring party can investigate the last place she was seen to try and locate her. What they find will take them into the Underdark lair of a drow noblewoman with her eloped love, the young Lady Lekore. This adventure is designed for level 3 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

MONEY & OPPORTUNITY: The Lekore family is wealthy and holds a lot of land. Lower level adventurers have the opportunity to make a name for themselves and earn a bit of coin should they locate the missing noblewoman.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Lekore family has held lordship over Louton for generations. The area is peaceful aside from the occasional attack by orcs and drow scouting parties. Louton is known for two things: its harvest festival and beauty of the Lady Sepha Lekore. Word has spread that she's gone missing and Lord Lekore is willing to pay anyone that can find his daughter. Lady Sepha is expected to open the harvest festival in two weeks time.

Adventurers can search Sepha's quarters and her favorite reading spot outside the town walls. Clues will lead them to a cave system that leads to the Underdark. The adventurers will discover that Sepha & Adé have eloped. Adé will ask the party to abandon their quest and allow Sepha to stay with her. Adventurers can decide whether or not to allow the two ladies

to continue living in peace or bring the knowledge of their union to Lord Lekore.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **LORD LEKORE (N MALE HIGH ELF NOBLE):** Head of the Lekore family. Has ruled over Louton for decades. Prideful and relies heavily on tradition. Uses the **noble** stat block.
- **SEPHA LEKORE (CG FEMALE HIGH ELF NOBLE):** Daughter of Lord Lekore and heiress to the Lekore family. She shuns typical "ladylike behavior" and prefers to spend her time exploring the woods surrounding Louton. Uses the **druid** stat block.
- **LADY ADÉ PARGA (LN FEMALE DROW NOBLE):** A drow noblewoman who loves to explore both the Underdark and the surface. Smart and stubborn, she's determined to get drow accepted by other races. Uses the **priest** stat block.

CHAPTER 1 – LOUTON'S LOST LADY

The town of Louton is abuzz with energy. As you enter the town, preparations for a large festival can be seen in their early stages. What should be a happy affair seems to have a sombre air to it. A large manor house can be seen on the eastern edge of town. You're directed towards the manor for your audience with Lord Lekore. Upon entering the house, Lord Lekore greets you in the entrance hall. A tall, imposing high elf, he has a serious, no-nonsense air about him.

"Welcome adventurers. I appreciate your hasty response to my call for assistance. Please, let us discuss this matter in a more personal location."

- The party is shown to a private dining room. Lord Lekore proposes that they search for his missing daughter. He's stressed about his missing daughter and tells the party that as tradition dictates, as the heiress, it's imperative that she be located in time to open the upcoming harvest festival. Lord Lekore is willing to share the following information:
- Sepha is an avid reader. Much to Lord Lekore's consternation, Sepha also loves to explore the forests surrounding Louton.
- Louton is peaceful, but occasionally has incursions from orc raiders and drow scouting parties.
- Sepha is friendly with a lot of the townspeople & is well liked.
- Sepha's last known location was her favorite reading spot by the river that is right outside town.
- A DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Lord Lekore seems worried about his daughter's disappearance. Additionally, when talking about orcs and drow, a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Lord Lekore's distaste for them.

Lord Lekore tells the party that they are to be given access to Sepha's quarters and that the guards of the town have been instructed to allow them limited access to the manor. If the party decides to investigate Sepha's Room, continue on. If they choose to go to her last seen location, skip ahead to *Chapter 2*.

INVESTIGATING SEPHA'S ROOM

You find yourself in a finely furnished room. Bookcases lined with tomes stand on one side of the wall while a small writing desk faces toward an open window. Small knick-knacks are neatly organized on a small dresser near a large bed. Nothing seems disturbed or out of place.

Sepha's room should give off the feeling of someone who loves to learn. Perhaps an open book with handwritten notes lays on the desk or the knick-knacks are small sculptures of different creatures. Characters should be free to explore the room, however if they were escorted by a guard who will discourage any type of thievery. A few clues can be found around Sepha's room. Roll on the following table if a character succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check:

D6	RESULT/ITEM
1	A note written in Undercommon: Characters who speak Undercommon will be able to tell that it is a short love poem.
2	Remnants of a disguise kit
3	Small pendant with a spider symbol
4	Small bottle of tree sap
5	Sprig of an oak tree, which can be used as a druid focus
6	Hand-drawn map of the local forest with a cave system marked

Additionally, if a character makes a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check while searching the desk, they discover a hidden drawer containing a journal and empty coin purse. The journal is older, but if a player takes time to read it, it shows that Sepha met two dryads out by the river and started learning Druidic magic. Additionally, towards the end of the journal, she mentions meeting the drow scouting parties and their leader Adé Parga.

Guards try and avoid any questions directed at them. On a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the guard reveals that Sepha has recently started sneaking out after sunset and asked the guard to not inform her father about her nightly adventures.

DEVELOPMENT

The party should be directed to her favorite reading spot near the river and hints should be directing the characters towards a possible drow culprit.

CHAPTER 2 — THE GAME IS AFOOT

Upon heading outside the city, read or paraphrase the following:

You quickly encounter a small foot path through the dense forest. After about fifteen minutes of walking, the path opens up to a clearing. A small babbling stream about fifteen feet wide cuts through the middle of the clearing. A large oak tree grows next to the bank of the creek and under it looks to be a small stone bench.

CHAPTER 3 – DESCENDING INTO DARKNESS

The guards head back to town if not stopped by the characters. If questioned, they are honest and inform the characters that they escorted the Lady Sepha here the day she went missing and then headed back into town as was usual. When they came to escort her back, she was nowhere to be found.

INVESTIGATING THE CLEARING

The clearing itself is fairly bare. Besides the stream, the oak tree and the small stone bench, there isn't much else here. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals no signs of a struggle. However, a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals two different sets of footprints leading off into the woods on the other side of the stream. If the characters succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check, two dryads can be seen observing the group on the other side of the stream across the clearing.

If characters become hostile toward the dryads, they attempt to defend themselves.

CROSSING THE STREAM

Once characters attempt to cross the stream, a **water weird** emerges from the stream and attacks the characters.

If characters defeat the water weird, they may come to the incorrect conclusion that it had something to do with the Lady Sepha's disappearance. If this happens, the dryads might make an appearance to either lead the characters further into the woods, or entice them to keep looking. If the characters still head back to the city, have Lord Lekore demand proof of his daughter's demise.

DEVELOPMENT

After overcoming the water weird, the party should follow the footprints and head deeper into the forest.

Following the two sets of footprints you soon stumble upon a cave that is jutting out from a small hill. At the mouth of the cave, a number of footprints can be seen both leaving and entering the cave.

The two sets of footprints lead deeper into the woods before leading to a cave.

If dryads directed the characters toward the cave, they should lose the party before the mouth of the cave. Have the party stumble on the footprints or have the dryads tree stride right near the cave.

Either a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a number of footprints. Their age is indeterminable; however, the two sets that the party was following are leading into the cave.

- The cave mouth is about 15 feet tall. It is dark and there is no light source in the cave.
- As the party enters the cave, two **swarms of ravens** fly out.



INTO THE UNDERDARK

Exploring the cave, you find a small path about five feet wide that leads downward into the cave. After walking for a while, colorful and semi-fluorescent fungi can be seen. They give off a dim light, and as you continue downward, their frequency continues. Eventually you hear the sound of running water, and as the cave pathway opens to a large cavern you find yourself in what can only be the Underdark.

Large fluorescent mushrooms are scattered throughout the area providing dim light. The path continues into the vast cavern and carved into the stone seems to be some type of structure about 500 feet from the opening of the cavern. Outside the structure, a small group of six **drow** can be seen talking to each other.

Their voices echo through the cavern. They seem excited about something and start to move into the structure with a lone drow remaining behind.

The party can approach the drow without sneaking. One drow, a male, is surprised to see non-drow, but is otherwise not hostile. If questioned in Elvish or Undercommon, he takes the party into the stronghold. If this occurs, continue onto *Confronting Adé & Sepha: Non-Violent*.

If characters attack, he signals for help on his turn. At the end of the round, six more **drow** appear with two **giant spiders**. The drow attempt to take the characters alive and would rather subdue them than outright kill them. Should the characters eliminate more than half the reinforcements, then Adé and Sepha make an appearance and beg the party to cease their fighting. Either way, the party soon confronts Adé and Sepha.

CONFRONTING ADÉ AND SEPHA: NON-VIOLENT

If the party took the non-hostile route, read the following aloud:

You're lead through the stronghold. Handfuls of drow are scurrying about preparing for something. You are brought to an ornate door where your guide knocks once and then opens the door and motions for you to enter. You see a tall drow woman standing discussing something with the only other elf in the room. Wearing finely-dressed clothes but with a mace sheathed at her hip, the drow seems slightly annoyed at the intrusion. Sitting near her is a high elf, who you instantly recognize as the missing Lady Sepha Lekore. She seems surprised to see surface folk, and rises as you enter.

The tall drow woman narrows her eyes at you and says to you in Common, "*Welcome guests. What brings you into my domain?*"

ROLE-PLAYING ADÉ AND SEPHA

- Sepha is very much in the Underdark of her own free will. Characters can determine this with a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) of either the tall drow or Sepha. It does not seem that Sepha is being held against her will. If characters wish to make checks to see if she's been bewitched or if she's been hurt, then all checks should come back as negative.
- Adé should be played as being wary of surface dwellers, but willing to listen to what they have to say. While proficient with her mace, she is more prone to attempt diplomacy before resorting to violence. If the characters remain respectful, she answers their questions truthfully. She speaks bluntly and straight to the point.
- Sepha interjects to explain that she met Adé while she was exploring the forest and that their friendship has grown and deepened. When she tried to get her father to see that the drow weren't the enemies he wouldn't listen. Sepha explains that she feared her father would arrange a marriage for her soon, so instead she took matters into her own hand and eloped with Adé.

- She begs the party to allow her to stay in the Underdark with her new wife where she is happy and free to continue learning about the drow and about druidic magic.
- While Sepha doesn't have access to the money her father does, she will instead offer up payment in the form of four potions — two *potions of barkskin* and two *potions of healing*.
- While Sepha is against it, Adé suggests an alternative way for the characters to get both the potions and the money from Lord Lekore. Proceed to *Conclusion A*.
- Adé protects Sepha and visa versa. If the characters make an attempt to snatch Sepha and run, both turn hostile. Sepha is a **druid** and Adé is a **priest**. See *Confronting Sepha and Adé: Hostile* for tactics.

CONFRONTING ADÉ AND SEPHA: HOSTILE

If the characters decide to attack the drow, Adé and Sepha protect the drow and attempt to subdue the party.

TACTICS. Adé prioritizes Sepha's safety over her own. Adé first casts *sanctuary* on Sepha and begs her to retreat. Afterwards, Adé uses her mace to attack the characters non-lethally. Sepha first casts *barkskin* on herself. If Adé convinces her to retreat, Sepha retreats into the stronghold. Should the characters be victorious, proceed to *Conclusion B*. If Adé and the drow are victorious in rendering the party unconscious, proceed to *Conclusion C*.

DEVELOPMENT

The party now has to decide how to proceed. Continue on for the different conclusions depending on how your party interacts with Sepha and Adé.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION A

Sepha and Adé make it very clear that they want to stay together and both are happy with this relationship. Although Sepha doesn't want to trick her father, Adé offers a way for the party to collect the reward money for finding Sepha and offers an alternative route in exchange for the party's silence on the truth.

Adé smirks at the party and kisses Sepha on the forehead. She opens the door and speaks softly to the drow that first escorted you.

"This should only take a moment." She says to you.

A few minutes pass and a single knock is heard at the door. It opens to reveal a different drow man.

"Berus, thank you for joining us. I think I found the perfect task for you. Please show our new friends here your special talent."

The new drow turns and eyes you for a few seconds before he nods. His form blurs slightly and standing in front of you is an exact replica of Lady Sepha.

Adé turns and looks at the group, a smile on her face.

Adé informs the group that Berus is a **doppelganger** and is willing to take Sepha's place on the surface until Lord Lekore can be reasoned with. Berus is happy to oblige and live as Sepha. Characters can make a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check to try and convince Sepha and Adé to come clean to Lord Lekore about their relationship. An additional DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check with Lord Lekore sees him grudgingly accept their relationship. Failures see Lord Lekore not recognize the marriage, and he attempts (but fails) to frame Adé for kidnapping.

CONCLUSION B

If the party turns hostile and succeeds in killing Adé, Sepha is devastated and attempts to run from the party. Should she make it out of the cave, it should be implied that the dryads help her escape into the woods. If

the characters manage to capture Sepha and bring her back by force, she tries to escape at any opportunity and tells her father that she would rather live in the woods than spend another day without her partner.

CONCLUSION C

You awaken underneath the Oak tree by the stream. A note is attached to your bag and it reads the following:

I know you were just trying to help, but please I'm happy where I am. Give my father this note and perhaps you'll still earn your reward. Father if you're reading this, then I'm sorry. I couldn't spend another day confined to the manor. I'm happy where I am. Maybe one day, when I think you're ready to listen, I'll return, but I know you're not ready yet. I love you father and I'm sorry to hurt you so. I'll return someday.

*Your loving daughter,
Sepha Lekore*

If characters return to the cave, they find the entrance caved in and not accessible.

REWARDS

If the party returns to Lord Leskore with Sepha (or Berus pretending to be Sepha), the party receives 100 gp total. Additionally, anytime the party is in Louton, they will be given free lodging in guest quarters at the Lekore Manor. Characters should be rewarded by advancing to 4th level at the conclusion.



AUTHOR'S NOTES

I would like to acknowledge one of my bestest friends (who also doubles as my DM) Ali, @Azniac on Twitter, for encouraging me to write this one-shot and helping me with wording.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Dayton lives in Austin, TX with her two cat sons Orion and Nox. A fan of *D&D*, cooking, and playing video games, she has also started learning how to paint minis. If you're interested in reaching out to her, you can find her on Twitter as @TheCommonMasses.



ILLUSTRATION BY SAMMY WARD

THE BANSHEE'S TALE

by *Annabeth Lennon*

CREATURE: *Banshee* | **LEVEL(S):** 3-5

SYNOPSIS

The residents of Castle Gealladh have been visited by an ominous banshee with a warning: “Leave or die”. Your adventuring company finds themselves drafted by a wizard named Milo Tenpenny and tasked with investigating the castle and ridding it of undead. In your investigation, you will find that there is more to this warning than it seems — and that something far worse than spirits haunt this castle. *The Banshee's Tale* is intended for 3-5 characters of 5th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Castle Gealladh and the noble family who lives there are well-known and respected for being good and upstanding members of society. The party is hired to investigate the catacombs underneath the castle after a spirit appeared to the residents with a warning of imminent death.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The people of House Ó Cuinn are good natured and believe in helping the weak and protecting the innocent. The people of this county love and respect the people of House Ó Cuinn. In its 500 year history, House Ó Cuinn has known only success and prosperity — much to the chagrin of other noble families, who have tried many times over the years to slander and unseat them.

The true past of House Ó Cuinn is that the prosperity and success of the family can be attributed to a deal struck with the Demon Prince of Undeath, Orcus. Count Sloan, one of the founding members of the house, pledged all of the souls of his family line to the Demon Prince in exchange for success. Now, 500 years later, Orcus aims to collect the debt.

The ghost of Niamh, another founding member of House Ó Cuinn, has manifested herself in the form of a banshee in order to warn the residents to leave before the dead come for them. As the adventures fight their way through the risen dead of House Ó Cuinn, they will have to confront the terrible deed that led to the family's success.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **COUNTESS AILEEN Ó CUINN:** Current head of House Ó Cuinn. Hardheaded and takes no nonsense, is very proud of her family and the good they've done for their county.
- **BRIDGET Ó CUINN:** Wife of Aileen Ó Cuinn. Warm hearted and welcoming counterpart to Aileen. Loves to meet adventurers and hear tales of their past travels.
- **MILO TENPENNY:** Wizard for Castle Gealladh, the only current resident who knows the mysterious past of the family.
- **NIAMH:** A banshee and founding member of House Ó Cuinn. Has come back to warn people of impending doom for the castle.
- **SLOAN:** A wraith and founding member of House Ó Cuinn. Leader of the cult of Orcus and bringer of the castles impending doom.



CHAPTER 1 – THE DESCENT OF THE DEAD

A cool breeze whips through the streets of the village on this calm autumn day. As you approach the tavern, you can see the long shadow of Castle Gealladh up on the hill behind town.

Entering the tavern, you are greeted by the sounds of laughter and music. Looking around, you can see the typical patrons of a tavern: farmers relaxing after a hard day's work, adventurers resting after a long day's travel. Looking over the tavern, one group does catch your eye: you see two women, one stern and one seemingly jovial, and a halfling wizard.

The stern women sitting in the corner gestures for your party to approach. *"Hello, you must be the adventurers Milo called for. My name is Countess Aileen Ó Cuinn and my home has come under siege."*

Countess Aileen Ó Cuinn (see *Dramatis Personae*) has desperate need for a group of adventurers. She is willing to pay top dollar to the adventurers for clearing out her castle, and even more if they can figure out why the spirits appeared. Here is what she knows:

- Two weeks ago a banshee appeared to Aileen and Bridget with a simple warning: "Leave or die!"
- Soon after that, strange noises and whispers could be heard through the castle halls at night.
- Then, tenday ago, the dead started to rise from the crypt below the castle — luckily the castle wizard, Milo, was able to seal off the crypt and evacuate the residents of the castle to the tavern, where they've been staying.
- Aileen agrees to pay the characters 5,000 gp total upon ridding the crypt of undead, and another 2,500 gp if they can figure out why the spirits are haunting her castle.
- None of the three of them know the truth of why the spirits have appeared, though a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Milo knows more than he is telling.
- If Milo is pressed to reveal more information in front of Bridget and Aileen, he plays the part of the fool. If he is pressed alone, he reveals that he

knows that there is a dark secret in the past of House Ó Cuinn, and that something darker than a ghost lies at the bottom of the crypt.

CHAPTER 2 – THE CRYPT

After the party accepts Aileen's offer, Milo leads the adventurers up into the castle and to the doors of the crypt that lies underneath it. He unseals the doors of the crypt and wishes them luck as they descend the stairs.

ENTERING THE CRYPT

- **ROOMS:** A room's ceiling is at least as high as the room is wide, often higher. If a room's ceiling height isn't specified, assume it's the minimum height.
- **WALLS:** The walls of the crypt are littered with alcoves containing the corpses of members of house Ó Cuinn. If an alcove is searched, it contains ratty clothes and 2d6 gp.
- **ILLUMINATION:** Areas of the crypt are unlit unless otherwise stated.

ROOM 1: CRYPT ENTRY WAY

The staircase descends 30 feet before opening up into a burial chamber with four columns. The columns are covered with frescoes, which depict various good acts the family has committed over the years, including feeding the hungry and building shelters for the homeless.

- **BANSHEE:** The first time the players enter this chamber, the banshee appears to them. She appears angry and terrifying. She utters three words — "Leave or die" — before disappearing in a puff.
- **EXITS:** The hallway continues forward before turning west into room three. There is a doorway on the west wall that opens into Room 2.

ROOM 2: EMBALMING/PREPARATION CHAMBER

This small 15 foot chamber contains tools and equipment necessary for the process of embalming and preparing corpses.

- **RELIGION:** A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals that the embalming method coincides with the God Kelemvor.

- **INVESTIGATION:** A successful DC14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that a few pieces of the embalming equipment are missing.

ROOM 3: LARGE CRYPT CHAMBER

This large chamber contains the majority of the ancestors of House Ó Cuinn. The room contains four floor-to-ceiling pillars. These pillars contain the remains of important members from House Ó Cuinn.

- **UNDEAD:** Six **zombies** and four **crawling hands** are wandering around this large chamber. They attack anyone who enters the chamber. The zombies are wielding the missing embalming equipment, and as a result they do slashing damage instead of bludgeoning damage.

ROOM 4: CROSSWAY

The first time the players come to this crossway, the banshee appears to the players again.

- **BANSHEE:** This time when the banshee appears, she does not seem as angry or terrifying, but instead seems concerned. She once again urges the characters to leave. If pressed for answers allow the characters to make a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If it is successful, she will reveal that a dark figure from the family's past has come back to collect a debt, and that everybody in the castle is in grave danger.

ROOM 5: WARRIORS CRYPT

This large chamber contains the bodies of the warriors of House Ó Cuinn. The three exits from this room lead to more chambers containing dead warriors.

- **UNDEAD:** One ghaist and two ghouls are wandering around this large chamber. They attack anyone who enters the chamber. The ghaist is the corpse of a great warrior from House Ó Cuinn's past.

ROOM 6 MORE CRYPTS

These small chambers contain more members of House Ó Cuinn. The people in these crypts were particularly wealthy and as such contain 4d6+5 gp instead of the normal 2d6.

ROOM 7: HIGH PRIESTESSES

These chambers contain some of the priests and priestesses of House Ó Cuinn.

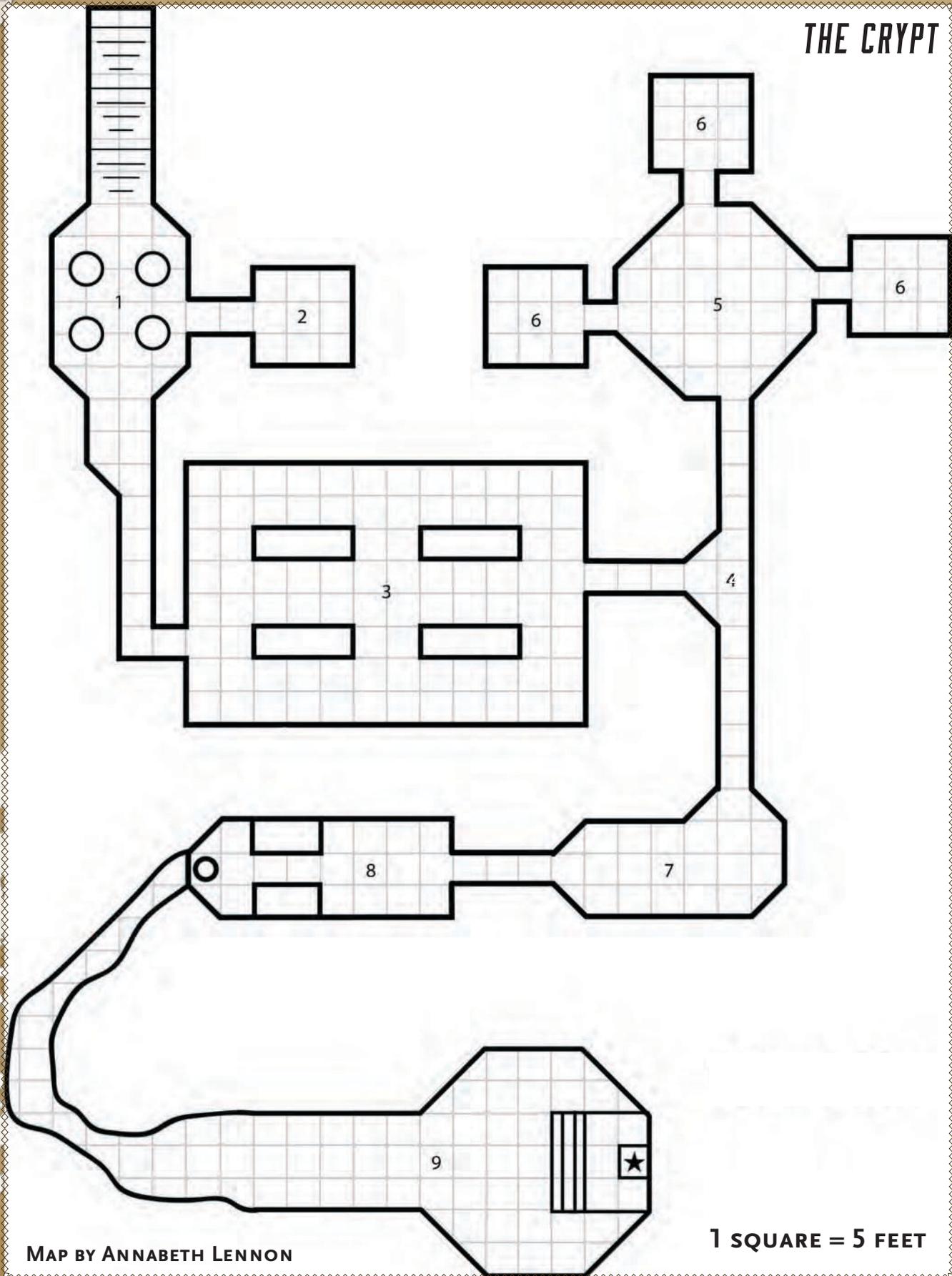
- **INVESTIGATION:** A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that two of these Priestesses were, in fact, worshipers of a Demon Prince. They are hiding holy symbols in their robes that read "Orcus The Prince of Undeath" in Abyssal.
- **UNDEAD:** Two **ghosts** are lying in wait in this room. When the party first enters, the ghosts attempt to surprise them, possess the strongest looking members of the party, and attack the weaker-looking members.

ROOM 8: FOUNDERS CHAMBER

This large ornate chamber contains two sarcophagi, one on the north wall and one on the south wall. The lids of these sarcophagi have bas relief carvings of a man on one and a woman on the other. The woman is the banshee that has appeared to the party several times at this point. The lid of the sarcophagi with the man is slightly ajar when the players enter the room. At the far end of the room there is a 5 foot wide hole in the floor, where it looks like something has dug down into the earth.

- **BANSHEE:** The banshee appears one final time to beg the party to leave. It is now that she reveals the whole truth of her family's past. She reveals that her name is Niamh and that her husband, Sloan, was a worshiper of Orcus. He made a deal that, in exchange for 500 years of wealth and success, he would lead an undead army for Orcus. Now, 500 years later, her husband has come back as a wraith and is raising all of the ancestors of House Ó Cuinn. Niamh is scared of her husband and does not want to help the adventurers face him. However, a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces her that fighting her husband is the right thing to do. Regardless, she reveals that, if they are able to return Sloan's remains to his sarcophagus, that should lay his spirit to rest once and for all.

THE CRYPT



MAP BY ANNABETH LENNON

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

ROOM 9: ALTAR TO ORCUS

The party descends 20 feet down through the hole and into a natural cave formation. The cave snakes around and opens up into a chapel, containing an altar to Orcus at the far end of the room. Laying on the altar is the corpse of Sloan.

- **UNDEAD:** Floating in front of the altar is the spirit of Sloan, who is a **wraith**. He attacks intruders on sight and refuses to negotiate. If the party has convinced Niamh to help them, Sloan also has a **ghast** with him to guard him.

CONCLUSION

When the party returns to the Countess Aileen with news that the castle has been cleared of undead read the following:

When you break the news to Aileen and her wife Bridet, an obvious sigh of relief passes over their faces. Aileen steps forward and says, *“Thank you so much for the great work that you’ve done. My family owes you a great debt. Do not worry, you will get the 5,000 gold pieces I’ve promised you. Please tell me — were you able to figure out why the spirits showed up?”*

At this point, the party can choose whether they want to reveal the dark origin of House Ó Cuinn. If they choose to reveal the past to her, read the following:

A look of horror passes over the faces of Aileen and Bridget. *“Oh my gods. That’s horrible. I’m so ashamed... we must tell the people. They need to know the truth. Hopefully, they will be able to forgive our past sins.”* Aileen is deeply upset, but ultimately thankful that you revealed the truth to her. *“As promised you will receive your extra reward for revealing the truth. Thank you for your service.”* She then takes her leave and heads up to her room with her wife Bridget.

If the party decides not to reveal the truth to Aileen, read the following:

“As long as the spirits are dealt with, that is what truly matters. As special thanks for all the good you have done, I would be happy to add an extra 1,000 gold pieces.” Pleased with the outcome, Aileen invites the players to a feast in their honor.

If the party decides to make up a new reason for the spirits showing up, have them make a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check — on a success, read the

“Wow, I can’t believe that! As promised, you will receive the extra gold we agreed upon.” Pleased with the outcome, Aileen invites the players to a feast in their honor.

following:

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS:

OBSTACLE	XP
Six Zombies and	340
Four Crawling Hands	
One Ghast and Two Ghouls	850
Two Ghosts	2,200
Banshee	1,100
Wraith	1,800

TREASURE REWARDS:

ITEM	VALUE
Ridding Crypt of Undead	5,000 gold pieces
Telling Countess Aileen the truth (or convincing her of a lie)	2,500 gp

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Annabeth Lennon resides in Austin, Texas. A lifelong fan of *D&D*, this is the first adventure she has written for a DM other than herself. She can be reached at @SStrahd on Twitter and annasthetic92@gmail.com.



ILLUSTRATION BY DUNGEON SECRETS

SWAMPED

by Jessica Ross

CREATURE: *Boo-hag* | LEVEL(S): 3-5

SYNOPSIS

Outside Briar Glen lies a dangerous swamp, and deep within it runs the Weeping River. Those who venture too far into the swampland near the river are overcome with grief and cry until their tears turn to blood. If they're lucky, they die quickly.

Lately, however, women in town disappear into the swamp near the Weeping River at night... and return in the morning, entranced but unscathed. Their families want to know why they return at sunrise with no memory of the previous night.

These women found themselves a friend in the boo-hag, angry at the townsfolk for damaging her swamp. She initiated the women into her coven and tasked them to drain the life energy from their families to help the boo-hag heal the swamp.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The former mayor, Araphyra Pernan, fell into a coma six months ago. Healers have kept Araphyra alive, but no one can wake her. Worse, several others have taken ill. The current mayor, a hill dwarf paladin named Ilde Glenhill, suspects foul play. She can't root out the problem while keeping the town running, so she put out a call for adventurers to investigate.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Briar Glen, though relatively small, has expanded since it was first settled. The townsfolk work as farmers, crafters, and traders; their economy relies on trade and travel. There have always been rumors regarding the dangers of the swamp; generations ago, a family of powerful warlocks (the Pernans) placed a barrier around it. Adventurers can enter the swamp, but it takes dedication and no small amount of power to breach the barrier.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **FERYNNE:** A boo-hag (night hag) who came to the swamp centuries ago. She ignored Briar Glen at first; by the time their expansion became a danger, she was outnumbered. Six months ago, the townsfolk cut too deep into the swamp, and the damage nearly killed Ferynne. Ferynne called for her sisters, but with no boo-hags nearby, she summoned several of the women in town. In her true form, she appears as a skinless woman. Years ago, a dying friend offered Ferynne her skin, so Ferynne disguises herself as a beautiful drow woman.
- **ILDE GLENHILL:** Ilde's primary concern is the safety of the townsfolk. She knows to avoid the swamp and warns the Characters away from it. Ilde aids the investigations as best she can but can't pass through the swamp barrier.
- **ENCHANTED WOMEN:** When these women answered the boo-hag's call, they agreed to join her coven and allow her to enchant them so they would only remember Ferynne under the light of the moon. At night, the women of the coven drain their partners' energy. They return to the swamp with the stolen energy at every full moon to help Ferynne heal it. These willingly-enchanted women are starting to remember tidbits, and now they're juggling their loyalty to the boo-hag and their love for their families.
- **PERNAN FAMILY:** A Pernan has been mayor in Briar Glen for as long as anyone remembers. They've expanded Briar Glen into the surrounding swamp for the last several generations, making room for more townsfolk, more businesses, and more land to farm.

“Don’t let the hag ride you.” This is how the people of Briar Glen say goodbye and have done for generations to wish others health and wellness; the townsfolk see it as a figure of speech. Use this when characters end a positive encounter with an NPC.

CHAPTER 1 – THE SWAMP’S EDGE

The town of Briar Glen lies on the edge of dense swampland. Old but well-maintained buildings line the main road through town. As soon as you approach the border of town, a smiling hill dwarf greets you, while many townsfolk watch with suspicion.

“I am Ilde Glenhill. Thank you for coming.”

She leads you to an old, beautiful building near the center of town and ushers you inside.

Ilde explains that the former mayor, Araphyra Pernan, has fallen into a coma. Several other townsfolk have become ill, as well, and for a few days every month, they appear entranced.

Ilde shares rumors that women wander into the swamp at night, which shouldn’t be possible due to the barrier. While she’s noticed overlap in the women entering the swamp and the women in trances, Ilde hasn’t been able to confirm a clear connection.

Ilde cautions the players against entering the swamp, even with the barrier; rumors have described the dangers of the swamp for generations.

Ilde directs you to the Pernan mansion, next door to the town hall. She is the first non-Pernan to win the mayoral election, which took place six months ago.

THE FAMILY PERNAN

The Pernans’ butler, Sarro, leads the characters to a lavishly decorated sitting room. Success on a DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals Sarro seems nervous, and he reluctantly admits Darona disappears into the swamp for several nights every month, sometimes returning in a trance. The trances are getting longer, and he’s worried she’ll fall into a coma, too.

With a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check, Sarro reveals Darona and Araphyra argued for hours a few days before Araphyra fell ill. Darona, who married into the Pernans, was upset the Pernans have been expanding into the swamp for generations; she wanted to stop it.

Darona or Sarro explain the swamp barrier; use the text box below.

On a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Darona lets the characters examine Araphyra, who can’t be woken; with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana) check, the characters sense Enchantment and Evocation surrounding her.

Darona doesn’t remember the argument, but she does feel it’s wrong for Briar Glen to continue intruding on the swamp.

WHAT THE DM KNOWS:

Darona asked the boo-hag to enchant her to forget the argument and the three days leading to Araphyra’s coma, which was caused by Darona draining too much of her energy at once. If Ferynne heals the swamp, Araphyra will be fine.

Even before Briar Glen, rumors of dangerous creatures surrounded the swamp. The Pernans created a barrier to keep travelers out of the swamp and, hopefully, to keep whatever’s in the swamp out of Briar Glen. The barrier isn’t unbreakable, but it serves as a warning and last safeguard.

DEVELOPMENT

After speaking with Darona, any NPC answers the adventurers’ questions to the best of their ability, but they have two recommendations:

1. The party can investigate someone entering the swamp. The NPC directs the characters to the home of one of the Women, Enchanted.
2. An NPC reluctantly suggests the group go directly Into the Swamp. The NPC advises against entering the swamp and reminds the players they can’t pass through the barrier.

CHAPTER 2 — WOMEN, ENCHANTED

To investigate the women entering the swamp, roll any die. On odd numbers, the characters visit the home of an enchanted woman, on even numbers, they find a lucid woman instead.

ENCHANTED WOMAN

Tiall welcomes the characters into his home for their investigation. He hesitates at first but leads the characters to his wife, Nel, in the sitting room.

When you enter the room, the woman does not so much as stir. She stares directly ahead of her, her eyes glazed and unfocused as everyone moves around her.

On a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana) check, the characters sense Enchantment. If a character has a way to end an enchantment, the DC is 20, regardless of the spell's DC. If a character wakes the enchanted woman, she becomes a lucid woman; use the next section for this encounter.

With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, characters see mud on Nel's shoes and determine she has been to the swamp recently.

If a character attempts to get close to Nel, she focuses on them, saying "If she dies, we die." She then returns to her unresponsive state.

When questioned, Tiall shares what he knows:

- Every month, Nel disappears for the two nights before, the night of, and the two nights after the full moon. He tried following her, but he couldn't pass through the barrier. Nel returned in the morning unharmed and with no memory of leaving. Sometimes she returns normally, but sometimes she comes back dazed — as she is now — remaining so for days before she returns to normal. This started six months ago.
- Tiall also mentions he has been losing sleep and has been exhausted lately.

WHAT THE DM KNOWS: Tiall is exhausted because Nel drains his life force for the boo-hag.

LUCID WOMAN

Myrsael and Bralla welcome the characters into their home. Bralla tells them she doesn't know how much help she'll be, and Myrsael shares what she knows (use what Tiall knows in the previous section).

Bralla doesn't know why this happens or how it started. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check determines Bralla is hiding something: she remembers hearing someone weeping.

STORIES AND LEGENDS

An NPC can share the town's legends if the characters ask the right questions.

LEGEND OF THE WEEPING RIVER

With a successful DC 9 Intelligence (History) check, a character knows the legend; otherwise, an NPC tells them.

Before it was the Weeping River, it was the Dreamer's Pond, where people could present an offering and make a wish. The pond didn't grant wishes, but it gave people the power and energy to grant their own.

The deeper into the swamp the town expanded, the larger the pond became until it outgrew the island, and now it cuts through the entire swamp.

The people of Briar Glen don't make wishes on that river. They learned long ago how dangerous it is — by the time you see the river, it's already too late. Anyone who ventures that deep into the swamp is overcome by grief, and they begin weeping. Few have made it out of the swamp before the tears turn to blood and they die in anguish.

DON'T LET THE HAG RIDE YOU

An NPC shares the lesser-known legend of the boo-hag with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Before this town was built, there was a creature in the swamp. She drained energy from travelers to sustain herself, but she left them alive and enchanted them so they could only remember what happened through a dream-like haze.

Once the town was built, she visited Briar Glen under the cover of night to latch onto someone and drain their energy. She wouldn't kill if she didn't have to, but those she drained were never the same.

Years later, a drow woman entered the swamp to find this creature and never returned. Until the barrier was built, many said they caught glimpses of this woman wandering the town at night.

The townsfolk have since shared the warning and the protection “don’t let the hag ride you.”



DEVELOPMENT

If the characters befriended any enchanted woman (Daron, Bralla, or Nel), she gives each player a small stone painted to look like a pearl and directs them to the swamp. If they threatened or angered her, she tells them to leave Briar Glen. If they leave town without investigating the swamp, see *Conclusion, Part C*.

CHAPTER 3 – THE HAG RIDES

INTO THE SWAMP

The players can enter the swamp as soon as they enter town. Roll 1d4 on the *Swamp Encounters* table. After the characters explore town, roll 1d6 twice on the *Swamp Encounters* table as the characters head for the barrier.

SWAMP ENCOUNTERS

D6	ENCOUNTER	DETAILS
1	Bullywug Attack	Bullywugs (one per character) attack the party.
2	Encampment	On a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the party finds evidence of deserted camp grounds. With a result of 16, they also discover more recent tracks leading deeper into the swamp toward the barrier and a <i>potion of healing</i> .
3	Stirge Swarm	A swarm of stirges (two per character) attack the party.
4	Swamp Fog	A thick fog rolls in, surrounding the party and dampening their senses. When the fog clears, they are back at the edge of the swamp.
5	Enchanted Woman	Nel or Bralla enter the swamp in a trance and walk toward the barrier. Their path can be obstructed, but the party can’t wake them. If they damage the enchanted woman, the swamp swallows her, and a tree root lashes out toward the character who attacked, dealing twice the damage the woman received.
6	Daron Pernan	Daron Pernan approaches the barrier. A successful DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals Abjuration and Illusion magic.

WHAT THE DM KNOWS: Daron is weakening the barrier but making it appear undamaged. She’s adjusting the barrier so only those who want to save the swamp can pass through.

THE BARRIER

WHAT THE DM KNOWS: the characters can pass through the barrier if their intention is to protect the swamp or if they have a faux-pearl.

The characters can bluff their way through with a successful DC 21 Charisma (Deception, Performance, or Persuasion) check or by following an enchanted woman (by convincing or tricking her into thinking they want to help).

DEVELOPMENT

After two encounters, if the party has not discovered another way in, present result 5 or 6: an enchanted woman or Daronia Pernan.

THE SISTERS OF THE SWAMP

If they enter through trickery or deception, read the following:

You feel dampness on your face as you push deeper into the swamp, and when you move to brush it away, you hear soft weeping and realize the water is coming from your eyes. As you fall to your knees, a beautiful drow appears before you, smiling down at you.

“You will suffer every pain my sister feels,” the woman says, pointing to the river behind her. “If she dies, you die.”

On a successful DC 13 Constitution check, the characters stop crying. If they fail, they take 1d10 psychic damage.

THE HEART OF THE SWAMP

If the characters enter with the guidance of an enchanted woman or by passing through the barrier to help, read the following.

You follow the gentle sound of weeping to a drow woman, kneeling at the edge of the river. She leans close to the water and exhales. As she does, the haggard and dying plants around you spring up with renewed energy. The woman lets her tears fall into the river as she breathes life back into the swamp.

She looks up to see you watching her. “Are you here to help?” she asks.

THE BOO-HAG

The characters can try talking to Ferynne, but if they attack, she’s a disguised boo-hag who summons a **troll** (with half health) to aid her (unless the players received faux-pearls). When the troll dies or Ferynne is at half health (whichever happens first), she peels away her flesh to become the boo-hag.

SCALING THE BATTLE:

If the party is small or under-powered, consider removing the troll and/or transforming the boo-hag sooner.

BOO-HAG

- The boo-hag uses the stats of the **night hag** with the addition of *ride*. Her ride ability allows her to regain 1d8 health per turn when she puts a character to sleep.
- When disguised, she has half health and can’t use *ride*.

DEVELOPMENT

- If the players want to negotiate with Ferynne, go to *Conclusion, Part A*.
- If the players kill the boo-hag, go to *Conclusion, Part B*.
- If the players decide to leave town without killing Ferynne or attempting to facilitate a negotiation, go to *Conclusion, Part C*.

CONCLUSION, PART A

The boo-hag wants Briar Glen to stop killing the swamp. The party can convince her to negotiate with Ilde (she can't cross the barrier), who wants what's best for the town.

If your party successfully facilitates a negotiation, read the following:

The enchanted women awaken, as does Araphyra. She's disappointed to learn Briar Glen will no longer be expanding into the swamp, but she thanks you for saving her.

Ferynne arrives in her disguise, and the townsfolk agree to one final ritual. They allow Ferynne to use their life force to revive the dying swamp, and Darona destroys the barrier. The town holds a celebration lasting several nights and provide free food and drink for the festival.

After leaving Briar Glen to return to your normal lives, you watch for news from the town. As days turn to weeks, you hear the swamp is flourishing, and with the new life in the swamp, more people visit. The economy is booming with more traders visiting than ever, and adventurers travel through the swamp relatively unharmed.

CONCLUSION, PART B

If the party kills the boo-hag, read the following text aloud:

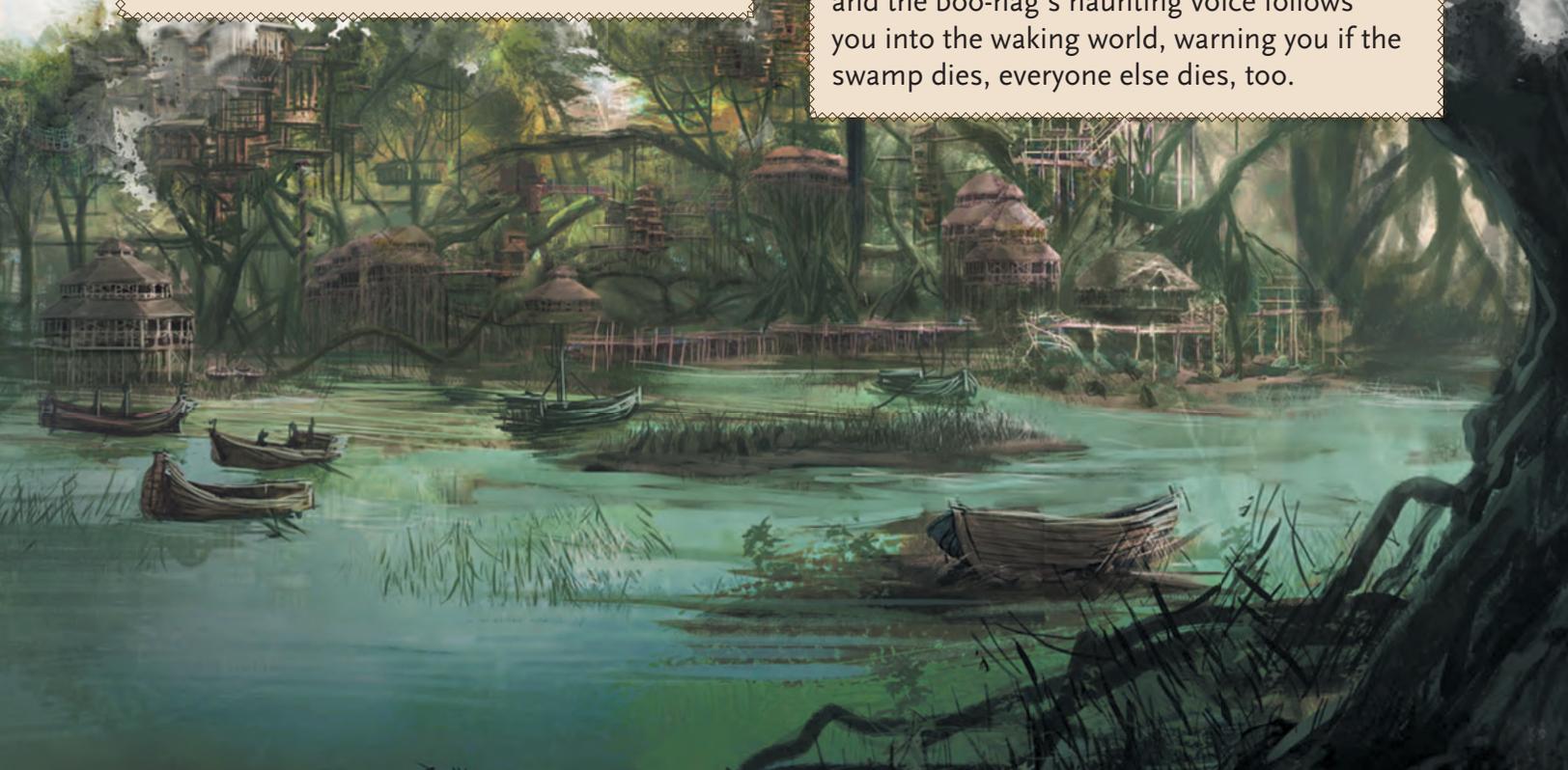
The hag's body falls to the ground, and the swamp opens and swallows her, leaving behind a pile of rocks painted to look like pearls. As soon as her body disappears, the lush, green plants turn brown, and the murky water recedes. The swamp dies around you as you leave.

Ilde greets you in town with a sad smile. Behind her stands Araphyra comforting a weeping Darona. In fact, many women join Darona in her sorrow, and they watch you disdainfully.

Araphyra screams as blood leaks from her eyes. She dies in front of you, and Darona screams for you to leave town before you do more damage.

You leave Briar Glen behind you and return to your normal lives. The days turn to weeks, and you hear rumors of a town near a swamp nearly destroyed. A few townsfolk still remain, but the swamp around the town died, taking many in the town with it.

One night, you wake from a nightmare, and the boo-hag's haunting voice follows you into the waking world, warning you if the swamp dies, everyone else dies, too.



CONCLUSION, PART C

If the party leaves without confronting the boo-hag or facilitating a deal, read the following:

Ilde follows you to the edge of town, unhappy but understanding. Briar Glen's troubles started long before you arrived, and it was too much, perhaps, to expect you to fix them.

You return to your normal lives, and as the days turn to weeks, you hear rumors of a town near a swamp nearly destroyed. A few townsfolk still remain, but they live in fear of the hag coven controlling the nearby swamp. The people work during the day, then lock their houses tight at night, whispering words of protection and warning.

"Don't let the hag ride you."

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Thank you to my wonderful group of playtesters, Robin, Katie, Sam, and Patrick! And thank you to Jen Vaughn and Robin Michele for reviewing my drafts and not letting me give up.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jess is a teacher, editor, and podcaster. You can listen to her play *D&D* with some of her favorite ladies on d20 Dames and tune in while she GMs Blue Rose for some of her besties on Bitches & Liches. Check in with her shenanigans on Twitter @writejessr.

REWARDS

CONCLUSION	ITEMS	CLOUT
<i>Part A</i>	<i>wand of magic detection</i>	You have done this town a great service, and word of your bravery will spread. If you encounter someone from this town in your travels, they're willing to help you in any way they can on your next adventure.
	<i>grey bag of tricks</i>	
If they received faux-pearls	100 gp	
<i>Part B</i>	Each pearl is a potion of greater healing	You have made an enemy of Darona Pernan, a powerful warlock. She won't forget what you've done, nor will the other previously-enchanted women.
	100 gp	
If they picked up the 3 faux-pearls left behind by the boo-hag	Each pearl is a potion of greater healing	
<i>Part C</i>	50 gp	
ENCOUNTER	XP EARNED	
Boo-hag appeased	2500	
Boo-hag killed	1800	
Troll killed	900	
Bullywug	50 per bullywug	
Stirge	25 per stirge	



THE DEMON'S HEART

by Masha Lepire

CREATURE: *Succubus* | LEVEL(S): 3-5

SYNOPSIS

A group of adventurers find themselves drawn to Axeholme, a small, desolate village with a rash of disappearances. An ancient burial mound nearby has been opened, its stone door found shattered, and, if the villagers are to be believed, the disappearances are the work of a wizard's curse. But things are not always what they seem. *The Demon's Heart* is an adventure for 3-5 characters of 4th level. It uses the milestone system and characters that complete this adventure may advance to 5th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventurers are summoned to Axeholme by a local lord to investigate a string of missing peasants. The lord tells them a woman came to him the night before begging for his aid to find her lost son. The adventurers learn that an ancient barrow, said to hold the remains of a powerful wizard, has been unearthed. Locals say the place is cursed, and blame the disappearances on the barrow's recent disruption. Their proof of the curse lies in the nightmares that have plagued Axeholme ever since a stableboy reported the barrow's stone door smashed. Dark omens and demonic visions visit themselves upon the sleeping each and every night. A character blessed by divinity (such as a cleric or paladin) might receive a cryptic vision from their god, showing demonic omens and guiding them to the barrow as the source of the town's recent misfortunes. Unbeknownst to the townsfolk and the adventurers, these visions have been conjured by a succubus posing as a local woman in order to lure adventures to the barrow.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventurers arrive at a small village next to an ancient barrow. They think they have arrived in order to investigate a string of disappearances, but really they have been lured by a succubus, Katherine, who seeks to use them for her own purposes. She is seeking an ancient demonic artifact, The Demon's Heart, locked in the hallowed tomb of a long dead warlock. The barrow is warded with an old spell so that demons cannot enter. Katherine seeks to use the adventurers to retrieve the artifact for her — and deal with her competition.

Elias, her **cambion** son, is competing with her to obtain the artifact, for it can set one of them free from their contract with a hellish pit lord.

The adventurers eventually discover that the cambion has been charming townsfolk from Axeholme in an attempt to retrieve the artifact for him. Seeing his plans, the succubus lures the players into the village with the hope she can manipulate them into killing the cambion, entering the barrow, and retrieving the Demon's Heart for her. The cambion is the true villain, while the succubus, though manipulative, is painted in a more neutral light.

CHAPTER 1 — THE VILLAGE

The characters are summoned to Axeholme, a desolate village located near an old barrow in a nearby grassy knoll. The village borders a vast marsh and is little more than cluster of sod huts around a stacked stone well.

THE VILLAGE SQUARE

Several dirty peasants squat around a greasy peat fire in the village's center. If the characters speak with the villagers they discover the following information:

The ancient barrow at the edge of the marsh has been recently opened. A stable boy, Peter, discovered the large stone blocking its door had been shattered a fortnight past. Ever since the barrow opened, people have been disappearing. The last to go missing was Lysa, the daughter of Beatrice, the innkeeper.

People have been behaving strangely. For instance, the blacksmith, Yohan, has shuttered his shop. Townsfolk believe an ancient curse is to blame and say the barrow is the tomb of a powerful wizard. The village elder, Toland, has warned everyone to stay away from the barrow.

THE VILLAGERS

- **YOHAN:** The Blacksmith is a stout dwarf with a long black beard. His forge, a clay chimney under a small thatch overhang abutting his stacked stone hut, is cold and appears to have not been operational for several days. He is home, but tells the adventurers to go away and echoes the superstitions of the villagers. In reality, Yohan is dead. Elias has taken his place while he uses villagers to explore the barrow.
- **PETER:** The teenage stableboy solemnly recounts for the adventurers the events leading up to his discovering the barrow's opening. He mentions that he sometimes sees lights at night near the barrow and believes traveling bandits might be behind the break-in.
- **TOLAND:** The elderly gray-bearded village elder tells the adventurers the barrow is the tomb of a wizard and older than the village itself. He desperately pleads with the characters to help save his village.

THE TAVERN

The dimly lit tavern is deserted save for the innkeeper, Beatrice, and her two **mastiffs** by the fireplace. The large mean looking hounds seem on edge, pacing the flagstones, and snapping at each other over an old bone. Another woman sits at a table in a corner of the tavern farthest from the light and warmth of the dwindling fire.

Beatrice is initially friendly toward the characters, though clearly distraught over her missing daughter, Lysa. She offers them lodging and a hot meal, sharing what little she has as thanks for their help finding her daughter.

Unknown to the players, Beatrice is charmed by the woman in the corner, a succubus named Katherine. Katherine is using Beatrice to earn the adventurers' trust by having her attempt to kill them, thwarting the attempt herself, and then pinning it on her son, the cambion, Elias.

When Beatrice brings the group drinks and food, Katherine knocks the drinks from their hands, warning them of the poison waiting within. Beatrice, a **commoner**, draws a knife and attacks, her agitated hounds by her side. Should Beatrice survive the encounter, she will regain her senses, and remember being charmed by a dark figure in the night.

Katherine introduces herself as a fellow adventurer and suggest they share a common enemy. She reveals that a sorcerer named Elias is behind the disappearances in the village and she has been tracking him for some time. If asked how she knows this, Katherine discloses her parentage of Elias.

If questioned further, Katherine claims Elias is seeking a powerful relic contained within the barrow mound.

If the adventurers question her motives, Katherine points out she did just save their lives and remind them that the enemy of her enemy is her friend. She adds that Elias is stronger than both of them and they will need her help if they are to defeat him. She adds that he is cunning, and they may already be manipulated by him, as it's likely he lured them to Axeholme in order to kill her. She adds that she saw Elias enter the barrow right before she came to the inn.

ROLE-PLAYING KATHERINE

Kathrine is a **succubus**, and, as such, manipulates others to further her ends. She genuinely wants to see her son slain as he is a threat to her. Above all else, she covets the artifact in the barrow in order to free herself from her masters' bondage. She is cunning, and will play to the heroes' sympathies.

CHAPTER 2 – THE BARROW

The inside of the barrow is a large, round burial chamber. In the center rests a stone sarcophagus with the relief of a man carved on its lid. In his hands is nestled the Demon's Heart, a polished obsidian sphere. The walls of the barrow are carved with worn runes, glowing faintly like embers in a dying fire. A character might recognize the runes as Infernal, describing the nefarious deeds of a powerful warlock. Pictograms also show a warlock wielding a black sphere subjugating demons.

THE TOMB

On the ground around the sarcophagus are withered corpses, the bodies of villagers drained of life. Among them is the body of Yohan, the blacksmith. There is no sign of Lysa.

An adventurer who can read Infernal or who who passes an Investigation (Intelligence) check DC 13 can decipher the story on the walls: A warlock, pledged in service to a powerful demon lord conquers his enemies and subjugates demons, but he is unable to produce an heir. Frustrated he tricks a lesser demon into bearing his child, promising freedom from her master, the demon lord he too serves in exchange. The rest of the wall seems damaged by a long ago collapse, and is unreadable. Upon disturbing the chamber, the **ghost** of the warlock will rise from the tomb and attack the adventurers.

Once the adventurers pick up the Demon's Heart, the hallow spell on the barrow will fall, the runes lining the walls darkening, and Elias will enter to confront them, shedding the form of the dwarven smith for his true demonic visage.

First, he thanks the adventurers for their unexpected aid, saying he could not enter the crypt or even so much as lift the orb from its resting place without them.

While fighting, Elias taunts the group, "What lies has she told you?" If they tell him Katherine said he lured them, he replies, "Why would I bring you here? You are interfering with my plans!"

A successful DC 13 Arcana (Intelligence) or Religion (Intelligence) check reveals that a cambion is a child born of a succubus and a human.



CONCLUSION

You hear the soft slow clapping of delicate hands. Katherine stands in the doorway of the chamber.

Once Elias has been dealt with, Katherine enters the barrow in her human guise to claim the Demon's Heart. She reveals she can use it to break her master's hold over her. If the characters have not already pieced together the story, she explains how she was forced to bear her son against her will, and how the warlock buried here was his father. According to her, the warlock died before he could fulfill his bargain, killed by Elias. His followers buried him here.

If the characters refuse to give her the Heart she begs and pleads with them. As a last resort, she confesses that Lysa, the innkeeper's daughter, is still alive, and they might be able to save her, if they act quickly and hand over the orb.

If they comply, Katherine informs them that Lysa is in the marsh by a ring of standing stones, a location they can easily find. They discover her bound hand and foot, but unharmed, in the mud between the mossy stones.

If the characters attempt to kill Katherine, she assumes her true demonic form as a **succubus** and fights back, attempting to turn them against one another with both words and magic. She tries to grab the orb and flee the barrow.

The characters can replace the artifact, restoring the hallow spell and trapping the succubus inside the barrow.

The characters may also choose to let Katherine go, with or without the Demon's Heart.

THE DEMON'S HEART

Wonderous Item, rare

This cold, smoothly polished black orb is crafted from obsidian, mined from the hardened magma of the nine hells. While holding the orb you can use your action cast the *command* (fiends only) spell.

REWARDS

- The eyes of the figure carved into the stone of the sarcophagus lid are black gems that glint like beetles in the torchlight. The can be pried loose as two *onyx gems*, each worth 150 gp.
- The village elder, Toland rewards the adventures with 100 gp, donated from the villagers.
- If Lysa is saved, Beatrice gives the characters a golden brooch in the shape of a racoon, a family heirloom worth 25 gp.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The purpose of this adventure is to paint a new perspective on the traditionally overtly sexualized succubus. I turned the succubus into a mother in order to develop her into a more unique fiendish creature. This one-shot is dedicated to my loving partner and talented game designer, Eugene Fasano, who helped inspire and edit this adventure. I also wouldn't have been able to stay determined during my writing process without the overwhelming support of my dear friends.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Masha Lepire is a Seattle-based composer, sound designer, and writer. Scandinavian folklore and her adventures in Polish castles and Norwegian forests inspire her creative projects. She currently creates content for the Ancient Greece-inspired tabletop setting *Arkadia*.





ILLUSTRATION BY DUNGEON SECRETS

LOST GODS

by *Natalie Wallace*

CREATURE: *Medusa* | **LEVEL(S):** 3-5

SYNOPSIS

The town of Medeira was once a thriving and bountiful place. Over the last six months, what once appeared to be alive, is now slowly withering away into nothing. Crops are failing. Disease plagues the townsfolk. Nearby water sources are drying up. And everything traces back to the goddess that the town worships, a creature that most adventurers will recognize as... Medusa. Only she can return the town to its former glory. Or perhaps she's destined to bring ruin. If only someone could get to her and find out. *Lost Gods* is intended for characters of 3rd to 5th levels.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventurers discover that they need to delve into the caverns of Medeira, get past the traps and creatures haunting it, in order to find the Medusa. She might be able to help the village. She might not. Any adventurer worth their salt is aware of what a Medusa really is, and thus may feel inclined to just outright kill her, and not listen to what she may have to say. But at the risk of demoralizing the village and setting them on a path of ruin by destroying the greater power they believe in, what should the group even do?

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure focuses primarily on the moral quandary of whether or not to interfere with a town's natural progression, as well as their beliefs. The townsfolk are devout believers in the power their revered goddess possesses, but adventurers recognize the "goddess" as being a dangerous creature, historically known as being evil in nature.

CHAPTER 1 – WHAT A QUIET VILLAGE

The village of Medeira is at least two days away from any major city, but can be found at the crossing point of two rivers — Rebus and Sedah. At the crux of both rivers, there is a cavern that leads underground. The village is built up around this cave, with around 100 small huts and various structures. On the side opposite of the rivers, Medeira is guarded by a 5' high stone wall, allowing for only one main entrance point through the stone wall. Players can make a perception check as they approach the wall with a DC 18. If successful, they notice that the stone seems to vaguely resemble humanoids. There are several main roads that guide villagers around town, but the focal point is the shrine situated in front of the cavern entrance.

As you happen upon this small village, you can barely make out more than the thatched roofs which peak overtop the 5 foot tall stone wall that surrounds the village. The entrance is a 10 foot wide gap within the wall, which is unmanned, resembling more the entrance to a maze than a village. The unassuming entryway bears nothing to indicate the location, save for a small wooden plaque on the right hand side, which in large block letters, says "MEDEIRA."

As the adventurers explore, here are the various things they can learn by speaking to the villagers:

- Everyone here reveres the goddess Medusa — it is said she is the one who created the village and brought to its people everything they needed to survive. No one has ever met her, but legend tells of her beauty and grace.
- The decline for the village began about six months ago. First the fish in the rivers slowly disappeared, and the river water became tainted and undrinkable. After that, crops withered due to the lack of useable water, which reduced all produce within the village, and all live stock began to die off as they couldn't maintain the livelihood. The people have barely survived by working hard to make the water drinkable, and maintain what supplies they could, often
- For the longest time, it was a prosperous village with a decent trade market, and solid partnerships with neighbouring towns. Since the village's decline, no one visits anymore.
- There's a cave at the conflux of the two rivers, which is where Medusa is said to live. The shrine, which stands in front of the cave, has a stone statue of a woman reaching to the sky, with about a dozen offerings at its feet, varying from food and flowers to gold and handmade goods.
- At least a dozen people have ventured into the cavern, as some felt it might be best to approach the goddess herself in order to find out how to appease her so that the village may survive. None have returned.
- If the issue isn't resolved within the next couple of months, the villagers need to pick up and move elsewhere in order to survive. They're opposed to this idea as they don't want to anger their goddess — they fear it would be bad luck to leave.

There isn't much in this town — there are a handful of merchants who can sell basic items, but otherwise this town is primarily used to exporting its goods for what it needs instead of selling in town. There is one vendor who sells healing potions and another who sells simple weapons (see prices in *PHB*). Otherwise, there is not much in the way of supplies in this town, especially since so much of the produce has dried up.

GOLDEN GOOSE INN & TAVERN

Eventually, the adventurers find the Golden Goose Inn & Tavern, a two storey building adorned with modest furnishings and portraits of the revered goddess. Once inside, there are 1d4 patrons, and a young half-orc woman behind the bar. Upon talking to her, she reveals herself to be Tarragon Singlearrow, the tavern owner. She treats the adventurers to a round of drinks, provided they sit and listen to her request. She pleads to the adventurers (with any additional information from above that the party did not glean from villagers already) to speak with the mayor about the town's plights. She describes the mayor as a female human in her late 60s, with greying hair and tired eyes, going by the name of Cassandra Renato. Tarragon isn't certain as to where they can find the mayor, but she'll reside in town somewhere.

MAYOR RENATO

The party needs to talk to more of the residents in order to find the mayor — she's taken to hiding in a small alcove set into the cavern where it meets the river. It's narrow enough that characters need to make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 10) to not fall into the river. When they find her, she's sitting on the ground, staring into the river, and does not acknowledge the party as they approach. She responds if they talk to her, but she won't move from her position. She reveals the following information over time (and depending on the questions the characters ask):

- She's been seeking out adventurers, even going so far as to hire people from outside the village, to head into the cavern to seek out their goddess Medusa and ask her to restore the village. No one's come back out, and the village has run out of resources to hire traveling parties with, but she fears that if something is not done soon, they have to either leave or die with the village.
- The cavern, known colloquially in Medeira as the "Cave of Wonders," is said to be set with traps and dangerous paths so only the strong can seek an audience with the goddess.
- She begs and pleads to have the party attempt the cave — she bribes them with food and lodging. At this point, she finally looks at the players, and she appears as though she's been crying. If the party declines, follows them until they agree, being stub-

born and persuasive. Cassandra offers favours from the village or what little coin they have in order to have them agree, although she is very reluctant to give up any money. If the party decides to persuade her for coin, she bargains up to 50 gp, but that is her limit.

DEVELOPMENT

After the party has agreed to help the village, they can have a long rest at the inn for the night, and in the morning they can proceed to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 — CAVE OF WONDERS

Tarragon happily guides the party to the cavern entrance in the morning, wishing them the best of luck on their journey. Some villagers also see them off, praising their good deeds and asking the party to send love to Medusa for them. Some try to send offerings along with the party — if the party consents, use the table below to determine what offerings are given.

D8 RESULT	OFFERING
1	A silvered shield
2	A small bag containing 10 gold pieces
3	A loaf of bread and bushel of apples
4	A handmade doll, resembling the statue
5	A dagger
6	A lengthy poem written about Medusa
7	A lute
8	A small bag containing 1d4 gems

Once seen off by the villagers, the party can head into the cave and face the dangers that await them.

INTO THE DEPTHS

The mouth of the water-worn cavern is wide but near impossible to see far into. The dirt road leading into the smooth stone opening has a flurry of footprints going in, but none leaving it. There is an eerie silence about the entrance — as if no one dares to enter.

1. CAVE ENTRANCE

Light still trickles through the entrance of this cavern, but it is soon lost once the party gets far enough in. Any character without darkvision will not be able to see. There are no sources of light.

2. OPEN CAVE

The main pathway opens up into a large, open space, littered with boulders — there are seemingly four pathways leading from it, outside of where the party entered. The party may make a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to look at the footprints throughout — on a success, they note that the left most pathways have more traffic. Nothing else is really to be found in this area.

3. ALCOVE OF STATUES

The right most path goes by an alcove, which, if inspected, reveals stone statues. Upon a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the characters discover that they appear to be villagers. If they linger, 1d6 **spectres** appear and start to attack the party. They follow until the party leaves the cavern altogether, but remain at the entrance to the cavern.

4. DESTROYED PASSAGEWAY

What appears to be another tunnel turns out to be caved in — there may have been another entrance or exit once, but it has long since been closed off. Adventurers may make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern the strange shapes blocking the pathway. On a successful check, they notice that upon closer inspection, the pathway has been walled up with stone-shaped bodies, as if they were attempting to escape.

5. ROUNDABOUT

This area goes around in a circle, and should the adventurers go the full way around, they notice 1d4 rats scurry by. The rats attempt to bite any adventurer that comes close.

6. OPEN PATHWAY

The open pathway splits into a T intersection, with no discernable indication of which is the correct path.

7. DEAD END

The pathway looks like it might have once continued on, but long since closed off by additional rubble. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check offers approximately 15 gp in loose coins scattered amongst the dirt.

8. SEMI COLLAPSED TUNNEL

The passage way ahead is almost entirely collapsed, as though someone tried to close it off entirely. Some of the stones have been moved aside, leaving a narrow pathway only 5' high for adventurers to pass through.

The tunnel may be made wide enough to fit the players with a successful DC 10 Strength check to move the stones out of the way. Alternatively they can do a DC 10 Dexterity check to see if they can slip through.

9. STONE GARDEN

This small area is filled with stone statues — all appearing to be villagers from the town. There are about a dozen, kept in pristine condition. If inspected too closely, 1d6 specters rise and attack, the angered souls of the deceased villagers.



10. GODDESS' LAIR

The cave opens up to a small clearing, adorned with stone statues that have been draped in fabric, as if trying to hide their petrified faces. A silver shield leans up against the wall, and as your eyes look at it, you see yourself staring into the red eyes of the goddess herself — the Medusa. Her snaked hair writhing, and clothed in grey fabrics. Her face looks forlorn and distressed, but quickly turns to anger as she notices you.

DEVELOPMENT

When the party finds the Medusa, proceed to *Chapter 3*.



THE CAVE OF WONDERS



MAP BY NATALIE WALLACE

CHAPTER 3 – HELL HATH NO FURY

Players who choose to approach the Medusa can do so, but she's already aware of their presence the moment they walked in. She refuses to look them in the eyes, or at her directly, but is willing to talk if they are amenable. She will attack if provoked or if the players try to leave her lair - if they're not here to help, they're no good to her at all.

THIS IS WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN FIND OUT BY TALKING TO HER:

- She is not a god, despite what the villagers believe. She was once a beautiful human woman, who was turned into a monster by a god who approached her and she turned them down. She was given this land to be “worshipped” as a fate of dramatic irony — she loathes it, and simply wants her freedom. She knows she'll accidentally kill the villagers if she tries to leave, another fate she wishes to not have haunt her.
- She has never had control over the land — the real reason why everything is failing is the land that they settled on was never meant for crops or livestock. The Gods who cursed her made it seem sustainable for 100 years, but that time is nearing to a close, and the land will no longer be viable.
- Every person that has been turned to stone in this cavern was an accident (whether or not players believe this is up to them).
- The city wall is actually made up of people she accidentally turned to stone — if characters did not notice this, she will point it out. She built it into a wall to serve as a reminder to others to keep out, but the townsfolk saw it as protection and took refuge within the walls.

At this point, the adventurers must make the ultimate decision — help Medusa find freedom or kill her.

DEVELOPMENT

The conclusion is played out depending on the decision made by the party. If they attack Medusa, proceed to C1. If the players offer to help Medusa, proceed to C2.

CONCLUSION

C1. IF THE PARTY KILLS MEDUSA...

If they outright kill Medusa, or let her petrify herself and then leave her, they will need to find a way to leave the village without the villagers seeing them. If they are seen, they will be bothered about their goddess endlessly, and will not believe the party if they try to lie about her well being.

As soon as the villagers find out their beloved goddess is dead, they will turn into a mob, half of them going after the party, the other half running into the ruins to try to save her (1d100 villagers total). Chaos ensues, and eventually the village burns to the ground. If the party escapes, they see the flames behind them as they run away, consuming the village. If they take too long trying to escape, they burn alongside the rest of the villagers.

Legends are later told about the town of Medeira, noting the efforts of the adventurers who failed to save it.

C2. IF THE PARTY HELPS MEDUSA...

Characters need to find a way to distract the villagers so that Medusa can be allowed to leave without being bothered. There are no alternative tunnels — only the main entrance. Players are encouraged to be creative in their deceptions with the villagers; if the adventurers attempt their escape efforts during the day, the DC is 20, and if they attempt it at night, then it is a DC15. They will need to continue to make checks through the village, depending on how fast they make their way out. The villagers, should they see Medusa, will get excited and swarm her. This may result in someone getting turned to stone, or they may try to convince her to stay (should the party elect to blindfold her).

If unsuccessful, Medusa will attempt to retreat back into the cavern, injuring 1d20 villagers on the way.

If successful, she thanks the adventurers, bestowing upon them a shield as a reward (see Rewards section). She disappears, never to be seen from again. If the party elects to return to the village to tell them what happened, most will be disgruntled that their goddess has abandoned them, but Cassandra will be ultimately grateful, and will produce the agreed upon reward, if any.

FATE OF MEDEIRA

Regardless of the outcome, the villagers will need to realize that it is the act of nature, not of the gods, that their land is dying. They will need to be convinced to leave — the mayor has the best chance of rallying everyone together. The DM can elect to play this out if the players are so inclined to return to the village (and if there is still a village standing), or they can decide the fate of the village themselves.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS:

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE	XP
Spectres	50 each
Rats	10 each
Killing Medusa	500
Saving Medusa	1,500

TREASURE REWARDS:

HERO'S SHIELD

Shield, uncommon

This silvered metal shield has a faint glow to it, and around the edge is inscribed the name “PERSEUS.” The front of it can be used as a reflective surface, and it provides a +1 to AC when equipped.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The idea behind this was to play into the Prime Directive from *Star Trek*, and presenting that as a moral quandary in a *D&D* environment. Also taking meta knowledge and using it against the players – while many know what a medusa is capable of, how often do you really get to talk to one?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Natalie Wallace is from Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and is a chaotic rogue who loves both GMing and playing various TTRPGs, but especially *D&D*. She can be found on Twitter @ChaoticRogue as well as on various streaming channels, and creates *D&D* 5e content for www.themagecollege.com.





ILLUSTRATION BY KAYLA CLINE

THE SECRET OF SHADOW GROVE

by Lynne M. Meyer

CREATURE: Hag | LEVEL: 4

SYNOPSIS

Anamdael is a small town remarkable only for its peacefulness. However, the town harbors a dark secret: Long ago, a resident entered into a pact with a Night Hag, whose services come at a price. Travelers who once gave little thought to Anamdael now hear rumors of a strange cult in its woods. Your party is hired to locate and return a missing person, last known to be traveling to Anamdael. Before you may enter “Mother’s” land, you face your first test. Your responses determine more than you know and set the stage for an eerie adventure. *The Secret of Shadow Grove* is designed for level 4 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party may be mercenaries having just completed a job in the growing city nearest Anamdael, Stagmore, where they attract the eye of a noble wishing to hire them, or they may answer a quest notice posted anonymously by this same noble; in either case, they are escorted by an aide to the noble’s audience chamber, where they begin their adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, a woman from Anamdael made a pact with a powerful healer she met in the woods, who helped her escape the abusive marriage in which she had unwillingly found herself. Over time, others in distress sought out this mysterious healer; under cover of darkness, she tended their wounds, and avenged the wrongs done to them. They came to call her The Mother. For generations, she’s remained a secret to be shared only as needed, lest she be discovered by those who would harm the vulnerable. Her silent watch has kept Anamdael a safe haven — to the growing frustration of a certain noble in the nearby city of Stagmore.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **LORD V'LINDER ODAMI:** (NE male human noble) Stagmore’s most ambitious noble. He doesn’t tolerate being refused. Long, blond hair accents his amber eyes and lean face.
- **BROGOL GROTSK:** (NE male veteran) Odami’s gruff hired hand.
- **OLD HAZEL:** (CG commoner) A Mother devotee, this eccentric peasant woman has lived for years on the outskirts of Anamdael and watches the increasing number of travelers from Stagmore with a careful eye.
- **LUNELI MIRTHSPIRE:** (NG modified acolyte) Innkeeper of The Copper Kettle. Long, silvering, double braided hair; a lived-in, radiant face. She became head of the Mother’s cult after escaping a bad marriage with Mother’s aid.
- **CONSTABLE HAL HARGRAVE:** (LG male veteran) Graying, chestnut hair pulled into a ponytail; a lengthy scar along his right cheek. A child who survived to adulthood thanks to Mother. He prevents troublesome inquiries when mysterious deaths caused by her occur.
- **HAWK HARGRAVE:** (NE male commoner) Adult son of the Constable, he shares his father’s features — but not disposition. He’s been kept unaware of Mother, though he has suspicions. Anamdael’s bowyer.
- **MILSEE MEADOWBROOK:** (NG female commoner) Head server at the inn and Mother devotee. An astute young redheaded woman, she knows more about Anamdael and its residents than most people realize.
- **THE MOTHER:** A **night hag**. Kind to those who respect her ways and followers. Her judgement is fierce against transgressors.
- **TRUX AND TRYX:** **Imps**; night hag minions.

CHAPTER 1 — THE GUARDIAN AT THE GATE

The party's hired for a job that takes them to Anamdael. But can they enter?

THE QUEST BEGINS

Large, heavy doors open and you're ushered into an audience chamber. A man of noble status gazes thoughtfully out his window. He seemingly takes no notice of your arrival, until the doors close behind you. His amber eyes scrutinize each of you. Finally he smiles. *"Welcome, friends. I have need of your services."*

V'linder Odami provides the following information:

- Rumors suggest there's a strange cult in the woods near Anamdael. Some say the area's haunted; it's beginning to affect travel to and from Stagmore.
- He sent Brogol Grotsk there to investigate. Brogol was due back seven days ago.
- He offers the party 50 gp each to find and return Brogol — 150 gp if alive — and provides a map.

AT THE RIVER

The party finds a strange figure at the bridge into town.

Aided by your map, the past day and half of travel have gone well. You've begun to wonder how anyone might consider these beautiful woods haunted. Ahead, you see the ancient stone bridge that leads into Anamdael, and hear the river flowing beneath it.

Two ravens sit in a tree by the river. As you approach, a third joins them. You see a figure near the base of the bridge. She appears to be an old peasant woman, washing clothes.

Old Hazel calls out to the party, begging for coin and food. If ignored, she approaches them.

Characters casting *detect evil* discern an evil presence if they are within 30 ft of the ravens; one is actually Tryx, a shapeshifted **imp**. A DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that one raven isn't what it seems.

- If the party is rude or aggressive to Old Hazel, or attacks the imp, a **swarm of poisonous snakes** erupt from the stream to attack the party, along with the two **ravens**. Old Hazel attacks the characters with her fists, yelling obscenities. The imp leaves to report all party actions to the night hag.
- If the players are kind to Old Hazel, she wishes them "Mother's" blessing.
- If the players are especially kind to Old Hazel, she wishes them Mother's blessing, and gives them a small wooden token from around her neck. The token's symbol appears similar to a strophalos.

DEVELOPMENT

The party finds their way to Anamdael's only inn, The Copper Kettle.

CHAPTER 2 — NIGHT TERRORS

The party finds Brogol, who has an unexpected request.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Laughter, conversation, and the aroma of good food beckon you forward. The modest inn is a beacon of warmth and joviality - until you walk you through the door and enter the Main Hall. Hearing the pause in conversation, the innkeeper looks up from her work. *"Greetings, travelers."* She smiles. Conversations resume.

This is Luneli Mirthspire. Standing by her is Constable Hal Hargrave. Milsee serves patrons. A character visibly displaying Old Hazel's token receives a +5 bonus to Charisma-based interactions with them.

After some time, a disheveled man stumbles down from a room above, and moves about the common rooms. Luneli and Hal respond to Brogol as though he's intoxicated; a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests they know he isn't.

Spotting the party, Brogol Grotsk pleads for help, saying “She’s going to kill me!” He offers the following information:

- Odami suspects there’s a witch in the woods; Brogol was sent to kill her.
- Brogol thought it was Old Hazel. Before he could strike, something invisible attacked him and told him to leave her alone. “My Mistress will find you,” it said.
- Then the nightmares started.
- The constable refuses to help.

He offers all his coin — 1,000 gp — to hire the party to save him. He begs the party to take guard in his room overnight.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he’s truthful; Tryx had taunted him, while Trux, polymorphed into rat form, inflicted a poisonous bite. If they take his offer, the party can take shifts guarding him outside his door, or in his small room in pairs; Brogol obtains a room for the party’s use between shifts.

Exhausted and terrified, he does not willingly leave town. If the party refuses Brogol and forces him to depart for Stagmore, the following encounter happens when they make camp in the woods outside Anamdael; Brogol then insists on going back to Anamdael, telling the party that Luneli has information.

HELLO DARKNESS

A few hours pass. You’re beginning to suspect that Brogol’s fears may be unfounded. Suddenly, he begins to thrash wildly in his sleep, visibly terrified of... something.

“Mother” — the night hag — is, as she has for the past 10 nights at the same hour, exacting justice on Brogol by way of nightmare haunting.

- **If any character begins to cast a spell that would interfere with her efforts, risk her safety, or prevent her escape, the night hag plane shifts to her lair on the Material Plane.**

As the haunting begins, if anyone in the party was unkind to Old Hazel, they are ambushed by the Night Hag’s minions: the **imp** Trux, two **swarms of rats**, and two **swarms of insects**.

- If the party was kind to Old Hazel, they avoid the attack by night hag’s minions — unless they attack the night hag.

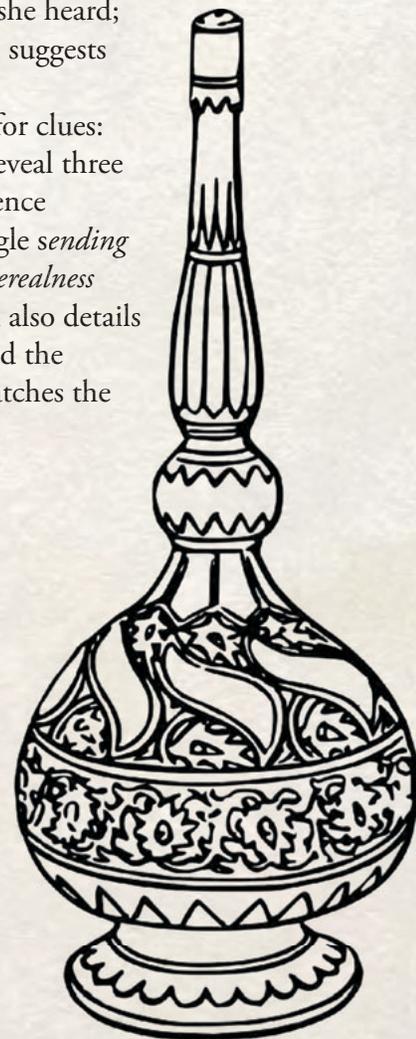
If combat begins and the party is visibly displaying the token given by Old Hazel, the night hag notes it and call off the minions before departing in a haste.

- If characters attempt travel from one room of the inn to the other (e.g., those not on watch trying to rush to Brogol’s room or trying to escape a swarm), Luneli — not in her quarters as expected, but instead peeking from the stairwell outside the guest rooms — attempts to hinder them by casting thaumaturgy to slam the doors shut.

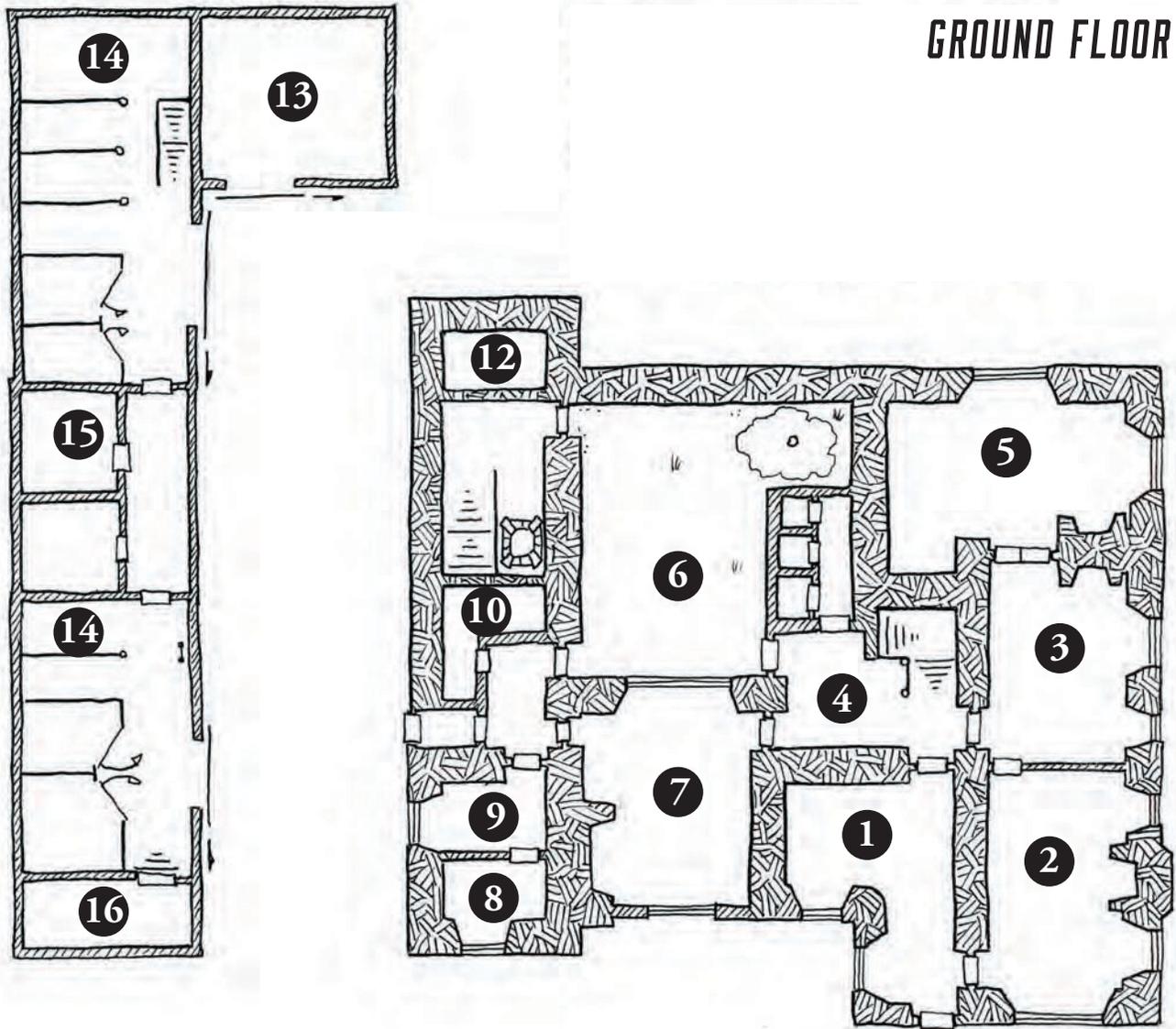
DEVELOPMENT

Immediately following the encounter, the party realizes on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check that Luneli is awake. A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check that night or the next day reveals that she’s rattled and concerned about the noise she heard; a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) suggests that she’s complicit.

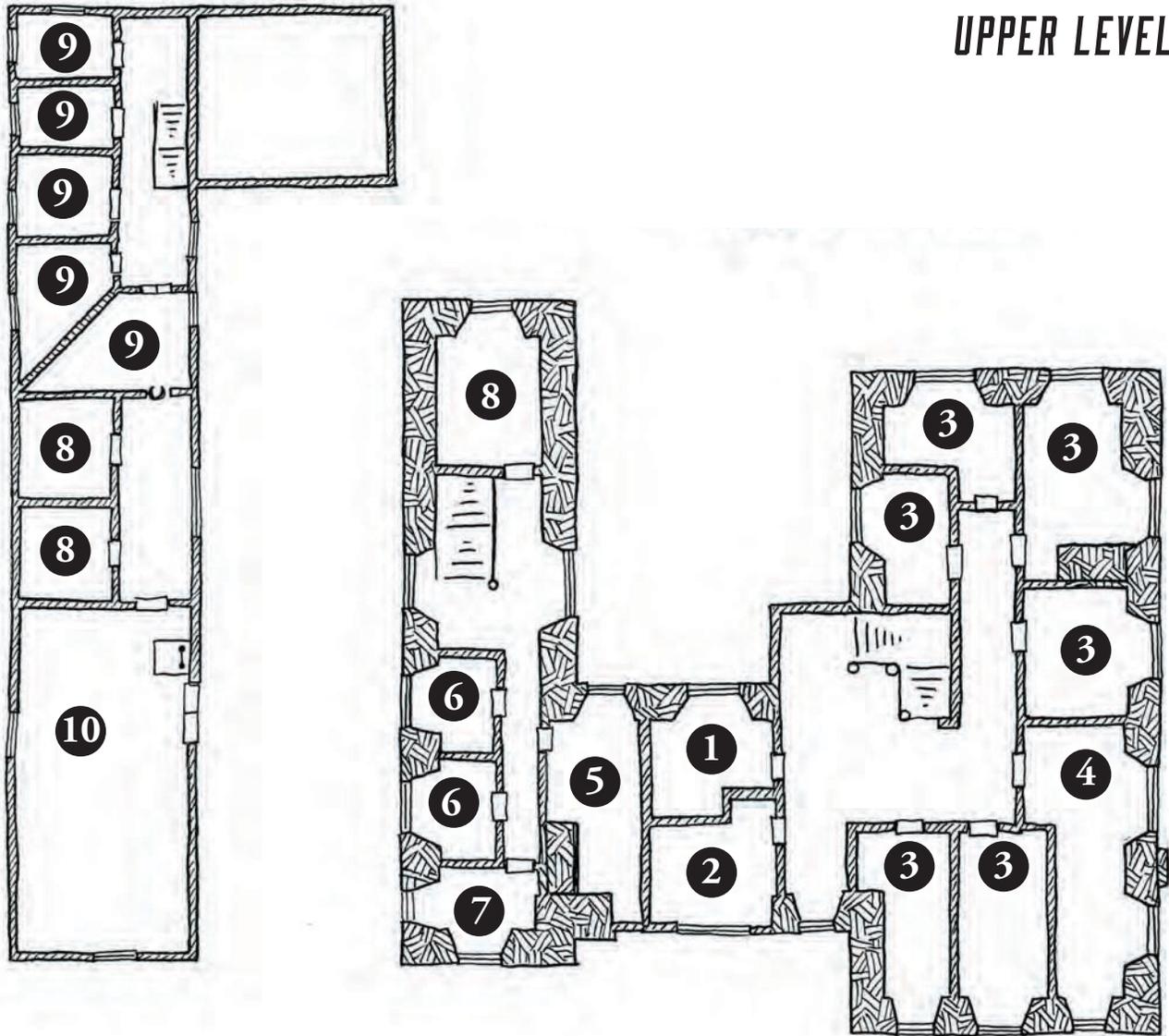
If the characters search for clues: Luneli’s private chambers reveal three items on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check: a single *sending stone* (DMG), one *oil of etherealness* (DMG), and a diary, which also details the history of Anamdael and the Mother. Its cover image matches the token from Old Hazel.



*THE COPPER KETTLE INN,
GROUND FLOOR*



*THE COPPER KETTLE INN,
UPPER LEVEL*



MAPS BY DYSON LOGOS

THE COPPER KETTLE INN, GROUND FLOOR

1. **ENTRY HALL**
2. **MAIN HALL**
3. **SITTING ROOM**
4. **HALL**
5. **DINING ROOM**
6. **YARD**
7. **KITCHEN**
8. **LAUNDRY**
9. **HOT WATER**
10. **LARDER**
11. **WELL**
12. **CISTERN**
13. **COACHES**
14. **HORSE STALLS**
15. **STORAGE**
16. **TACK ROOM**

- **ENTRY HALL.** The walls are lined with hooks, from which hang various coats. Immediately to the right, it opens to the Main Hall.
- **MAIN HALL.** The aroma of good food and the sounds of conversation typically draw people here first. A fireplace fills the room with warmth and light. Guests sit at rectangular tables with bench seating or square tables with chairs. The majority of diners take their meals here.
- **SITTING ROOM.** With fewer tables and more chairs, this room is more for conversation and drinking.
- **HALL.** From here, guests can access the yard or the sitting room, head upstairs to their rooms, or enter the privies.
- **DINING ROOM.** Reserved for large dinners and rich guests, this room is features the inn's longest table, decorated by two candelabras. A wrought-iron candle chandelier hangs from the ceiling.
- **YARD.** On nice days, this pretty space is an option for relaxing or taking meals. A large tree offers shade. Near it is a large rectangular table and two benches for seating.
- **KITCHEN.** This well-stocked kitchen has everything the inn needs to serve overnight guests and diners from in town.
- **LAUNDRY.** Tubs, lye, and ash are found here, along with a number of linens being laundered.

- **HOT WATER.** A great copper boiler with logs burning beneath it provides hot water for laundry and other needs.
- **LARDER.** The inn's well stocked pantry, from which Luneli and her cook produce delicious provincial dishes - hearty and comforting.
- **WELL.** The inn's source of potable water. A wooden bucket sits next to it.
- **CISTERN:** Pipes from the room collect rainwater into this storage tank.
- **COACHES:** If the characters travel by carriage, Luneli's staff keeps it here. No others are there currently.
- **HORSE STALLS:** Room and board for the PCs and visitors' horses. Straw covers the floor. Luneli's horse, Asteria, is in the stall closest to the Tack Room. The beautiful dapple gray mare is identified by a name plaque on the stall.
- **STORAGE:** A variety of items needed to run and maintain the kitchen, dining spaces, and coaching areas are here, including additional sets of dishes, oil for lamps, and tools.
- **TACK ROOM:** Characters find a saddle, reins, a bit, and other accessories for Luneli's horse.

THE COPPER KETTLE INN, UPPER FLOOR

1. **BROGOL'S ROOM**
2. **PCs ROOM**
3. **GUEST ROOMS**
4. **MORNING SITTING ROOM**
5. **LUNELI'S ROOM**
6. **STAFF ROOMS**
7. **MILSEE'S ROOM**
8. **UPPER STORAGE**
9. **SERVANT ROOMS**
10. **HAY & FEED**

- **BROGOL'S ROOM:** When you enter, it's clear that he has been here for a while, and in distress. The linens on his bed are askew, and his clothes and other belongings are carelessly scattered about the room. The head of the bed is along the wall opposite the door. There is a chest of drawers along the left wall, and a table and chair by the window to the right.

- **PCs ROOM:** Furnished like the other guest rooms, with the added convenience of being adjacent to Brogol.
- **GUEST ROOMS:** These modestly furnished chambers are currently unoccupied; no other out of town travelers are staying at the inn. In each room there is a bed, a table and chair, a chest of drawers, and a lamp.
- **MORNING SITTING ROOM:** A simple but comfortable room for guest relaxation, two large windows opposite the entrance let in the morning sun. There are four small square tables and eight chairs.
- **LUNELI'S ROOM:** Good quality furnishings and comfortable linens adorn this cozy room. Unlike other rooms, in a far corner, it includes a writing desk, ink, and pens. On a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a search reveals a single *sending stone* (DMG), one *oil of etherealness* (DMG), and a diary, which also details the history of Anamdael and the Mother. Its cover image matches the token from Old Hazel.
- **STAFF ROOMS:** Furnished much like the guest rooms, these are for the use of the Copper Kettle's senior staff. They contain general items indicating that they're currently in use by everyday people, including clothing, and pitchers of water and cups tables.
- **MILSEE'S ROOM:** Identical to the other staff rooms in most respects. On a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check, PCs can discover that, like Luneli, she keeps a diary. It contains observations of Anamdael's residents and travelers who come through town, and describes that she'd felt unsafe around Hawk until she came to know Mother.
- **UPPER STORAGE:** Here are all of the items necessary for maintenance of the sleeping spaces, including extra linens, and oil for lamps.
- **SERVANT ROOMS:** More simply furnished versions of the guest rooms, intended for use by inn staff.
- **HAY & FEED:** This space above the horse stalls is stocked with hay bales and sacks of feed.



CHAPTER 3 – MOTHER, MAY I?

The next morning, Brogol is near death. Does the party wait for “Mother” to return, or attempt to find her? At the inn, on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party overhears conversation between Luneli and Hargrave about a gathering taking place.

A man dressed in Craftsman’s clothing enters the inn, greets Luneli and Hargrave, and sits. A woman approaches his table with a drink, and smiles politely but insincerely. He curses under his breath, shaking his head, and takes a drink. He notices you, and grins curiously. “New in town, eh?” He studies you for a moment. “So, what do you think of Anamdael?” he chortles, casting his arms wide and laughing at a private joke. He leans in close and lowers his voice to a whisper, “If you’ve come to do something about that blasted cult, I can help you.”

The young woman, Milsee Meadowbrook, is unhappily serving Hawk Hargrave. He tells you the following:

- Strange things happen to those who don’t show Anamdael’s women proper respect. Someone protects them.
- Some of his customers have told him what they’ve seen or heard in the woods. Based on their stories, he thinks he’s figured out where to look: Shadow Grove.
- Few people like to go there; it’s long been considered haunted.

If the party leaves the inn, they instead meet Hawk when he encounters them on his return to his shop. Characters looking for a healer in Anamdael discover that it’s Luneli, who’s unable to restore Brogol.

Hawk can show the party the location of Shadow Grove on their map, or lead them to it. If not asked to accompany the party, Hawk trails behind at a distance unseen.

SHADOW GROVE

The party heads to Shadow Grove. At nightfall, they see it: Mother (the **night hag**), as her followers know her, is healing with her heartstone. Unseen, she carries the mate to Luneli’s Sending Stone. The followers — who include Old Hazel and Milsee — are speaking a password which must be uttered before entering this space.

On a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party hears them: “Mother, may I?”

Hawk, traveling on his own or with the party, remains behind the trees. If the party gets within 30 ft of a scarecrow without the password, that scarecrow targets them with terrifying glare; if the characters attempt to enter the space without permission being granted by Mother, or make any aggressive actions within the space, they trigger attacks by Luneli, the **scarecrows**, the three **mastiffs**, the **owl**, and a **swarm of ravens**.

TACTICS: The commoners flee. The scarecrows target the party, using *terrifying glare* and claw attacks. The mastiffs and owl move into range and attack, as a swarm of ravens descends from the trees and attacks the party. Luneli immediately protects Mother by targeting one character with *sacred flame*, and as a bonus action casts sanctuary on Mother; subsequent rounds she uses *bane* or *sacred flame*, and if necessary uses one of her torches as a club. Mother polymorphs into her terrifying night hag form; on her next action, she enters the Ethereal Plane, and flees.

DEVELOPMENT

Hawk sees the night hag’s transformation and realizes that Brogol was truthful. He emerges and tells the party that she’s surely going to torment Brogol again tonight. They must move quickly; if she succeeds, he dies. If the party wishes to save him, continue to next section.

If the party chooses to stop fighting, and let Brogol die, proceed to *Conclusion A*.

THE CONFRONTATION

Arriving at Brogol's room, the party finds Brogol alive, but asleep.

TACTICS: If Brogol remains asleep, the hag appears 1 minute after the party arrives. If the party awakens Brogol, she casts *detect magic* and, if it is safe, appears the moment he falls asleep. If the party attacks or begins casting a spell that risks her safety, the night hag plane shifts to her lair; if she succeeds, a few moments later, her imp Tryx arrives, invisible.

A devilish laugh fills the air. *"Greetings from my Mistress. You want to save your friend, she thinks."* The voice moves from place to place. *"He is wicked, and deserves to die. What would you give her in exchange for his life?"*

The party must bargain for Brogol's life, or let him die. Proceed to *Conclusion A*.

Mother is most interested in future favors, to be determined and claimed by her at a time of her choosing.

- If she cannot *plane shift* away, as a last resort she targets the party with her Weird Magic item (VGtM), a Charm of Mass Suggestion, instructing them to immediately leave her and the town in peace, and tell no one what they've learned here.
- If the Charm works, proceed to *Conclusion A*.
- If the night hag is defeated, proceed to *Conclusion B*.

CONCLUSION, PART A

The party returns to Stagmore, with Brogol either dead or alive — but Mother undefeated.

V'linder erupts into a rage. He picks up a chalice from his desk and throws it across the room, and stares out his window towards Anamdael. He mutters under his breath. *"You won't keep me out forever."* A moment passes as he seethes. He straightens suddenly, as if remembering that you're there. He looks to you with icy eyes. *"Tell me everything you know."*

On a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check, the party realizes that V'linder's only interest was Brogol's success, not whether he lived or died.

If the party admits to V'linder what they know about the night hag and the cult, read the following:

V'linder breaks into a broad smile. "Excellent. You've done well, my friends." He reaches into his desk, and pulls out a purse of coin, which he tosses to you. "As promised."

"There's more where there that came from, if you're interested. Together, we can rid Anamdael of that cult and bring progress to that backwater little town." He lets out a cunning laugh. A shiver runs down your spines.

If the party chooses to withhold information about the night hag and the cult, read the following:

He glares at you, scrutinizing each of you. *"I can't tell if you're lying, or incompetent. For your sake, you'd better be merely incompetent. It appears that I must find more capable adventurers to deal with this thorn in my side."* He reaches into his desk, pulls out a purse, and throws it to you. *"Take your coin. Tell anyone that I hired you and I will deny it."* He dismisses you with a wave of his hand, and you are escorted from his audience chamber.

CONCLUSION, PART B

The party returns to Stagmore victorious, telling V'linder Odami that the cult rumored to be in Anamdael has been defeated, and that it was behind Brogol's disappearance.

"Finally!" V'linder roars with unrestrained delight. *"You've done well, my friends."* He reaches into his desk, and pulls out a purse, which he tosses to you. "As promised."

"There's more where there that came from, if you're interested. Thanks to you, we can finally bring progress to that backwater little town." He lets out a cunning laugh. A shiver runs down your spines.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards, in addition to coin offered by NPCs:

- Sending Stones
- Oil of Etherealness
- Heartstone
- Soul Bag

CHARM OF MASS SUGGESTION

Ring, Single-use, Weird Magic

This silver ring looks like a coiled serpent with a honey-colored vial mounted in its jaws. To cast mass suggestion, the wearer breaks the vial, releasing a swirling, powdery compound.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

In this story, I explore the Night Hag as a symbol of feminine power, and how that power is perceived depending on where one stands in relationship to it. As such, I intentionally subvert two aspects of the Night Hag as portrayed in *Dungeons & Dragons* specifically. First, her fearsome aspect is merely a guise worn when necessary. Secondly, she Haunts not to corrupt her victims, but to torment the wicked until they expire.

For further reading, I recommend the resources below, which provided inspiration and information that helped me craft this tale.

- Brannen, Cyndi. 2018. "Hekate: Guardian of the Marginalized." Patheos.
- Brannen, Cyndi. 2018. "Should We Fear Hekate?" Patheos.
- Spaeth, Barbetta Stanley. 2014. "From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature." Essay. In *Daughters of Hecate: Women & Magic in the Ancient World*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bisexual interfaith and diversity educator and activist Lynne Meyer holds a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Master of Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute. Lynne is a chronic illness warrior, devotee of Hekate, and lover of cats and good coffee.

LUNELI MIRTHSPIRE

Medium humanoid, neutral good

Armor Class 10
Hit points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 1/4 (50 xp)

Spellcasting. Luneli is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *spare the dying*, *sacred flame*, *thaumaturgy*
1st level (3 slots): *bane*, *cure wounds*, *sanctuary*

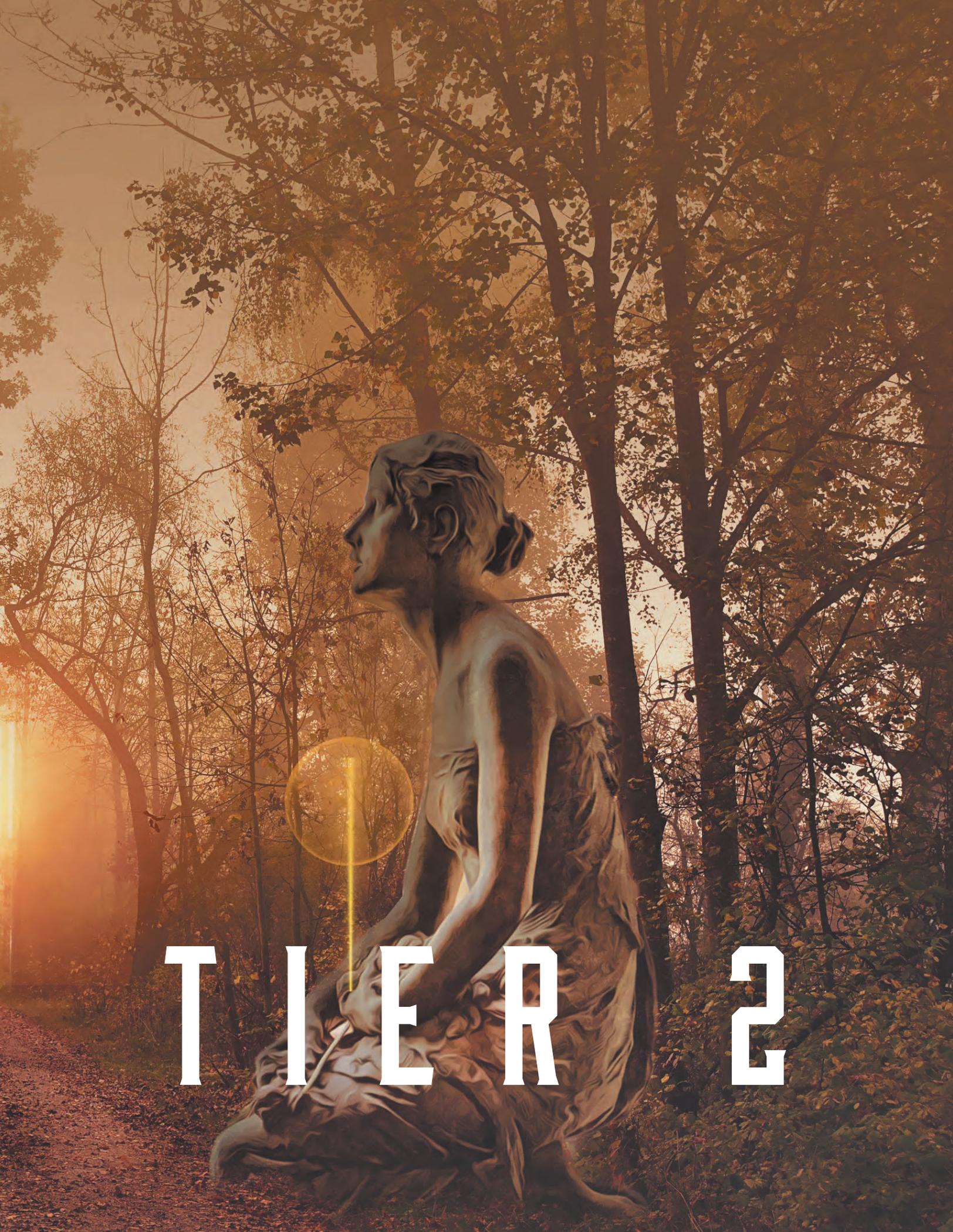
ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.



"JUDITH SLAYING HOLOFERNES"
BY ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI





TIER 2



SHADOWS AND TALONS

by Mellanie Black

CREATURE: *Harpies* | **LEVEL(S):** 5-6 | **CW:** *Abuse, gaslighting*

SYNOPSIS

In the ancient town of Cragwatch, the first harpy reveals that the legend of her origin is a malicious lie. The story goes that she pined for unrequited love, but in truth she was punished for refusing to submit to a god's will.

The harpy cannot reveal this truth alone. The party has been summoned to stop her tale from spreading. Will they discover the true story, or will they help to silence it? This adventure is designed for level 5 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party's growing renown leads the Cragwatch Council to contact them. The Council seeks aid in exchange for substantial reward.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Cragwatch's Council is heavily religious, but also influenced by the scholars and merchants of the town. It's relatively quiet and sees little of outsiders save those who come to see the temples and archives of religious relics.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **LYRA VELATHA, THE FIRST HARPY:** An elven bard cursed into this form when she angered Fenmarel Mestarine. She leads the colony accused of attacks by Cragwatch Council. She's proud, fair, and has not become too bitter.
- **ERMIN FARIN:** A half-elf High Priest of Fenmarel Mestarine and senior in the Cragwatch Council. Knows the truth about his god and the harpies and seeks to repress it by any means. Contacted the party as a way to appease the rest of the council and attempt to control a problem he sees as his and his gods' alone.
- **INA BORWAN:** A half-elf farmer. She owns and runs Fairlight Farm with her wife Veena. Hard-working and decent, with short blonde hair and a round stature.
- **TIMAREL FUNT:** A novice human monk assigned to assist the party. Nervous and biddable, but devoted to truth and honesty.



CHAPTER 1 – ARRIVAL AT CRAGWATCH

As you near the town of Cragwatch, you see several large, steep hills begin to dominate the landscape. At the foot of the hills, golden farmland stretches out for miles.

A weather vane teeters on a spire as a slow puff of chimney smoke tells you that this is a town already about its business.

You approach a watch post and a small, thin man in faded robes dashes out from beside the guard and interrupts before she can hail you aside.

This person is Timarel Funt. He's excited but very wary of the adventurers and their incongruous appearance.

WHAT TIMAREL KNOWS

On the walk into Cragwatch, Timarel happily divulges information:

- A few weeks ago, Ivona Detrix, a ranger devoted to Fenmarel Mestarine, met a harpy in the forest. An altercation occurred and she was injured.
- Ivona reported to High Priest Farin and the attacks started at Fairlight Farm a few days later.
- Harpies have previously been an occasional menace to those who stumble across them in the forest. There were never any serious injuries.
- Equipment and the farmer herself were attacked.
- He knows nothing of any ulterior motives.

DEVELOPMENTS

Timarel steers them towards The Blue Heart Inn, suggesting they rest in preparation for their meeting with Ermin Farin.

CHAPTER 2 – FINDING THE FACTS

The Blue Heart is a two-storey inn of grubby sandstone, with brightly-flowered vines creeping over its surface. A bard sits forlornly on the sill of the main window with her large bottle of wine and a flute. A dozen small tables litter the main floor.

Behind the bar a shaven-headed rosy-cheeked elf stacks ale barrels. "Ah! Timarel. Finally got somebody to come and help with our bird problem, eh?"

Timarel makes his excuses and leaves, promising to meet the party early the next morning.

The innkeeper is Bordie Nylan. She makes the party welcome but knows little except that:

- Fairlight Farm is where the trouble is. It's the big farmhouse between the hills and the edge of Cragwatch.
- She points to council-badged posters on the wall:

HARPY ATTACKS!

Harpies have breached Cragwatch for the first time in our history. No longer content to remain in the forest, these creatures defy the gods themselves.

DEFEND YOURSELF

The Harpies' unnatural voice will put even the strongest-willed into a stupor.
Keep your distance.
Keep covered and low.

DEVELOPMENTS

The next morning Timarel takes the party to meet High Priest Farin at the Temple of Fenmarel Mestarine.

CHAPTER 2.1 THE TEMPLE

The temple is an ornate wooden structure, carved with leaves, vines and forest creatures.

You're led to a small chamber to the side of a large hall of open fire pits where offerings of herbs and scrolls burn. Ermin Farin is a thin, white-skinned elf, showing signs of age. Four priests surround him, each wearing a different symbol of the Seldarine.

Ermin welcomes you formally but with genuine warmth: *"Refreshments? Timarel will fetch anything you may need."*

- Ermin and the other priests use the **priest** stat block.
- He rants about the harpies extensively. They are ungodly monsters, a blight on the earth, etc.
- "Our devoted friend" Ivona Detrix's woodland encounter started this. She escaped with news of planned attacks. The farm was hit a few days later.
- Ivona is currently training in secret in the event of more attacks.
- Ermin tells how Fenmarel Mestarine witnessed the creation of harpies. This is the official version and it is a lie. He presents it as truth:

Long ago a young woman in our nearby forest heard birdsong that moved her to tears. Following the sound, she met a handsome elf in a clearing, also paused to appreciate its beauty. This was Fenmarel Mestarine, our reclusive god.

His divine presence stole her heart, but he shortly vanished, as if he were never there. She called for him but he was nowhere to be found and she despaired. The elven sky goddess took pity on the woman and taught her a song as enchanting as birdsong.

When this failed to bring Fenmarel Mestarine back to her side the woman cursed the gods, turning her divine gift into an unholy curse, and her beauty into a caution against willful blasphemy.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals his zeal to be suspicious. DC 18 reveals that the rant appears learned by rote and that he is lying.

DEVELOPMENTS:

- It takes a DC 25 Charisma (Intimidation) check to make him willingly reveal the lie. The priests attack if it appears that the party is any threat to their secret or their reputation.
- Timarel stays out of any fight and is loyal to the truth, not his superiors. He helps the party.
- If the party goes along with High Priest Farin's tale, he insists on a visit to Fairlight Farm to see Ina Borwan and her wife, even if they have already been.



CHAPTER 3 — FAIRLIGHT FARM

If the party chooses to investigate here before they meet High Priest Farin, lower DC for Intelligence (Investigation) and Wisdom (Perception) checks at the farm by 3.

Fairlight Farm has one large, squat farmhouse with a number of small barns and outbuildings. Chickens and goats are scattered about the yard as you approach the front door.

Ina the farmer welcomes you, although she is clearly wary and shaken by events.

INA HAS TWO LARGE SCRATCHES DOWN THE LEFT SIDE OF HER FACE, EYEBROW TO JAW.

- Any Wisdom (Medicine) or similar check shows that it's unlikely they were made by a harpy's talon, but the bruising shows an attack of some force. DC 15 reveals the work of a straight, sharp blade.
- A DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Ermin Farin's guilt if he is present as this is revealed.
- If the party accuses Ermin of knowing more than he lets on, Ina's memory breaks and she recalls reporting the attack to Ermin and Ivona. Ivona immediately took out a dagger, slashed her eye, and persuaded Ermin to alter her memory.

INA'S ACCOUNT OF THE ATTACK:

- It was dark as she investigated a strange noise — a thud and a screech — in the nearest field. She had heard several of these for many nights.
- If any part of the truth is revealed, Ina recalls that boxes full of scrolls were left behind, but she never saw anything until the most recent attack.
- If not prompted, Ina's memories after the noise are foggy. She definitely recalls a sharp pain across her face and a female humanoid figure with wings, silhouetted against the moon and lamplight.
- Upon remembering, Ina begins looking for the boxes the harpies left behind.
- She seems to have genuine difficulty recalling more detail and only helps unearth the boxes if her memory is restored.

- The PC with highest passive perception notices disturbed dust as if items have been dragged/moved in haste as they move about the farm.
- A DC10 Intelligence (Investigation) check in the house or grounds reveals boxes of hidden papers.
- They are hundreds of neatly packed identical letters written in charcoal and rudimentary plant-based inks. They read:

The Harpies call to the people of Cragwatch. We are not your enemy. We are not the evil some would have you believe. Ask yourself why we were only rumours and bedtime stories until a ranger found herself with bruised pride. We welcome your questions. We welcome your presence. The curious should come to our clearing. Arm yourselves as you like. You will find no danger.

- A simple map shows a direct path to the Harpies' Clearing.
- The party is offered rations and some basic tools by Ina. She wants them well provisioned to make things right.

DEVELOPMENTS

- If confronted with evidence, Ermin Farin reluctantly confesses. If alone, he goes quietly to call four other priests and attacks the party. If the priests are with him they attack immediately.
- Two priests and Ermin Farin remain at range while the others engage in melee using *divine eminence* on all possible melee attacks.
- If defeated and left alive, he tells the truth about the harpies' creation. Priests of Fenmarel Mestarine in this area are told the truth upon initiation in order to control the lie.

CHAPTER 4 – THE HARPIES' CLEARING

As the party leaves Cragwatch and heads to the Harpies' Clearing, read this:

The ascent into the forest is harsh; pine needles scatter and make your footing uncertain. Large boulders line the ascent as the route slowly takes you off the well trodden pathways of rangers and into the wilds of the forest.

A young bard practiced in our forest, overheard by Fenmarel Mestarine. He admired her talent and voice, and demanded a song in his honour. She refused. Her work, and her pride, were more pressing. She did not appreciate demands.

In his rage Fenmarel Mestarine took her delicate musician's hands and made them into claws. He turned her voice into her curse, doomed to bring pain and confusion, not pleasure.

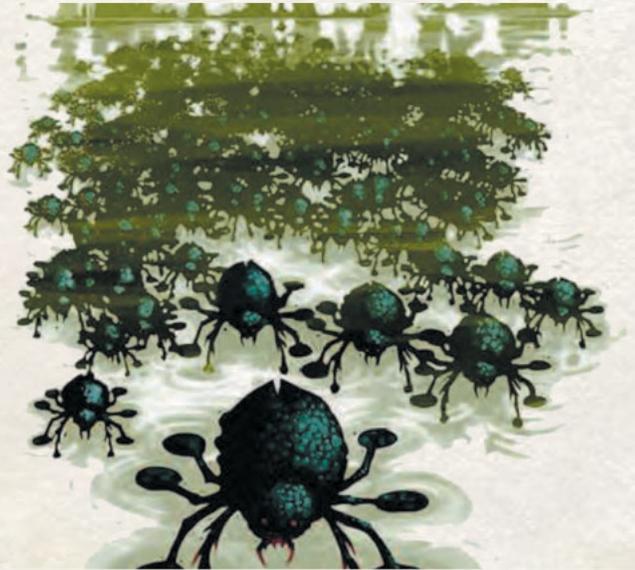
We lie. We protect our god's secrets. We couldn't have his envy of mortal talents be known. The tale is more sympathetic if her curse is a punishment, not torture. The result is the same — Harpies blight the world — what should we care for the method?

- If the party seems uncertain who to believe, High Priest Farin insists on taking four priests and confronting the harpies with the party.
- If Timarel is given evidence, he is horrified and will help the party get to the truth, even if it means sneaking around behind the priests' back.
- If Ina reads or hears the truth, she is confused, as if she does not understand the words, even as she hears or reads them. It becomes clear that her memories have been amended.
- *Remove curse* or similarly powerful spell/item restores them, as does many hours of talking/prompting.
- She remembers that her cuts were caused by Ivona Detrix in an attempt to frame the harpies.
- Ina and her wife Veena assist in any way they can.

The party encounters obstacles on their journey. If they follow the harpies' map, reduce the number. A route given by anybody else leads to more obstacles and a longer journey.

One or two obstacles should keep the adventure to around its advised length.

The walk takes around half a day by the harpies' route. As they near the clearing, they are on softer mossy earth, with tree roots cluttering the path underfoot. Until they reach the harpies they are on difficult terrain.



OBSTACLES

6 **giant spiders** descend from the trees

CHECK

DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to negate their surprise round

REWARD

DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check means the party can collect 2 vials of viable venom to be used as poison.

3 **faerie dragons** (violet) tug at any shiny objects the party hold

DC 14 Animal Handling (Wisdom) check should make the dragons cooperate in most circumstances. Advantage if food is offered.

An amicable encounter leads one of the dragons to leave a tiny gem worth 5gp with their favourite party member.

A huge pit trap takes up most of the path near the Harpies' Clearing. It's automatically avoided if they have the map.

DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to avoid it.

2d10 damage taken if they fall

MEETING THE HARPIES

When the party arrives at the Harpies' Clearing, read this:

The forest opens into a cavernous cylinder of rocks and branches. Harpy nests are hitched onto almost every surface on the cliff-face, and look more homey than you expected. An ancient tree stands in the centre. You see the sky through an opening hundreds of feet up. Bodies of forest beasts — a sabre-tooth tiger, an ettercap - are covered in talon scratches and strung up. A prominent platform balances about 100ft up.

A harpy descends. Five or six others watch you. As she lands you see she is tall and lithe, and her deep brown skin is covered with a criss-crossing of scars. Wings of tawny feathers tuck into her back and she retains some elven beauty. Her eyes are deep orange, surrounded by black sclera. Her teeth are sharp points and where you'd expect the deep brown of human lips, you see blueish black.

"I am Lyra Velatha," she says.

Your party's approach makes all the difference in how Lyra treats them. If they approach peaceably she graciously does likewise. She attacks at the first sign of aggression, but makes every attempt to tell her story first. She uses the **harpy** stat block.

- At the first opportunity Lyra tells the true version of her story from *Chapter 3*.
- As the first harpy, she is the leader of this colony. She was cursed in this forest, and wishes to remain as a reminder to Fenmarel Mestarine and his priests of the gods' pride and folly.
- She is glad that her words brought the truth to wider notice, whether people believe it or not.
- She is angry that her colony needs to speak out. They'd be happy to continue in isolation.
- Lyra reveals that Ivona believed widespread misconceptions about her kind, and she threatened to have their colony attacked and erased. This forced them to speak out.
- Observation of Ina showed that she was kind and intelligent — the perfect person to receive their letters. The damage to the farm was not caused by harpies.
- "If Cragwatch will not love us, at least have them respect all we do for the village."

- Dangerous beasts are routinely kept from the town by their hunt.

Deputy leaders of the clan, and two **swarms of ravens** help her in battle. Scale between 8-10 **harpies** (including Lyra Velatha) depending upon your party. If they are defeated, the harpy clan scatters, fearful of meeting the same fate.

CONCLUSION — CRAGWATCH'S LEGACY

CONCLUSION A

If the party helped the Council rid the town of Harpies as requested, read the following from Ermin Farrin and give two *Medallions of Seldarine* as reward.

"The gods in their wisdom perform miracles beyond our understanding. You have demonstrated exceptional faith and devotion. Your denial of doubts does you credit. Accept these Medallions of the Seldarine as thanks. They mark you as kindred to our cause."

The town sets up a Harpy Hunters Guild, trained by Ivona Detrix. Ina Borwan does not join.

The adventurers are free to enjoy their renown in Cragwatch or to move on as they like.

CONCLUSION B

If the Harpies come peacefully, they join at a feast organised by Ina Borwan in the town square. Ina has convinced many sheepish looking members of the Cragwatch Council — you notice a scholar and a merchant among their number — to celebrate this new chapter. Read the following from Lyra Velatha:

"I did not expect telling my story to bring unity and peace. I thank Ina Borwan, this brave band of adventurers, and everybody here. You looked beyond the truths you were told to seek the truth as it really is. This is a testament to the good still to be found in our world. May we continue to fight for it. Cheers!"

- All religious leaders are expunged from Cragwatch Council until it's established who among them has been involved in this deceit.
- If Lyra has not yet told her story, she will do so now.

CONCLUSION C:

If somehow the priests and the harpies are vanquished, the party deals instead with Ina Borwan.

"We're grateful to you for exposing this... strange happening. Whatever the gods intended, it's clear that we should be thankful that they don't intervene more often. We're hopeful we can create something great in Cragwatch."

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may receive the following rewards:

TREASURE:

At the conclusion of the adventure roll four times on Magic Item Table F in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and award:

TREASURE	VALUE
10 precious gems	50gp each (500gp total)

MEDALLION OF THE SELDARINE

Item, common

Use an action once a day to gain advantage when making Persuasion (Charisma), Performance (Charisma) or Intimidation (Charisma) checks while interacting with Clerics, Paladins or High Priests of any religious order of any good/neutral aligned elven deity.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Harpies are among many female NPCs and monsters in fantasy RPGs whose stories are moulded by misogynistic stereotypes that as a gaming community we're moving past. In the Harpy's case, it's the story of a woman motivated primarily by her need for romantic attention from a man. The Harpy is never named in the *Monster Manual*, but we know the name of the man who spurned her. This robs the Harpy of her agency, and her identity outside of her relationship to a man; two wrongs I seek to put right in this alternate telling.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mellanie Black lives in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England. She believes in *D&D* inclusivity and home-brews a special place in The Nine Hells for gatekeepers. She's a feminist, fantasy writer, *D&D* enthusiast, warlock, and aspiring elf. You can find her over on Twitter @MissBox.





ILLUSTRATION BY B-DESIGN

THE GUARDIAN OF THE FOREST

by *Awkward Bard*

CREATURE: *Medusa* | **LEVEL(S):** 5-8

CW: *Snakes, loss, kidnapping, patricide*

SYNOPSIS

Rare portals between the planes sometimes appear in the Caslan Woods. Recently though, these mythical woods have slowly moldered into swampland. As if that wasn't grim enough, bands of ogres and kobolds raid nearby settlement without fear of reprisal. Your adventuring party traverses the Caslan Woods, hoping to find the source to these strange occurrences. What lies at the heart of the swamp, however, is anything but expected. *The Guardian of the Forest* is an adventure for characters of 5th-8th level, but can be easily adjusted for different levels of play.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Sudden kobold attacks and the Caslan Woods' putrefaction are raising concerns among local figures. The party is hired by a local noble concerned for the magical woods or by a merchant worried the kobold attacks are bad for business.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Caslan Woods is a place where the veil between planes grows thin. Ophion, the giant snake responsible for mediating the portals and the travelers they bring, grows old and soon needs to leave their position. Aware of this, they adopted Petra, a medusa abandoned at the Forest Temple when a child, and trained her to assume their position. Ophion, however, also trained another. Murgyss, a proud black dragon seeking to grow powerful. Furious not be chosen as the next Guardian of the Forest, Murgyss plans his revenge. When the Ascendance ceremony arrived, the black dragon attacked, interrupting the delicate ritual. Certain he could take Ophion's power by force,

Murgyss allowed Petra to escape with her life. What he didn't know, however, is that, although the Ascendance ritual was interrupted, a portion of Ophion's power transferred to Petra. Now, Murgyss desperately searches for her, needing both Ophion's and Petra's power to become the new Guardian of the Forest.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

- **PETRA:** (LG female **medusa**; pronouns: she/her.) Ophion's adopted daughter and successor.
- **OPHION:** (NG non-binary **giant constrictor snake**; pronouns: they/them.) Watches over Caslan Woods and the portals that open there. Well respected by forest dwellers, who see them as a guardian of good.
- **MURGYSS, THE USURPER OF LIFE:** (LE male **young black dragon**; pronouns: he/him.) Studied under Ophion in hopes of gaining more power. He took the forest temple for himself and holds Ophion hostage.



CHAPTER 1 — A CALL FOR HELP

While investigating Caslan Woods, the party finds a collection of kobold-shaped statues. Between them, a trail of blood and several small footprints lead into a clearing.

Moving toward the center of Caslan Woods, the fresh breeze slowly turns humid and still. The ground beneath your feet becomes muddy and the foul smell of rot is too strong to ignore.

After a few days, you discover something unusual. A statue of a small lizard creature stands in the middle of a clearing. Realistically rendered, it perfectly captures the utter despair on the creature's face. Beyond it, you see more statues, all of similar lizard creatures.

With a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check, a character identifies this as a statue of a kobold, a small draconic creature rarely found alone. By succeeding on the check by five or more, the character also knows kobolds worship evil dragons and serve as their minions.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that this statue was not carved naturally.

A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 13 or more notices a few drops of blood on the ground near the statue. The trail of blood follows the array of statues, becoming larger and more frequent.



STICKS, STONES, AND KOBOLDS

The party stumbles upon Petra fighting against a group of **kobolds**. She appears grievously injured and unable to resist for much longer.

Following the trail of statues and drops of blood, you begin to hear the sounds of struggle in the distance. The clashing of steel, screams of frustration and agony, and teasing words in a strange fractured language draw you onward. Stepping into the clearing, you light upon a medusa surrounded by half a dozen kobolds.

Although the medusa appears strong and able, she bears several injuries, some in an advanced stage of healing. The lizard creatures, relying on size and number, overwhelm her.

Two kobolds come up behind her with a net and attempt to trap her. She locks eyes with them and her eyes glow a bright yellow. *"Let me go or I'll make sure you never again see the sunlight you so dread."* Her captor spits on her face and mocks her between laughter, *"There's nothing you can do to me that Murgys can't undo!"* The medusa's eyes burn even brighter, and the two kobold in front of her are frozen in place, now statues. The other kobolds avert their gaze.

"I will never surrender to the Usurper!" The medusa yells as she runs from the kobolds and into your party.

She looks up at you, her eyes a deep green. With a whisper, she pleads, *"Please, don't let them take me!"*

The kobolds attempt to capture Petra and take her to the Forest Temple. If the adventurers intervene the kobolds run away, dishing out threats as they run.

THE MEDUSA PETRA

After the kobolds run, Petra thanks the adventurers and asks for their help.

The medusa struggles to stay on her feet. She looks at you and forces a smile.

"Thank you for helping me. And don't worry, I won't turn you to stone... If you don't try to hurt me. My name is Petra. Listen, I know I'm in no position to ask, but I need your help again."

THIS IS WHAT PETRA TELLS THE PARTY:

- The strange occurrences are a result of the machinations of Murgyss, a black dragon. He interrupted a sacred ritual and is attempting to steal an ancient power for himself.
- Her parent, Ophion, is being held captive by Murgyss.
- Although he is only a young dragon, he is already very powerful.
- Murgyss is slowly transforming the forest into a swamp.
- The kobold attacks are Murgyss' hoard growing stronger and bolder.
- She and her parent share a mental connection. Ophion is under extreme pain, which Petra feels as well.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party agrees to help Petra, she promises them Murgyss' hoard as a payment. Although Petra is hurt, she goes along with the party. She avoids fighting, but uses her petrifying gaze on anyone who attacks her.

CHAPTER 2 — THE CORRUPTED TEMPLE

The party arrives at the Forest Temple, an ancient structure sinking into the swamp.

AREA 1: ENTRANCE

The entrance is moderately guarded, and a fight would alert anyone inside.

With Petra's guidance, you make your way to the Forest Temple. Although it hasn't been under his control long, Murgyss' taint overwhelms the sanctuary. The plants and trees once surrounding the structure wilt and wither, most having been swallowed by the surrounding bog.

You spot a trio of winged lizard creatures sitting around the stairs, teasing a large ogre. You prepare to face the guards, but Petra calls your attention, *"There is another entrance. It is probably locked, but we could avoid the guards."*

Three winged **kobolds** and an **ogre** guard the entrance to the temple. If the party alerts the guards, they call for help from the guards in Area 2.

TACTICS: In 1d4 rounds, the ogre sounds an alarm warning the guards in Area 2. They aren't exactly organized, choosing to attack whichever character annoys them the most. While fighting, the kobolds tease both the party members and the ogre.

HIDDEN ENTRANCE

Not far from the main entrance is a door concealed by dangling foliage. The door is locked and requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to open or a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check to break down. Entering this door takes the party to Area 2. Breaking down the door alerts the guards in Area 2.

AREA 2: ENTRANCE HALL

An ogre and five kobolds guard this area. The kobolds play around with a *driftglobe* (DMG, "Treasure") and mock the ogre, who in turn has trouble understanding the ridicule. If the ogre in Area 1 sounded the alarm, they will all have gone outside to join the fight, leaving the entrance hall empty, save for their forgotten *driftglobe*.

A group of kobolds play with a shiny ball of crystal. They toss it around and over the ogre's head while teasing and ridiculing it.

AREA 3: LARGE CORRIDOR

This immense passage leads from the entrance hall to the main chamber, where Murgyss awaits. Halfway there, a door branches off toward Area 4.

You enter a large corridor lined with colossal moss covered pillars. At the very end stands a door more grand than any other in the temple. The nearer you draw to the end of the corridor, the more a foul bog stench assails your senses.

Petra grows visibly tense and says, "*That's the main chamber, Murgyss should be in there.*"

Halfway down the corridor, you notice a strange door with several runes etched into it. Petra tells you this door leads to the basement, but the runes are fresh. Murgyss must have hidden something valuable down there.

A low and mournful cry echoes through the corridor.

THE WEeping OGRE

An ogre quietly weeps in the darkness behind a pillar. Her name is Fiona and she is not hostile toward the party unless provoked. She is crying because the kobolds from Area 2 took her *driftglobe*, which she refers to as "shiny."

If the party returns Fiona's *driftglobe* to her, she warns them about the crystals holding Ophion and how Murgyss can use them (see *Chapter 3*, "Slaying Murgyss"). She also helps them open the chamber door at the end of the corridor.

If they are nice to her, she will stay at the temple after Murgyss is defeated and will help rebuild it.

AREA 4: HOARD ROOM

The hoard room is warded by a rune puzzle. Petra hazards the door leads to the basement and the runes are a recent addition.

A large stone door with strange runes etched into it blocks your path. Above the door, the following words can be read:

THEM IEMS HOAEMR DEM BE LEMO
NEMGST OTHEEM USUEMRP EROF LIEM
FEME,
EMB OWYO EMUR HEEM AEMD A NEMDS
PEAEM KHIS NAEMME.
ONLY THEN CAN YOU ENTER.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the runes to be a code, rather than a language. By succeeding the check by five or more, a character notices a repeating pattern in the sentence.

PUZZLE: To solve the puzzle, remove all the "EM"s and regroup the proper syllables together. The message reads: "This hoard belongs to the usurper of life, bow your head and speak his name."

To open the door, a creature must bow its head and speak "Murgyss."

After Murgyss is vanquished, the magical ward sealing the door wears off, and the hoard can be freely accessed.

THE DRAGON'S HOARD

Although the room is filled with piles of coin and treasure, it is certainly not as impressive as you expected. Murgyss may be powerful, but he is still young. His hoard is nowhere near as grand as that of the ancient dragons of legend.

Murgyss' hoard consists of the following:

- 626 gp, 257 sp, and 154 cp
- A large well-made tapestry worth 250 gp
- *Oil of slipperiness* (DMG)
- *Quaal's feather token, tree* (DMG)
- *Potion of resistance* (DMG)
- *Ring of the ram* (DMG)
- 1d6 trinkets (PHB)

DEVELOPMENT

The party can attempt to enter Area 4, where the hoard awaits. Petra won't object to this, as there might be some treasure that could help defeat Murgyss. She does, however, urge them to worry about the money and other valuables later.

The door to the main chamber is heavy, and can only be opened by characters with a combined Strength score of 35. If the party helped Fiona, she gladly helps open the door.

CHAPTER 3 — SLAYING MURGYSS

The party finally meets the cruel black dragon, Murgyss.

MURGYSS, THE USURPER OF LIFE

The main chamber houses a swamp, awash in pools of foul water. Moss clings to every available surface and twisted trees reach out with skeletal limbs devoid of leaves. At the far end of the hall, Ophion floats, tethered by strings of black energy connecting their body to three crystals. Murgyss, three kobolds, and an ogre await the party.



When you open the chamber door, a humid, fetid air flows out. Were it not for the walls and ceiling above, the room would be indistinguishable from the swamp outside. Foul water covers the floor and twisted plants grow all around and over the walls. A giant snake floats gently at the far end of the room. It makes no sound or movements, and appears asleep. Three strings of black energy wrap around its body, and connect to different crystals scattered across the chamber.

Slow laughter builds and reverberates throughout the hall. A voice seems to come from nowhere and everywhere at once.

"Finally you have come. I was starting to grow bored. Oh, and you've done me the great service of bringing my dearest Petra home. Good, I need to consume her, also."

BATTLE

Murgyss is a **young black dragon**. While in the swamp, he has access to his lair actions. Three kobolds and an ogre join the fight if commanded by Murgyss. The pools of foul water are considered difficult terrain.

TACTICS: Murgyss begins combat hidden under the swamp water. He commands the kobolds and ogre to attack the party and watches, both for his entertainment and to determine the weak link of the party. On the second round of combat, Murgyss will emerge from the water and try to catch the weak link by surprise. He uses his breath weapon whenever he can hit two or more party members. His lair actions will be focused on hindering whichever member presents the biggest threat to him. When Murgyss is at half or less hit points, he will consume a crystal (see below). Murgyss will defend the crystals over attacking weak party members. He will not willingly look at Petra.

CONSUMING A CRYSTAL

Murgyss can use an action to corrupt one of the restraining crystals, transferring Ophion's life force to himself. One of the black threads connecting Ophion to the crystals turns red as the serpent screeches in pain. Murgyss regains 3d8+6 hp. Once used, a crystal is consumed, changing its color to a faded red, and cannot be used again in this way.

Destroying a crystal or dispelling it undoes the magic that binds Ophion's life force. A destroyed crystal cannot be consumed. A crystal has an AC of 13 and 25 HP.

If all of the crystals are consumed, Ophion dies.

DIFFICULTY ADJUSTMENTS:

- If the party is underleveled, remove the ogre.
- If the party is overleveled, add two kobolds.
- If the party is vastly overleveled, add one ogre and increase Murgyss' healing to 4d8+10.

DEVELOPMENT

- If Murgyss is defeated and Ophion is saved, proceed to *Conclusion A*.
- If Murgyss is defeated, but all the three crystals were consumed, proceed to *Conclusion B*.
- As Murgyss is defeated, all of his servants drop their things and flee.

CONCLUSION

With Murgyss, the Usurper of Life defeated, the Caslan Woods begin to heal.

CONCLUSION A

Ophion is saved and the party is welcomed to stay for the Ritual of Ascendance. If they stay for the ritual, Petra uses her new powers to grant each of them a charm (see Petra's charms table in Rewards).

After a difficult battle, you defeat Murgyss, the Usurper of Life, and save Ophion from his grasp. Petra runs to her parent. The guardian is weakened, but will survive.

Petra, overflowing with joy and relief, turns to you. "No words can express my gratitude to you! Please, feel free to stay for as long as you need."

She and Ophion exchange a look, and Petra smiles, nodding. The Guardian of the Forest turns to face you. Their voice is weak but soothing, almost a whisper.

"Thank you for aiding my daughter, we are in eternal debt to you. Soon we must complete Petra's ascendance, it is a ceremony few mortals have ever witnessed and we would be honored if you would participate."

Slowly, the fog begins to dissipate. It will take some time, but this land will heal.

The ritual of Ascendance is completed without further interruption. Ophion ages visibly after passing on their power. They shed their skin and emerge a small and fragile snake, but are not saddened by this. They are glad not only to be alive, but to witness their daughter rise up and take her place as Guardian of the Forest. And although Petra's form doesn't visibly change, she emanates a powerful and inspiring energy.



CONCLUSION B

The party is not able to save Ophion's life in the battle against Murgyss. Petra steps up and takes her role as Guardian of the Forest as was intended.

Murgyss is defeated, but none of you are in a celebratory mood. Petra approaches the body of her beloved parent and tears flow down her face as she says her goodbye. An orb of a gentle blue light leaves Ophion's body and lingers in front of Petra. You hear their whispered and ethereal voice echoing through the room.

"Don't cry for me, my child. I lived a good and long life, and I had you beside me. Nothing could have brought me greater joy... It pains me to leave you so unprepared to deal with your task, but you are more powerful than you imagine. Don't ever forget that..."

The small orb vanishes. Petra lies near Ophion's body for a time, her eyes filled with tears. After a while, she directs her words toward you.

"These woods are safe now, thanks to your help. Feel free to stay for as long as you need, and you can help yourself to Mur... to the treasure hoard, as promised. I wish I could offer further hospitality, but I'm afraid this is all I can do for now."

Although her words are polite, you don't feel welcomed. You should leave as soon you your wounds are healed.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The name Medusa, in the original Greek, means *guardian* or *protectress*. This mythological figure, however, is often portrayed as either an overtly sexualized femme-fatale, or a grotesque monster, both existing to threaten or lead men astray. Neither of those depictions possess an ounce of humanity or depth, which is why I chose to show the medusa as a fighter, a guardian of what is important to her, as her name suggests, rather than a monster or villain that needs to be slain. I am very grateful to my friends, Vin, Isis, and Gabi, who were very patient with me throughout this process, and never hesitated to lend me a helping hand.

REWARDS

Characters earn the contents of the Dragon's Hoard

PETRA'S CHARMS

Choose one for each player or roll from this table:

1d6 CHARM

1 Charm of Woodland Beings

This charm allows you to cast the conjure woodland beings (4th-level version) spell. Once used, the charm vanishes.

2 Charm of Plant Growth

This charm has 3 charges. While holding it, you can use an action and expend 1 charge to cast the plant growth spell. Once all charges have been expended, the charm vanishes.

3 Charm of Protection

One cloak in your possession becomes a cloak of protection for the next 9 days. The charm then vanishes, and the cloak returns to normal.

4 Charm of Invulnerability

This charm allows you to give yourself the benefit of a potion of invulnerability as an action. Once you do so, the charm vanishes.

5 Charm of Water Walking

This charm grants you the benefits of a ring of water walking. These benefits last for 10 days, after which the charm vanishes.

6 Charm of the Nature Caller

This charm has 6 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend some of its charges to cast one of the following spells: commune with nature (4 charges) or locate animals or plants (2 charges). Once all charges have been expended, the charm vanishes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Awkward Bard is a non-binary, bisexual content creator who loves spending their days playing *D&D*, re-reading their favorite novels, and creating stories that may or may not one day leave their head.



A FAMILY REUNION

by Jessica Marcrum

CREATURE: *Melusine* | LEVEL: 7

SYNOPSIS

Monster hunting is a noble profession for only the bravest adventurers. But when a monster queen hires the party to reunite her family and restore her honor, the traditional methods of death and dismemberment are no longer on the table. Melusine is missing her children and the party must recover them all alive. This is an adventure for Tier 2 characters and optimized for a party of 4-5 level 7 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

They may be mercenaries, monster hunters, or knights errant, hired for their efficiency and their reputation of never leaving a job undone. The adventure begins when they are hired for a “retrieval job.”

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Melusine was once married to a powerful king with whom she had several children, all brilliant but physically monstrous. Her agreement to marriage entailed that she would be granted Saturdays entirely to herself. After multiple monstrous children, her husband spied on her one Saturday and saw her bathing. Shockingly, the lower half of her body had been replaced with either the body of a fish, a snake, or two fish-tails, depending on who was telling the legend. Later at court, he embarrassed her by alluding to her true form. Enraged, she flew into the air and was never seen again. Following her disappearance, her children were each hunted down for sport or died under mysterious circumstances. In this telling, Melusine has foreseen these tragedies and wishes to protect her brood.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **MELUSINE:** Yuan-ti malison type 3, former queen, and ruler of the Serpent Palace
- **GUILLAUME:** Cambion, a skillful politician, and the next in line to rule
- **GENERAL JEHAN:** Minotaur, his country’s most talented general
- **COLLETTE:** Lamia, a very promising scholar
- **ROBERT:** Jackalwere, a deadly assassin
- **YSABEL:** Harpy, a singer of great renown



CHAPTER 1 — AN UNUSUAL ASSIGNMENT

The party arrives at a jungle temple decorated with snake motifs. A servant (likely a **yuan-ti pureblood**, but could also be any creature transfigured to appear human) asks them to leave all weapons, magical items, and components in a locked room near the entrance, out of respect for the queen. Melusine sits on a cobra-shaped throne before them. She informs them that since leaving her kingdom, she has had a vision foretelling the death of her children. Fearful for their safety, she charges the party with bringing her five adult children to her and offers great reward in return. She warns that if any of her children are killed, they will face her and her yuan-ti guards. She directs the party to begin with her eldest son, Guillaume, who should still be serving in his father's court, and gives them official documentation as royal ambassadors.

If asked, Melusine knows the careers of her children, but not their locations.

POLITICAL INTRIGUE

Melusine's palace is several days' journey from her ex-husband's court. (Sidequests may ensue at DM's discretion.)

Upon arrival at court, the party see Guillaume, a well-dressed cambion, giving a speech before an enraptured crowd. Adventurers must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw to avoid being charmed, and a DC 18 Charisma check to interrupt him. If they interrupt, Guillaume is angry and less likely to listen. If they wait until his speech is over (and it will be long), he hears them out.

Guillaume is eager to see his mother again, but does not want to leave when he is so close to achieving his political goals. With a successful DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion OR Intimidation) check, he can be made to follow the party back to Melusine. Otherwise, he insists that they immediately present themselves as ambassadors and speak before the court on his behalf, asking that they claim that, where the party is from, princes are given supreme power without being susceptible to the whims of a parliament.

Whether the party speak before court or not, Guillaume suggests that he see his sister Ysabel at the opera house while they wait for tomorrow's vote.

For a more open world campaign, Guillaume can give them directions to Jehan as well. In this case,

Robert ambushes them after they connect with Jehan and takes them to Ysabel if he defeats them.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Ysabel can be found in her dressing room at the opera house. Adventurers must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma check to bypass security or bribe the guard with at least 20 sp. Ysabel states that she yearns to see her mother, but cannot leave before tonight's performance. She also feels neglected since her sister Collette has never heard her sing, and asks the party to convince Collette to attend tonight's performance. With a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion OR Intimidation) check, she can be convinced to abandon the performance in favor of her understudy. Otherwise, the party is off to the college.

THE LEARNED LAMIA

Collette has no interest in seeing her mother, nor in attending her sister's concert. She is deeply focused on her studies and feels hurt at being abandoned by her mother. She also blames her mother for her and her siblings' "deformities." She is researching a method of transitioning to human shape permanently while maintaining their unique abilities. Collette asks the party to be her research assistants. If they refuse, she casts *suggestion* and/or *geas* on them. If they accept, or if they are bewitched, Collette proceeds to practice casting *polymorph* on them, interspersed with *remove curse*.

- If the party chose to be research assistants voluntarily, Collette thanks them for being good sports and comes to the opera with them.
- If the party had to be magically convinced to assist Collette, she refuses to attend the opera, but agrees to head to Melusine's palace when it is convenient for her.

Collette mentions that she has concerns about her brother Jehan and hopes he is safe.

DEVELOPMENT

The party returns to the opera house for the evening's show, but can't shake the feeling that they are being watched. A thin jackal slinks just out of sight and into dark corners.

CHAPTER 2 – UNEXPECTED COMPLICATIONS

The party attends Ysabel's opera. They must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw to keep from being utterly convinced that abandoning monster hunting and devoting their life to Ysabel is the only way to live. The crowd begins to rush the stage, cheering, as Ysabel flies and sings above them. If Collette is with the party, she finds this hilarious.

After the show, Ysabel agrees to visit Melusine the following morning. If Collette is with the party, they travel together. They suggests the adventurers seek out Jehan as soon as possible.

AMBUSH

As the party is leaving, they are approached by an incredibly thin beggar. Regardless of how they respond, he reveals himself to be Robert, a **jackalwere**. He will accuse the party of stalking his family and attempt to fight them. The party must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation OR Persuasion) check to convince him. Otherwise, Robert attacks.

TACTICS: Robert will primarily use sleep gaze in an attempt to kidnap the party and bring them to Jehan.

- If the party reduces Robert to 4 hp or fewer, he can be subdued. If they have the equipment, the party can bind Robert (**note:** he is a shapeshifter and must be tied carefully) and bring him with them, or they can convince him that they have been hired by Melusine. This time, he will listen and take directions to Melusine's palace.
- If the party kills Robert, they can continue on their journey, but get *Conclusion A* no matter how the rest of the adventure plays out.
- If Robert defeats the party, continue to "The Training Grounds."

RETURN TO COURT

The following morning, if the party was not defeated by Robert, they may return to court. Guillaume's resolution passes overwhelmingly, and he is happy to take a brief visit to see his mother.

Upon leaving, party members with passive Perception 15+ will overhear confusion, as the nobility is released from Guillaume's spell. Some may make threats against the "devil prince," but do not take action unless threatened by the party.

TACTICS: If threatened by the party, court contains 20 **nobles**, about 10 of which fight the group. Guillaume fights on the party's side.

DEVELOPMENT

With all but General Jehan accounted for, it is time to take the few days' journey to the battlegrounds.

CHAPTER 3 – UNGENTLEMANLY OFFICERS

After a few days' journey, the party arrives at a training field with several tents, one notably larger than the others.

COMBATANTS

- Nobles – NE human **nobles**
- Personal Guards – TN **guards**
- Soldiers – TN human **veterans**

THE TRAINING GROUNDS

Party members with passive Perception 12+ overhears grumbling about "the big ox." Those with passive Perception 15+ hear two nobles plotting the death of "the monster prince."

- If the party is being transported by Robert, this still applies. Robert also hears the plotting.
- Inside the largest tent is General Jehan, a minotaur in full uniform who is studying battle plans.
- If Robert defeated them earlier, the party awakens as they are unceremoniously dumped out of a sack in front of Jehan. Adventurers must succeed on a DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) check, show the court invitation, or role play very well to convince Jehan that they have been hired by Melusine. Jehan convinces Robert to back off.
- Jehan expresses joy that his mother hasn't vanished for good, but states that he cannot leave now. War with a rival kingdom is brewing and he is concerned that some of his soldiers do not appear to trust him as they once did. He regrets that his appearance seems to matter much more than it used to.
- Paladins and others with the knight or soldier background can help Jehan make battle plans and put his mind regarding the coming war at peace.
- Adventurers who overheard the plot against Jehan may wish to inform him about the threat to his

life. If Robert is there, he informs him and begin assassination plans.

MUTINY AVERTED

If the party has warned Jehan about the mutiny, he makes preparations and has two personal **guards** and one trusted **veteran** join him that night. If he has not been warned by the adventurers or Robert, Jehan and the adventurers are ambushed by his racist troops looking for new leadership.

The revolt consists of three nobles, each with two personal guards, and three soldiers.

SCALING: For higher level parties, add one additional **veteran** per **noble**. For lower level parties, reduce the hp of the soldiers to 44.

TACTICS: Nobles attack last, aiming to mitigate damage to themselves. They see the veterans as the most expendable. Enemy guards aim to protect the nobles first and engage Jehan second. They only attack adventurers or Robert if engaged first. Enemy soldiers concentrate on Jehan unless physically stopped by adventurers.

- Jehan's veteran acts as a bodyguard, while his two guards defend his tent. Jehan fights like a typical **minotaur**. Robert, if there, fights as a **jackalwere**, utilizing *sleep gaze*. He turns into a jackal and slink away before dying if he takes too much damage.
- If Jehan dies, the nobles offer the party 250 gp to look the other way. If they accept (and Robert is alive), he attacks them as they leave. This time, it is a fight to the death. Go to *Conclusion A*.
- If Jehan and the nobles all die, the fighting stops and the guards ask the adventurers to be merciful, one mercenary to another.
- If the party defeats the nobles and stops the mutiny, Jehan is thankful to the party for fighting on his side (and possibly warning him of the attack). If his veteran survives, he asks them to take charge while he accompanies the party on their journey to Melusine. If Jehan's veteran died, he calls in a major to take over command temporarily. Go to *Conclusion B*.

Note: If Jehan is met earlier in the game, he may go straight to Melusine or offer to accompany the party throughout the journey to “protect” them, especially if they are lacking a barbarian, fighter, or paladin. At this point, he also convinces Robert to go to Melusine, if he is there.

DEVELOPMENT

With Melusine's children accounted for, whether living or dead, it is time to return to the Serpent Queen for an accounting.



CONCLUSION A – MELUSINE'S WRATH

POTENTIAL COMBATANTS

- Melusine's throne: **giant constrictor snake**
- **Giant poisonous snake**
- **Swarm of poisonous snakes**
- Melusine's guards: LN **yuan-ti pureblood**
- Melusine: LN **yuan-ti malison type 3**

Melusine asks why the party has returned to her with only some of her children and questions their competence. She accuses them of being monster hunters through and through, more eager to kill than to do a proper job. She stands before the adventures and her snake throne reveals itself to be a **giant constrictor snake**. She summons 2 to 4 **giant poisonous snakes** at the party's sides, and 2 to 4 **swarms of poisonous snakes** behind them, at DM's discretion based on party level.

- **DIFFICULTY SCALING:** For stronger parties, 2 to 6 of Melusine's guards (**yuan-ti pureblood**) also fight.
- **OPTION FOR SCALING:** Melusine may summon the higher number of snakes as punishment for adventurers who lost several of her children, regardless of party size and composition. In this option, her guards always join.

If the party spoke before court on Guillaume's behalf, let Collette experiment on them, or attended Ysabel's opera, the children will speak out on behalf of the adventurers. If either Jehan or Robert are alive, they lend their voices also. If Jehan was warned about the mutiny, but still slain, Robert also speaks on the party's behalf, assuming he wasn't killed.

If more than half of her children advocate for the party, Melusine does not join in the fight herself. She agrees that the adventurers may not be all bad but must prove their worthiness to live in order to make up for their incompetence. If two or fewer children speak up for the party, Melusine joins in the fight herself.

If the adventurers defeat the snakes and Melusine did not fight, she gives them 500 gp for each child returned to her.

If Melusine fights the adventurers and is slain, they may loot the rod of rulership from her body. Her living children do not attack adventurers unless pro-

voked, but tell the party that they are no longer welcome in their home kingdom nor in Melusine's palace. If alive, Ysabel sings a mourning song as her siblings escort the party out.

CONCLUSION B – HAPPY REUNION

Melusine is overjoyed to see all of her children alive. She throws a massive feast to celebrate, with Ysabel providing music. If adventurers allowed Collette to practice on them, she demonstrates what she has learned on Jehan, to the family's amusement.

- Melusine gives the party 500 gp for each child returned to her as well as the *staff of the python*.
- If the party spoke before the court, Guillaume gives them his *eyes of charming*.
- If the party allowed Collette to practice on them, she winks and give them a *mantle of spell resistance*.
- If the party attended the opera, Ysabel gives them *pipes of haunting* and say that she hopes they can play together in the future.
- Robert gives the adventurers a *robe of useful items*, saying that an assassin can never be too prepared.
- If the party warned Jehan, he gives them a ring of the minotaur (see: *Ring of the Ram*) and ask them to think fondly of him.

Characters are informed that they are always welcome both at Melusine's palace and at the children's court, which Guillaume and Jehan are shortly going to control. (If desired for a longer campaign, they can refer adventurers to other quests or recruit them for the upcoming war).

REWARDS

POTENTIAL XP REWARDS:

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards. (DMs may also choose to award listed XP for reuniting the children.)

CREATURES	XP
Guillaume (cambion)	1800
Ysabel (harpy)	200
Collette (lamia)	1,100
Robert (jackalwere)	100
Jehan (minotaur)	700
Melusine (yuan-ti malison type 3)	700
Guards	25 each
Nobles	25 each
Soldiers (veterans)	700 each
Swarm of poisonous snakes	450 each
Giant constrictor snake	450
Giant poisonous snake	50 each
Melusine's guards (yuan-ti pureblood)	200 each

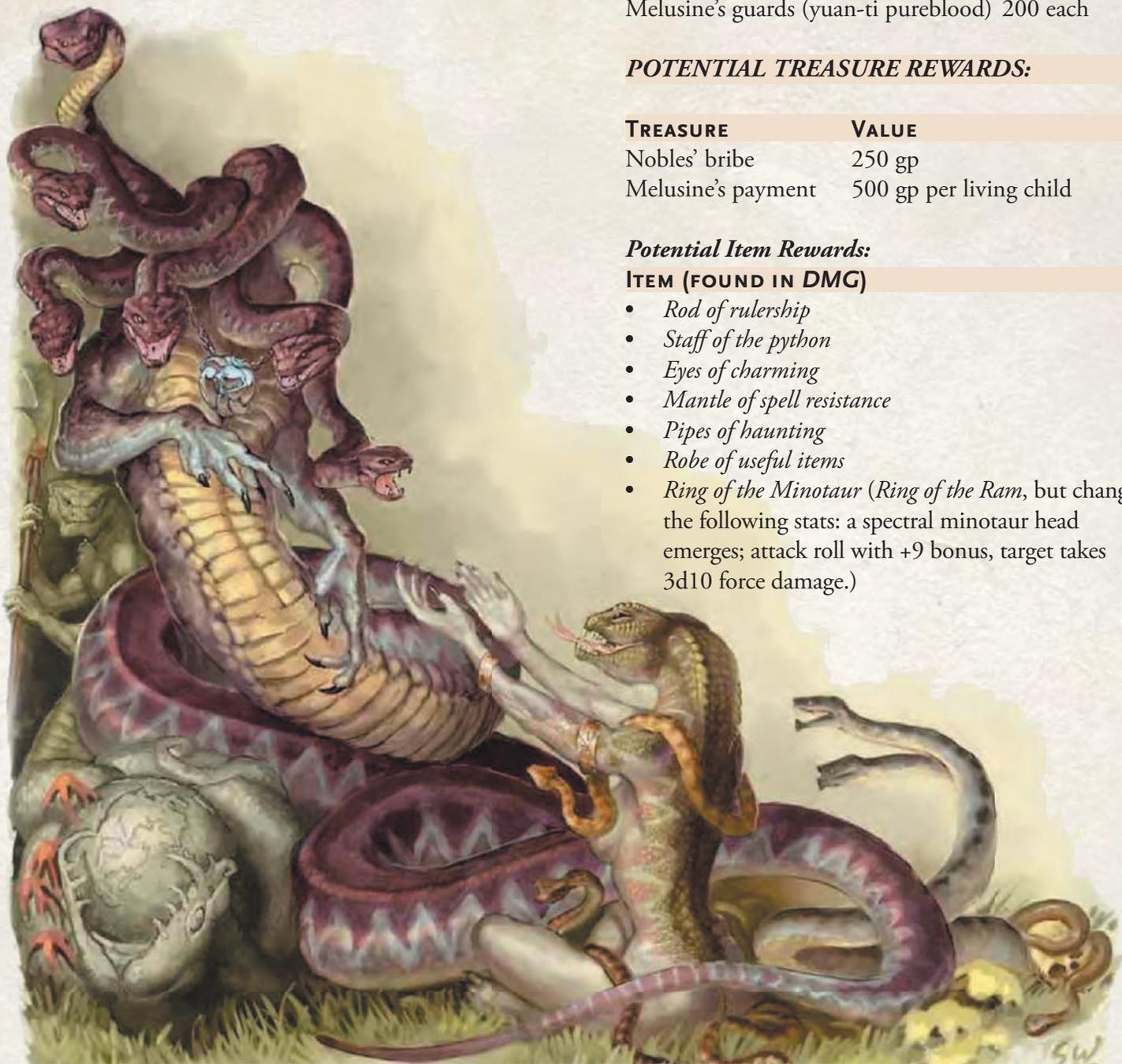
POTENTIAL TREASURE REWARDS:

TREASURE	VALUE
Nobles' bribe	250 gp
Melusine's payment	500 gp per living child

Potential Item Rewards:

ITEM (FOUND IN DMG)

- *Rod of rulership*
- *Staff of the python*
- *Eyes of charming*
- *Mantle of spell resistance*
- *Pipes of haunting*
- *Robe of useful items*
- *Ring of the Minotaur* (*Ring of the Ram*, but change the following stats: a spectral minotaur head emerges; attack roll with +9 bonus, target takes 3d10 force damage.)



AUTHOR'S NOTES

Melusine has been one of my favorite myths since childhood, partly due to my love of mermaids and partly due to her unabashed control in her relationship. I was always horrified that her children died tragically after she left, so this is my attempt of reuniting them with their powerful mom.

Thank you to Ashley for this amazing opportunity, to my lovely friends for telling me about the project and believing in me, and for my wonderful spouse without whom none of this would be possible!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Marcrum is a lifelong fan of myths, fantasy, and gaming. A former opera singer and current licensed social worker, she has had the good fortune to GM for several fantastic groups of adventurers over the last several years. Though Chicago-raised, she currently lives in Pittsburgh with her spouse and their three fat cats. She can be reached at @Miss_Jess03 on Twitter.





ILLUSTRATION BY WOUTER FLORUSSE

W. Florusse

MAIDENS OF THE WEAVE

by *Emily Smith*

CREATURE: *Drider* | **LEVEL(S):** 7

SYNOPSIS

After a drow girl goes missing, characters must delve into the depths of the Underdark to bring her back. As they journey through the dark, characters discover not all monsters are monstrous and webs are capable of restraining all manner of creatures; in fact, they can capture magic itself. This 4-hour adventure is designed for Tier 2 (APL 7).

ADVENTURE HOOK

After a young girl goes missing from her home in Menzoberranzan, her mother contacts the party for help.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Driders are drow worshippers of Lolth which have been transformed into spiders from the waist down. The transformation is an agonizing ritual which is performed by a high priestess of Lolth, often as a punishment for failing Lolth in some way. Seen as monstrosities by drow society, driders are used as servants of the drow or exiled from society.

A group of driders, called the Maidens of the Weave, formed a peaceful, secretive society outside the walls of Menzoberranzan that serves Lolth's grand design. They select promising young drow and offer them the opportunity to become a drider, where they devote their life to the service of Lolth and upholding and maintaining the Weave, which is the source of all magic.

Vexalora, daughter of Narltearn of House Zurdren, has been chosen as a Maiden. Over the last dozen tenday, Maidens have visited her in visions, directing her to construct a shrine and devote herself to Lolth, which she has done dutifully in a small grotto outside

Menzoberranzan. Last night, Vexalora was finally summoned by the Maidens to undergo the transformation to a drider, which will occur at midnight tonight.

The Maidens of the Weave have an internal division. The traditionalists, led by Hadrezzt, is devoted to the service of Lolth and upholding the magical weave, created by Mystra. A secret coup, led by Silvrar, seeks to overthrow Hadrezzt and use the magic of the Weave to destroy their enemies. Silvrar plans to strike against Hadrezzt during the ritual tonight, when Hadrezzt is at her weakest.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Characters meet with Narltearn Zurdren and receive a *Call to Action*. Then, characters locate Vexalora's secret grotto, where they find clues to track Vexalora to the Maidens of the Weave.

SCENE 1: MEETING NARLTEARN

Narltearn Zurdren, mother of Vexalora, is the matriarch of House Zurdren, a noble drow House in Menzoberranzan. Narltearn seeks aid after her daughter vanished last night. She can give characters the following information:

- Vexalora had been spending an unusually large amount of time in a small grotto outside the city. Narltearn had followed her daughter and investigated the grotto previously, but found nothing unusual. She can provide characters directions to the grotto.
- Vexalora had been acting cagey, moody and secretive over the past dozen tenday.

Characters can gain the following information:

- DC 15 Intelligence (History): House Zurdren is in service to Selvetarm, demigod of drow warriors, which serve Lolth using their combat prowess. If asked, Narltearn can tell characters her daughter has always been a bit rebellious, spurning combat training in favor of reading and learning magic rituals.

A small grotto, lit dimly by luminescent fungi, sits off the side of the main path. Rough-hewn rocks jut out from the wall. A small weapons rack and training dummy sit in one corner of the cavern.

SCENE 2: THE SECRET GROTTO

Characters can gain the following information:

- DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation): A small compartment is hidden inside the rock wall, behind a curtain of fungi. Inside is Vexalora's diary and a swatch of exquisitely woven fabric. It is clear it has been touched repeatedly, as some of the threads are worn in the same location (clutched by Vexalora while praying to Lolth).
- DC 12 Wisdom (Perception): The weapons look unused and the area seems largely undisturbed. The training dummy looks untouched.

VEXALORA'S DIARY

This diary details Vexalora's interactions with the Maidens of the Weave. They have come to her daily in visions over the last dozen tenday, teaching her how to purify and prepare herself to enter Lolth's service. In an entry dated from the previous day, the Maidens told her the time has come for her to join Lolth's service. Included is a drawing of the path she will take through the Underdark to reach the Maidens, noting the journey will take 4 hours.

DEVELOPMENT

Once characters have discovered evidence of Vexalora's connection to the Maidens of the Weave, they can begin tracking her passage deeper into the Underdark.

CHAPTER 2 — DESCENDING INTO THE DEPTHS

Characters follow in Vexalora's tracks, stumbling across Underdark hazards along the way.

SCENE 1: THE ABANDONED MINESHAFT

- The trail turns into an abandoned, 15' wide duergar mineshaft, haunted by the ghosts of miners lost during an incursion of hook horrors many years ago. The ghosts are hostile towards non-duergar and seek to kill those passing through their tunnels.
- As characters pass through, they hear distant moaning, echoing whispers and the sounds of pickaxes striking stone, setting a haunting mood. Torches spontaneously wink out and characters feel cold hands brushing against them.
- While travelling through the shaft, a passive Perception of 13 locates an unmined portion of gold. It takes characters 10 minutes to extract and is worth 300 gp.
- Eventually, the ghostly noises fade to unsettling silence and five **duergar ghosts** appear in the cavern ahead. They demand characters turn back. If characters comply, they are allowed to leave. If they refuse, the **ghosts** attack.

SCENE 2: BULETTES BELOW

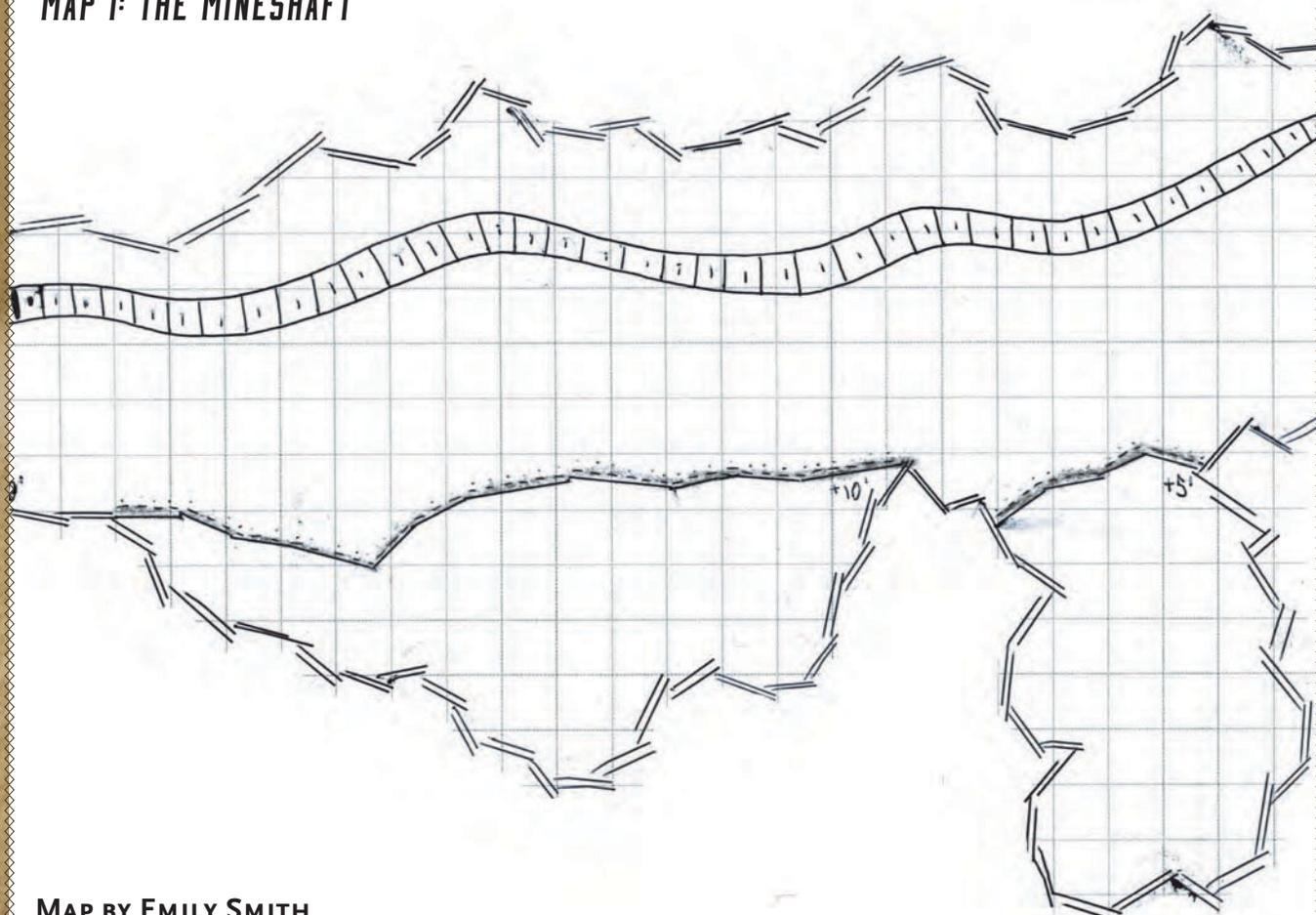
- The mineshaft continues steeply downwards. A single minecart, large enough to fit the party members, sits on a rickety metal track. If used, the cart moves at 40 ft per round.
- As characters continue, the walls begin to rumble and shake. Four **bulettes** erupt from the floors and walls of the tunnel and attack. For a layout of the area, see Map 1, pg. 149.
- The characters have eight rounds to escape the mine shaft, before the burrowing bulettes destabilize the tunnel and it collapses. If characters are riding in the mining cart, they can fight the bulettes while continuing to speed towards the tunnel's exit. If the characters are on foot, it takes them three rounds of dashing to exit the tunnel. If characters fail to escape the tunnel before it collapses, they must make a DC 14 Dexterity Saving

Throw or take 10d10 bludgeoning damage, or half on a success, from falling rocks and are restrained. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to escape the rubble.

DEVELOPMENT

After characters complete the random encounters, they close in on the Maidens' Sanctuary. Proceed to *Chapter 3*.

MAP 1: THE MINESHAFT



MAP BY EMILY SMITH

CHAPTER 3 — THE MAIDENS' SANCTUARY

The Maidens of the Weave have a small colony built around an enormous spiderweb, which they use to travel between small caverns throughout the complex. As characters near the sanctuary, they notice webs begin to form and thicken around the pathway. Their passage is noticed by Hadrezzt, the **driders** leader, using her Web Sense.

SCENE 1: WELCOME

Hadrezzt greets characters at the entrance of the complex. She has two **driders** in tow, for security purposes. She politely greets characters as they approach and asks what business they have with the Maidens of the Weave. If characters mention they are searching for Vexalora, she guides them inside to Area 1, where Vexalora is watching a drider create an enormous spider silk quilt masterpiece.

ROLE-PLAYING HADREZZT

Hadrezzt is the high priestess of the Maidens of the Weave. She is innately in tune with the Weave and rules her society with self-assurance and self-reliance. She demands all initiates be fully willing to undergo the transformation. She believes the maintenance of the Weave, maintaining balance in magic and life, is the driders' job and the best way to serve Lolth.

AREA 1: THE WEAVERY

This room is lined with several loom-like structures, formed from stone pegs carved out from the wall. A drider sits at one of these makeshift looms, seemingly lost in her work, weaving an enormous quilt which, upon closer inspection, resembles a shower of rain exploding outward from the center of the piece. Vexalora is watching the drider work. Several other spider silk works hang on the walls in different states of completion.

ROLE-PLAYING VEXALORA

Vexalora is a bright young drow, interested in the magical arts and eager to join an organization where she can learn. She left her family behind, as they refused to let her practice magic, and she plans to become a drider tonight. She is fully aware of the transformation that

will occur (minus the exact details of the ceremony) and is eager to join the Maidens. If asked, she says she wants to be involved with the Maidens because they are inherently linked to the Weave, with the ability to tap into its magic in a way that no one else can.

AREA 2: THE TRAINING GROUNDS

The clashing of steel catches your attention, as you see a single warrior, blades spinning, as she dodges two other warriors in a training ground at the side of the encampment. As she effortlessly dances and dodges their attacks, you see an imposing figure looking on from the other side of the ring: a female drow, clad in ornate mithril armor and a silken tunic rises up, revealing the lower body of an immense spider, joined seamlessly with her torso.

The warrior at the opposite side of the arena is Silvrar.

ROLE-PLAYING SILVRAR

Silvrar believes driders should use their might to control and conquer other civilizations in the name of Lolth. She is the leader of a secret group seeking to kill Hadrezzt and take control of the colony. She is clever and will not give away information which may compromise her plans. She speaks ill of the “weak” driders, like Hadrezzt, who are too absorbed in the Weave and afraid to leave the society and fight for Lolth's supremacy.

AREA 3: DRIDER LIVING QUARTERS

Looking up, you see the cavern above the encampment stretches upward beyond sight, with elaborate webs spreading across the vast chimney, until nothing can be seen but web and darkness. As you look closer, you distantly see several of the webs stretch and bend, as if creatures are moving atop them.

- A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals each of the webs is woven in a subtly different way (by different driders) and separate living quarters can be discerned inside of the chimney, though it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish webs higher in the chimney.
- Several tunnels lead off of the chimney, some of which travel further into the Underdark, others of which lead to ancillary caverns (a “kitchen” of sorts, mushroom farm for the slaves, latrine, outposts, etc.)
- **YOCHLOL HOLDING FACILITY:** The **yochlols** for tonight’s event are being held in cages in a chamber near the top of the chimney and are carefully guarded by 2 dedicated driders. Because the yochlols are vital for the Ceremony tonight, these driders will not leave their post under any circumstance, and signal for help at the first sign of trouble. The driders defend the yochlols with their lives. There are eight yochlols currently in the chamber.

AREA 4: ALTAR TO LOLTH

A canopy of intricately woven spider silk surrounds a raised dais at the center of the encampment. Steps lead up to an obsidian altar, intricately carved with images of spiders climbing atop delicate webs which spanned entire cities. For a layout of the area, see Map 2.

AREA 5: SLAVE CAGES

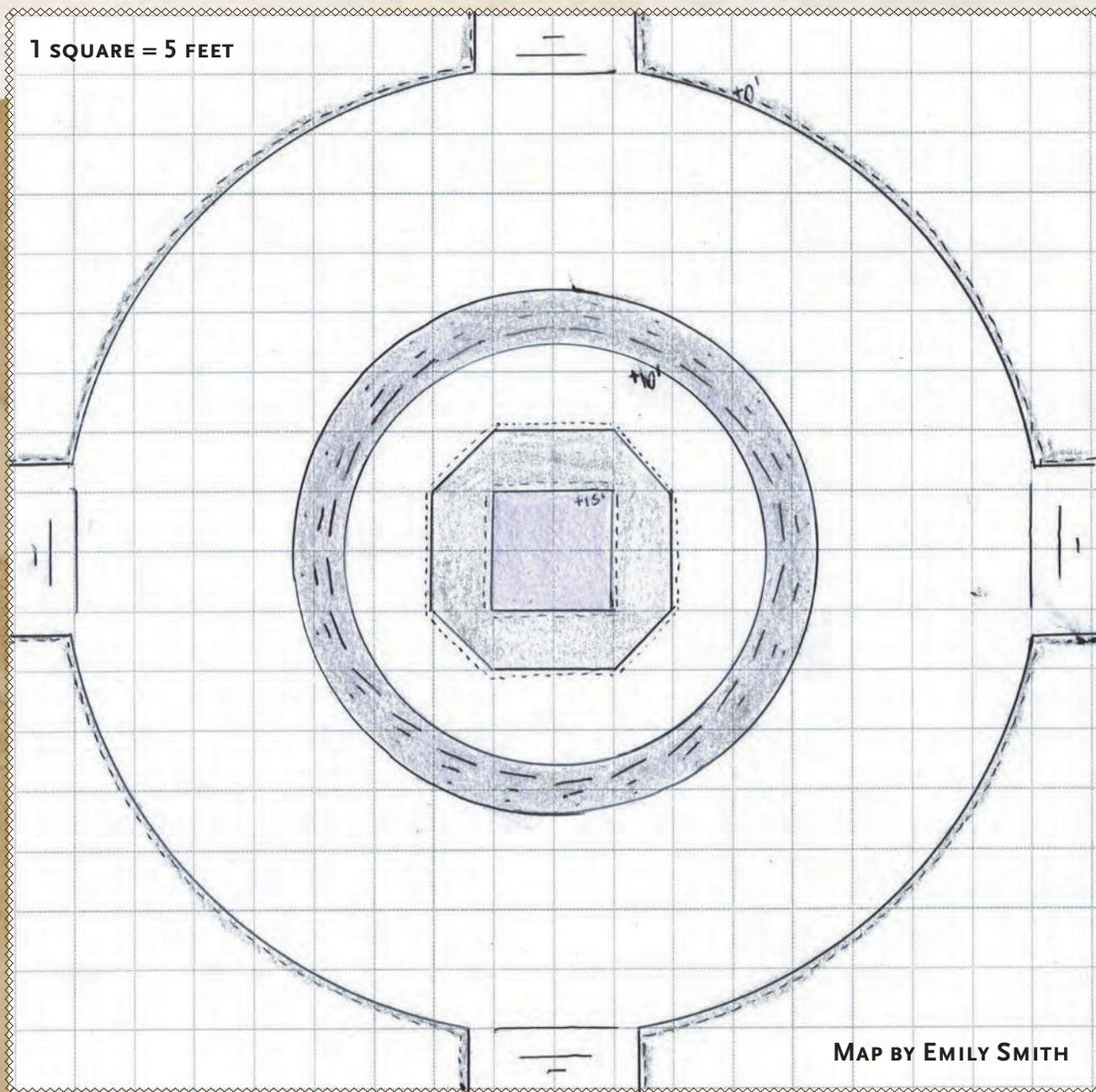
Several cages are set into the rocky walls of this side-cavern. Each cage has a finely made metal lock, which requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to open. Each lock has AC 10 and 15 hit points. At this time, the cages are empty, though they may be filled with other NPCs at the DM’s discretion.

DEVELOPMENT

When the characters have explored the colony and the time approaches midnight, continue to *Chapter 4*.



MAP 2: THE MAIDEN'S SANCTUARY



CHAPTER 4 – THE RITUAL

Just before midnight, the driders gather at the Alter to Lolth to perform the ritual of transformation on each drow initiate, transforming them into driders.

An enormous web spans the ceiling of this cavern, glowing in soft shades of purple and blue reflected by luminescent fungi lining the cavern. A ring of driders surround a central obsidian dais, next to which stands Hadrezzt, a ceremonial silver dagger in her hand. A line of initiates waits outside of the circle, dressed in elaborately woven tunics of purple and silver threads.

SCENE 1: THE TRANSFORMATION

At midnight, the web overhead begins glowing in brilliant colors. Eight small cages of yochlols (MM p. 65) rest at the side of the dais. As initiates are led inside the circle, Vexalora lays atop the central dais as Hadrezzt begins chanting in Undercommon. The lights inside the web begin to pulse in time with the chanting of Hadrezzt, as the rest of the driders join in, and strands of web begin to reach down, connecting with each of the participating driders and the initiates.

There are eight **driders**, including Hadrezzt, and eight initiates (**commoners**) participating in the ritual, which takes 10 rounds to complete. If any drider takes more than 30 points of damage, their connection to the weave is severed and both they and their initiate fall unconscious. Attacks against the chanting driders are made at advantage, as they are restrained by the weave.

This is the moment that Silvrar and her followers strike. Silvrar's goal is to interrupt the ritual and kill the other driders while they are unconscious, in order to take over the colony and the initiates, which she will use to create an army to destroy all other humanoids in the Underdark. Silvrar herself begins by attacking Hadrezzt while her two drider compatriots attack two other chanters, using a surprise round unless the characters are on the alert. If characters attack the driders, they will focus the characters, hoping to kill them before the ritual ends, leaving them enough time to finish off the other driders.

THE BATTLE

Three driders, including Hadrezzt, attack the party. They fight to the death. If you want to increase the encounter difficulty, several **yochlols** break free from their cage and engage in combat (1 per character). For a layout of the area, see Map 2, pg. 152.

THE RITUAL

Transforming a drow into a drider involves placing a yochlol on the drow's legs. As the priestesses chant, the power of Lolth is channeled through the weave and into the yochlol, which devours the initiate's legs and replaces them with the body of a spider.

DEVELOPMENT

After the characters defeat Hadrezzt and her drider minions, proceed to the next part.



CONCLUSION

The characters' success in Chapter 4 determines the outcome of this module.

OPTION 1: CHARACTERS SUCCEED

If all the driders survive, including Hadrezzt, and the ritual is completed, Hadrezzt thanks the characters and offers them a *Cloak of Arachnida* in thanks for their service. She also offers them 400 gp. Characters earn the story reward Friends of the Weave.

OPTION 2: PARTIAL SUCCESS

If some of the driders survive, but Hadrezzt dies, the remaining driders thank the characters for their aid and offer them 400 gp.

OPTION 3: CHARACTERS FAIL

If the characters fail, Silvrar and her driders kill Hadrezzt and her good-aligned driders. The initiates are captured, to be turned into driders at the next blood moon. If the characters are alive, they are captured by Silvrar, stripped of their equipment and locked in the slave cages. The characters have 3 months to escape before they will be forcibly used as tributes to Lolth, transformed into driders in the service of Silvrar.

REWARDS

Characters earn the following XP and items:

EXPERIENCE:

Total the combat experience earned for defeated foes and divide by the number of characters.

COMBAT AWARDS

ENEMY	XP PER ENEMY
Bulette	1,800
Drider	2,300
Ghost	1,100
Yochlol	5,900

NON-COMBAT AWARDS

TASK	XP PER CHARACTER
Save Hadrezzt	500
Save all the Driders	200

TREASURE:

The characters receive the following treasure, to be divided evenly among the party.

TREASURE REWARDS

ITEM	GP VALUE
Duergar Unmined Gold	300
Saving the Driders	400

DOWNTIME:

Characters completing this adventure earn 10 downtime.

REKNOWN:

Characters completing this adventure earn 1 renown.

MAGIC ITEM:

CLOAK OF ARACHNIDA

Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This fine garment is made of black silk interwoven with faint silvery threads. While wearing it, you gain the following benefits:

- You have Resistance to poison damage.
- You have a climbing speed equal to your walking speed.
- You can move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and upside down along ceilings, while leaving your hands free.
- You can't be caught in webs of any sort and can move through webs as if they were difficult terrain.
- You can use an action to cast the web spell (save DC 13). The web created by the spell fills twice its normal area. Once used, this property of the cloak can't be used again until the next dawn.

STORY REWARD:

FRIENDS OF THE WEAVE

You have done a great service to the Maidens of the Weave and earned their gratitude. You gain advantage on Charisma checks with Driders.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I would like to thank some of my first and best DMs, Chris Blackwell and David Phillips, for being awesome role models and creating stories and experiences that had me coming back to *D&D* every week, until I was fully addicted to the hobby and there was no turning back. I also want to give a shout-out to Adventurer's League, the official *D&D* organized play system, which has allowed me to play *D&D* no matter what city I'm in, and has allowed me to make invaluable friendships.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Smith is a *D&D* writer for Adventurer's League and Dungeon Masters Guild, based in Los Angeles, Calif. She is a regular TTRPG blogger for Quest Chests and Dice Envy and plays Firefly on the NQH Podcast. In her free time, she enjoys coding, cooking, and cat herding. Connect on Twitter @emilyjeasmith or emilyjeasmith.wordpress.com.





APPALLING MORASS

by Ma'at Crook

CREATURE: *Hags* | **LEVEL(S):** 8
CW: *gaslighting, lies, threats, manipulation*

SYNOPSIS

Elmwood village has had its fair share of corruption and destruction, and the villagers won't take anymore, not even from fearful hags. Manipulation, lies, and greed are at the heart of their woes, but what if the rumors about hags are wrong? What if the most untrustworthy person is the one the villagers trust the most? Can the party sift the truth from this appalling morass and put an end to the threat?

ADVENTURE HOOK

Appalling Morass begins with the adventurers traveling to or through the village of Elmwood. They may happen upon Elmwood between missions, seek coin in this blossoming settlement, go fishing off the newly-built pier, or come up with their individual or group reasons.

BLEEDING GATE HOOK

If playing this adventure after *Bleeding Gate: Amalgamation* (CCC-BLD 1-2) or *Bleeding Gate: Lineage* (CCC-BLD 01-03) Armaita Mossbeard, grocer and Zhentarim agent, asks the party to travel south to Elmwood. Dar'Vo Pleasance, fellow Zhent, struggles to establish his general store. She asks the party to facilitate a partnership between Armaita and Dar'Vo, to sell him Emudomier-made merchandise at a discount and stock her shelves with Elmwood's specialties.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

On the Moonsea's southern coast, the village of Elmwood is in a phase of resurrection. The ground beneath new homes and businesses is still scorched from the explosion of a devastation orb. New residents are eager

to make a fresh start. Among them is Dar'Vo Pleasance, whose Pleasance's Perennials general store boasts, "Everything! Now!" Dar'Vo is helpful and well-loved by his community, but unknown to the villagers, he is manipulating them. Within the Cormanthor Forest, hags Ah-vay, Thorne, and Eura live off the forest and Ah-vay's occasional trade in Elmwood. Dar'Vo desired a partnership with Ah-vay, envisioning expensive magic items on his shelves and the destruction of his competition. After she refused his repeated requests, coercion, and threats, he turned the villagers against her.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

AH-VAY ARCORAR: (Pronouns: she/her) middle-aged, transgender hag with translucent skin, teal hair, and mirrored eyes.

- **Ideals:** Connection to new and well-known friends.
- **Bonds:** Thrives on relationships, leading to occasional trips into Elmwood. Her connection to animals means there is nothing in Cormanthor Forest that escapes her notice.
- **Flaws:** Reads too many true crime novels.

DAR'VO PLEASANCE: (Pronouns: he/him) 31-year-old, cisgender human, Zhentarim agent, Pleasance's Perennials general store owner.

- **Ideals:** Takes what he wants through manipulation, coercion, and threats. He's an avid knick-knack collector.
- **Bonds:** No one provides more help to Elmwood, giving him credibility as a kind person while he secretly helps himself at others' expense.
- **Flaws:** Abusive.

EURA ARCORAR: (Pronouns: she/her) senior, cisgender hag with dark brown skin, lavender hair, and silent, fluid movement.

- **Ideals:** Horticulturist; conserves Cormanthor Forest's flora.
- **Bonds:** "There are just two beings I love more than the forest. I'll never leaf Thorne or Ah-vay; they tree-t me so well."
- **Flaws:** Loves puns and terrible jokes.

THORNE ARCORAR: (Pronouns: he/his) adult, cisgender hag with olive skin, magenta hair, and the stature of a cypress.

- **Ideals:** That "ah ha" moment, after struggling with a sculpture, is euphoric.
- **Bonds:** Can't look at driftwood or a lump of clay without envisioning it shaped into a cute animal.
- **Flaws:** Difficulty trusting non-hag humanoids.

ADVENTURE OUTLINE

The adventure can be played as a straightforward chase and assault on a hag coven, however, the module includes social interactions and investigations to learn Dar'Vo, not the hags, is the real antagonist.

- **CHAPTER 1 – UNWELCOME:** Speak with the villagers and/or follow the hag into the woods.
- **CHAPTER 2 – LIGHT AND SHADOW:** Enter combat with forest creatures and the hag coven. Alternately speak with the coven about Dar'Vo's abuses.
- **CHAPTER 3 – EXPOSURE:** Return to Elmwood for Dar'Vo's reward or confront him for the hags' reward instead.

CHAPTER 1 – UNWELCOME

Estimated Playtime: 15 minutes

The party arrives in Elmwood as a mob attacks Ah-vay. She uses *invisibility* and an *amulet of protection and location* to escape into the forest. The characters can speak with villagers and/or follow the hag.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

- **COMBAT:** The mob isn't aggressive toward the party. If attacked, Dar'Vo (**gladiator**), his employees (**veterans**), and villagers (**commoner**) defend themselves.

- **SOCIAL:** See "What the Mob Knows" below. Dar'Vo is manipulative but try not to let roleplay delivery betray that fact. Dar'Vo is likable and believable.
- **EXPLORATION:** The hag leaves no tracks. A successful DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to pickpocket the mob yields 6 copper, 1 nautical bracelet, 1 chest key (Dar'Vo's), and 1 lure.

Read or paraphrase:

You travel a dirt road toward Elmwood. Morning fog weighs heavily on the Moonsea; the sun fights to banish it from what must be a beautiful waterfront view.

Builders' hammers ring, water laps the shore, and waterfowl demand fish. As you get closer, an angry chorus replaces the sound of hammers. Villagers shout "Hag!" A hunched hag with ratted hair, tattered clothes, and smelling of rot, runs toward you. The panicked mob strikes out in fear, chasing her with thrown stones and garbage. In her reflective eyes, you read the realization that your approach blocks her escape; she flickers and becomes invisible.

The characters may question the mob ("What the Mob Knows below") or chase the hag (*Chapter 2*).

WHAT THE MOB KNOWS

If questioned, the mob discusses the following:

- **Dar'Vo Pleasance**, general store owner, alerted the villagers that Ah-vay is a dangerous, evil hag. However, he is subtly manipulating the villagers and party to trust him and get them to do what he wants, in the following ways:
- **BEFRIENDING:** Talks about his adventuring days and compliments their skills.
- **MARTYRDOM:** "She misled us; we believed she was poor. I paid her for her meager wares, even when I was low on coin!"
- **LIES:** "She enchanted me! She made me offer her a business partnership!"

TRUTH: He wanted to keep her close and use her skills to increase his power and profit. He threatened her (small doll, *Chapter 2's* "Treasure")



- **TELLING HALF-TRUTHS:** “Ah-vay poisoned me (lie)! I was up all night, vomiting, after drinking her potion (truth).” A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check confirms he ingested poison.
 - **TRUTH:** He stole and drank cleaning products (jars, *Chapter 2* and *3*’s “Treasure”).
- **BLAMING:** “It’s her fault we chased her, evil hag!”
- **EXAGGERATING AUTHORITY:** Raises his voice, “You didn’t see;” “You weren’t here;” “I know about hags!
- If the players question his truthfulness, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check recognizes his blame and anger as truthful, but he’s hiding something.
- He requests, “I hate saying this, but I worry about these people — please, kill this dangerous hag. Her shack’s in Cormanthor Forest, southwest of here.”
 - He’ll reward the party with armor he says came from adventurers (*Chapter 3*’s “Treasure”).

TRUTH: He stole it from the hags.

- Villagers are afraid of the “hideous temptress,” “corruptor,” “liar,” “selfish gold-digger.”
- They ask the party to find her haven in the forest and stop her from coming back.
- Any Wisdom (Insight) check shows the villagers believe their words.

OBJECTIVE A

Stop the hag from troubling the village.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the characters enter the forest, proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 — LIGHT AND SHADOW

Estimated Playtime: 1 hour

In the forest, they encounter large foxes. Unseen, Ah-vay warns of Dar’Vo’s treachery, wanting to speak further at her haven.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

- **COMBAT:** Large foxes defend Ah-vay and the coven while she speaks. Fighting the foxes and the coven

are valid options. Combat can end at any time.

- **SOCIAL:** Ah-vay worries the party presents a threat but remains open to socializing, knowing Dar’Vo manipulated them.
- **EXPLORATION:** Attempts at stealth prompt “Ah-vay’s Shouts.” With a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check characters see lizards, foxes, and snakes watching, unmoved, as the party passes.

Read or paraphrase.

Traveling southwest through Cormanthor Forest, its moss-covered mud exposes no humanoid tracks, just biting-insects, and swampy stench. The sun breaks through the fog and canopy. Somewhere in the forest, a feminine voice addresses you, “*Harming you, when we share so much, would be a shame.*”

Ahead, six large, gray foxes let out high-pitched, nervous warnings.

The six large foxes (using **tiger** stats) and various hidden forest creatures keep the party from getting too close to Ah-vay until she can assess their intention. She hopes to lead them home to talk further.

- **TACTICS:** The large foxes attack if attacked. During combat, innumerable forest creatures (baby foxes, rabbits, lizards, snakes) dash out of hiding, creating difficult terrain for anyone who gets closer to Ah-vay. At the beginning of a player character’s movement toward Ah-vay, they must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, or darting creatures obstruct their footfalls.

AH-VAY’S SHOUTS

While hidden in the forest, in or out of combat, Ah-vay shouts the following:

- Ah-vay loathes hypocrisy, “Your people call us ugly and evil, looking past your own grotesqueries and evil deeds.”
- She warns of manipulation, “A dollop of honey, half a pinch of truth, and one whole lie, scrambled and baked in under a minute. You’ve had your heads messed with!”
- If the party is open to discussion, she invites them to speak with her coven, “Follow my voice to my haven and the truth.” Continue to the optional “Bonus Objective 1” or go straight to “The Coven Haven.”

- If the party chooses combat, her voice leads them to her haven. Continue to “The Coven Haven.”

BONUS OBJECTIVE 1 – EENY, MEENY, AH-VAY HAG

Optional Objective: Identify which disguise hides Ah-vay.

Estimated Playtime: additional 1 hour

If the characters are non-hostile, Ah-vay proposes a game as she leads them to her haven. She uses the green hag action, illusory appearance, disguising herself as a creature (of her “general size and humanoid shape”). She challenges them to shout out which creature they think she is (answer in bold). Be descriptive of the interactions between the creatures and the environment.

- **Sighting 1:** Large fox, small armadillo, or **bullywug**
- **Sighting 2:** Raven, **darkling elder**, or giant rat
- **Sighting 3:** Oblex ooze, ghast, or **lizardfolk**
- **Sighting 4:** **Yuan-ti**, muskrats, or shambling mound
- **Sighting 5:** **Nagpa**, kobold, or black bear

THE COVEN HAVEN

The party follows Ah-vay’s voice to her haven. Thorne and Eura worry why she’s disheveled and accompanied by strangers.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

- **COMBAT:** The party can enter combat with the coven. They can also end it at any point, opting instead for a social interaction.
- **SOCIAL:** See “What the Hags Know” below.
- **EXPLORATION:** If the characters succeed in combat against the coven or have a social interaction, they may investigate the haven (*Chapter 2’s* “Treasure”).

Read or paraphrase:

You follow the hag’s voice down a deer path. Stepping off results in sinking into ankle-deep mud. Grass-like sedge, ferns, cattails, and decay cover the swamp floor. Giant frogs, stirges, foxes, and black bears warily watch you pass. As the forest density expands, the mirrored water reflects cypress scattered along its surface. About a hundred feet ahead the hag hops from a sedge mound to the floating dock of a stilt-shack, draped in potted plants and sculptures. Two hags rush out the front door, fussing over the returning hag, picking trash from her torn clothing and smoothing her matted hair. They spot you and freeze, teeth bared.

If the characters choose combat with the three **green hags**, include the **hag covens** stat block.

- **TACTICS:** Ah-vay uses eyebite to put each character to sleep so she can talk with them when they wake.

AH-VAY’S APPEARANCE

After Ah-vay cleans up, the characters see her disheveled, rotten presentation was due to the mob’s attack (see the module’s illustration for her true appearance).

WHAT THE HAGS KNOW

If the characters enter a social interaction, the hags discuss the following:

- Ah-vay identifies Dar’Vo’s tactics used to manipulate the party (*Chapter 1’s* “What the Mob Knows”).
- Dar’Vo was kind at first but raged at Ah-vay trading with others. He apologized and asked her to make exclusive potions for his store; she refused. He offered a business partnership; she refused. He threatened her. He broke into their haven last night, while the coven was out, and stole a jar of homemade “See Thru” glass cleaner, “Ooze Gone” adhesive remover, and “HRP” hormone replacement potion. He stole Ah-vay’s armor, Eura’s anniversary gift.
- Unlike many who are abused by others, Ah-vay’s in a unique position to have physical evidence. Dar’Vo left her a letter and doll in a hollow tree at

- the forest's edge (*Chapter 2's* "Treasure").
- They ask the party to help prove Ah-vay's innocence and Dar'Vo's abuses. Ah-vay doesn't want Dar'Vo killed; it will cast doubt on her word, cause villagers grief, and martyr him.

TREASURE

Within the haven are the following items of note:

- Dar'Vo's Letter – tucked inside a true crime novel, written after Ah-vay's first visit. It welcomes her to Elmwood, identifies her as a hag, and demands she stop selling potions to other vendors, signed "D." A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or (Investigation) check shows the paper is made of cattail.
- Jars – "Bee Bare" hair remover, "Dryad's Friend" wood polish, specially-mixed paint labeled "Special, Don't Touch," "No Fungus Amongus" fungicide, and "Bug Off" pesticide
- Small doll – teal, yarn hair pulled out, embroidered with bruises and cuts, and a message: "WORK WITH ME OR..."

OBJECTIVE B

Help prove Ah-vay's innocence and Dar'Vo's abuses.

DEVELOPMENT

After Ah-vay asks the players to expose Dar'Vo or they find the letter and small doll, they may take a short rest, then proceed to *Chapter 3* below.

CHAPTER 3 – EXPOSURE

Estimated Playtime: 45 minutes

Returning to Elmwood, the characters may collect their reward for stopping or killing Ah-vay ("Conclusion" below), confront Dar'Vo directly ("Pleasance's Perennials"), tell the villagers ("Telling Villagers of Dar'Vo's Abuses"), or collect more evidence by breaking into Pleasance's Perennials ("Bonus Objective 2" and "Pleasance's Perennials" below).

PLAYING THE PILLARS

- **COMBAT:** The players may choose to fight Dar'Vo and his three employees.

- **SOCIAL:** Players may speak with the villagers or Dar'Vo. If he feels his good standing in the community is threatened, he starts combat.
- **EXPLORATION:** Dar'Vo's store, Pleasance's Perennials, contains evidence of his manipulation and theft (*Chapter 3's* "Treasure").

TELLING VILLAGERS OF DAR'VO'S ABUSES

Many find it hard to believe a friend is abusive. However, if a player or Ah-vay (best) speaks to these villagers about Dar'Vo's abusive behavior, they'll listen and compassionately think about what's said, without trying to argue or disprove. They ask what help Ah-vay wants.

BONUS OBJECTIVE 2 – GET IN, GET STUFF, GET OUT

Optional Objective: Get into Dar'Vo's store, take evidence and/or stolen items (*Chapter 3's* "Treasure"), and get out without getting caught.

Estimated Playtime: additional 1 hour

The characters can make and execute a plan to fulfill the objective. Below lists obstacles or benefits to the characters when the store is open or closed.

Dar'Vo Pleasance:

- **Open** – when with a customer, his Wisdom (Perception) is at disadvantage
- **Closed** – works late, bookkeeping

Bugbear Employee:

- **Open** – in the aisles, crouched down to count inventory, giving her full cover and obscuring sight of anything not in her aisle
- **Closed** – sleeps by the register, a light sleeper with passive Perception 12

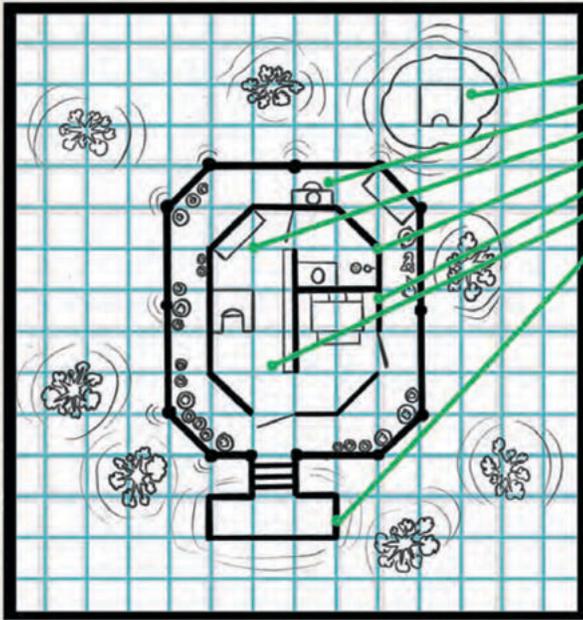
Human Employee:

- **Open** – at the backdoor, behind the store, cooking cattails in toxic lye, for papermaking
- **Closed** – sleeps by the collectibles cabinet, is a sound sleeper, a failed Dexterity (Stealth) DC 5 check or loud combat wakes him

Half-Orc Employee:

- **Open** – organizes the dried fish storefront display, at the front door
- **Open and Closed** – sneezes loudly, allergic to the fish seasoning

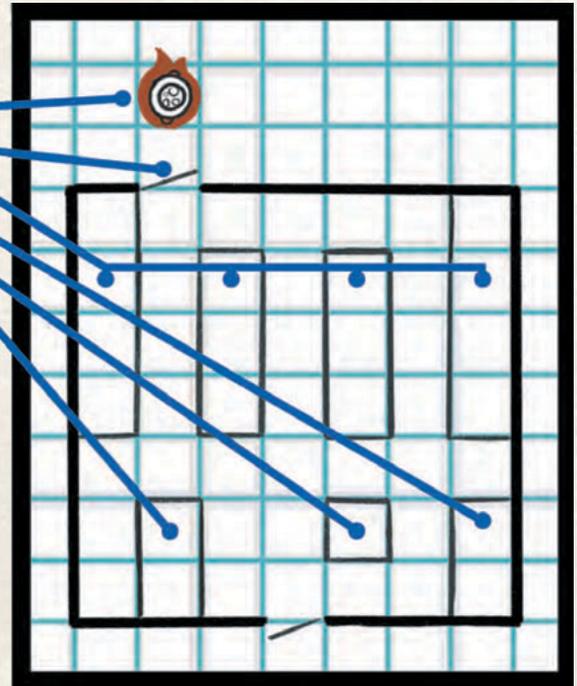
COVEN HAVEN



- POTTER'S KILN
- POTTER'S WHEEL
- PANTRY
- BATHROOM
- BEDROOM
- LIVING SPACE WITH OVEN
- FLOATING DOCK

PLEASANCE'S PERENNIALS

- COOKING LYE & CATTAILS
- BACKDOOR
- AISLES
- COLLECTIBLES CABINET
- STOREFRONT DISPLAY
- REGISTER COUNTER



PLEASANCE'S PERENNIALS

If the characters do not confront Dar'Vo, go to the "Conclusion" below. If they confront Dar'Vo, he's good-natured until his good standing in the community is at risk, then Dar'Vo (**gladiator**) and his employees (three **veterans**) start combat.

- **TACTICS:** One employee uses ranged attacks. For easier combat, villagers or a hag support the party.

TREASURE

Dar'Vo stole or used the below items to send Ah-vay threats.

- Four vials of "Anti-Ooze Repellant" — a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation), Intelligence (Nature), or Wisdom (Medicine) check to know this is "Ooze Gone" adhesive remover, stolen from the coven
- One-hundred sheets of cattail paper-matching the letter sent to Ah-vay
- Four vials of "Aid" potion — a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (Nature), or

- Wisdom (Medicine) check to know this is HRP, hormone replacement, stolen from the coven
- Glass collectibles cabinet-rocks, leaves, small dolls, embroidery needles, etc.
- Chest — open with the key from Dar’Vo’s pocket, a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, or 10 hit points damage. Contains three empty jars labeled "See Thru," "Ooze Gone," and a smudged "HRP" that could be misread as "AID," one-hundred gold, the embroidery thread used on the small doll to threaten Ah-vay
- Ah-vay’s Armor (see *Conclusion* to know if it is a reward) — plate armor found in Dar’Vo’s bedroom (see magic item "Treasure" below for details), stolen from the coven

DEVELOPMENT

After the characters complete their encounter in Pleasance’s Perennials, go to the *Conclusion* below.

CONCLUSION

IF THE PLAYERS KILLED (OR STOPPED) THE HAGS AND...

did not confront Dar’Vo:

- The villagers and Dar’Vo are grateful.
- **Reward:** *Armor of Vulnerability*, "Dar’Vo Pleasance’s Word" story award

killed Dar’Vo:

- The villagers doubt Dar’Vo presented a threat.
- **Reward:** *Armor of Vulnerability*

Dar’Vo is alive, and the players exposed his abuses:

- The villagers are grateful for the help; they keep an eye on Dar’Vo.
- Dar’Vo is angry but says he is the better person and gives them their reward.
- **Reward:** *Armor of Vulnerability*, "Dar’Vo Pleasance’s Word" story award

IF THE PLAYERS HELPED THE HAGS AND...

did not confront Dar’Vo but returned all the hags’ stolen items:

- The villagers begin constructing a fortified wall.
- Dar’Vo is happy with this development.
- The hags aren’t pleased Dar’Vo is not held accountable.

- **Reward:** *Amulet of Proof Against Detection and Location*

killed Dar’Vo:

- The villagers doubt Dar’Vo presented a threat.
- Ah-vay has a hard time regaining the villagers’ trust. Thorne and Eura are grateful Dar’Vo is dead.
- **Reward:** *Amulet of Proof Against Detection and Location*, "You Have the Hags’ Attention" story award

Dar’Vo is alive, and the players exposed his abuses:

- The villagers thank the characters, keep an eye on Dar’Vo, and welcome Ah-vay back.
- Dar’Vo professes innocence.
- **Reward:** *Amulet of Proof Against Detection and Location*, "You Have the Hags’ Attention" story award.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS:

Add the total XP of creatures overcome by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

ENCOUNTER	XP
Green Hag in a Coven	1800
Large foxes (tigers)	200
Dar’Vo Pleasance (gladiator)	1800
Dar’Vo’s Employees (veterans)	700
Helping the hags	50 per player
Exposing Dar’Vo’s abusive acts without killing him	50 per player
Bonus Objective 1, "Eeny, Meeny, Ah-Vay Hag"	50 per player
Bonus Objective 2, "Get In, Get Stuff, Get Out"	50 per player

Or characters receive 1 advancement checkpoint and 1 treasure checkpoint for each story objective they complete, as follows:

STORY OBJECTIVE	DESCRIPTION
Story Objective A	Encounter Ah-vay
Story Objective B	Encounter Dar’Vo Pleasance
Bonus Objective 1	"Eeny, Meeny, Ah-Vay Hag"
Bonus Objective 2	"Get in, Get Stuff, Get Out"

TREASURE REWARDS:

ITEM	VALUE
Lure	1 gold
Paper	2 silver each

Characters receive only one magic items (see “Conclusion” above).

AMULET OF PROOF AGAINST DETECTION AND LOCATION

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

Dungeon Master's Guide

While wearing this amulet, you are hidden from divination magic. You can't be targeted by such magic or perceived through magical scrying sensors.

ARMOR OF VULNERABILITY

Armor (plate), rare (requires attunement)

Dungeon Master's Guide

While wearing this armor, you have resistance to slashing damage.

Curse. This armor is cursed, a fact that is revealed only when an identify spell is cast on the armor or you attune to it. Attuning to the armor curses you until you are targeted by the remove curse spell or similar magic; removing the armor fails to end the curse. While cursed, you have vulnerability to bludgeoning and piercing damage. Plate consists of shaped, interlocking, swamp-green metal plates to cover the entire body. It is embossed with designs of carnivorous plants, cattails, ferns, foxes, and bats. A suit of plate includes gauntlets, heavy leather boots, a visored helmet, and thick layers of hanging moss padding underneath the armor. Buckles and straps of braided marsh plant stems distribute the weight over the body. A sylvan inscription reads, “When I'm with her, I'm always holm. Only she is suited for my amour; all else are my hexes.”

STORY AWARDS

Characters receive only one story award, depending on whom they helped (see *Conclusion*, pg 164).

YOU HAVE THE HAGS' ATTENTION

You listened to and considered Ah-vay Arcorar and her coven's plight. You honored her request to help expose Dar'Vo Pleasance's actions and gain the villagers' trust. Word spreads quickly among hags, and every hag across

Toril soon learns of your assistance. They now know you don't easily buy into rumors and stereotypes; they consider this before acting on any assumptions they may have about you and your party. Ah-vay offers to provide hormone replacement potions to any transgender characters you send her way, “My transition had its challenges; I'll never turn away anyone who shares that journey. Your non-binary, intersex, and cis friends in need of any hormone therapies may also seek me out.”

DAR'VO PLEASANCE'S WORD

You helped Dar'Vo Pleasance and his group of Zhentarim dispatch troublesome hags that could have been a real threat to the burgeoning and vulnerable village of Elmwood. Word quickly spreads to every Zhent across Toril of your assistance. They know you're trustworthy, dependable, and willing to act without asking too many intrusive questions. Any Zhent you meet considers this. However, Dar'Vo isn't well thought of by all Zhentarim agents. At the DM's discretion, this could affect your interaction with them (perhaps a dice-roll of an even number produces an agent who is impressed, while an odd roll produces an agent who does not like Dar'Vo Pleasance, his methods, or those who have aligned with him).

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Historical portrayals of hags include antisemitic and sexist stereotypes — evil, corrupt, gossipy, lying, greedy, and ugly (elderly) women with red and dark hair, large noses, and wearing pointed hats like those required of Jewish people in thirteenth-century Rome. Knowing how human these behaviors are, I wanted them present in an NPC who's often taken at face value, the mission-giving NPC, making him the real antagonist instead of the hags. I wanted more variety to hags' appearances, genders, ages, and motivations. I wanted players to question their actions, the honesty of the mission-NPC, and the stereotypes of “monsters.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ma'at (ma ought) Crook has been a *D&D* fan since the 80s but didn't find a table to play at until her 40s. Since then, she's written modules and tools, served as an Adventurer's League coordinator and DM, and plays *D&D* and Pathfinder actual plays. Web: maatcrook.com, Twitter: @MaatCrook.



ILLUSTRATION BY FLOURESCENTWOLF

HEART OF THE GODDESS

by *Elise Cretel*

CREATURE: *Ma'at* | **LEVEL(S):** 10

SYNOPSIS

For centuries, Ma'at's temple sat peacefully in silent beauty; a great symbol of justice and harmony. The gems of its glistening ceiling glitter and fade with each rising sun as Ra lights the daytime sky. Isfet, the god of chaos, Ma'at's greatest enemy, has grown restless. Some have rumored that he tore out Ma'at's heart out of jealousy of her power. The bravest of adventurers must face the challenges of Duat and keep up with the determined Ma'at.

This adventure is designed for 4-6 players of level 10.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- **ANCIENT TEMPLE:** A temple suddenly appears nestled behind trees, cliffs, or dunes along a well traveled path. Many are curious what is inside.
- **SINGING:** Under the crisp, starlit night sky, the sound of singing comes from the temple door that is slightly ajar.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Ma'at is a goddess of ancient Egypt. She is depicted as a strong woman with wings along her arms. She symbolizes justice and harmony and is known for helping those passing through the dangerous trials of Duat, the passage to the Egyptian afterlife. Isfet is the god of chaos and destruction who seeks to destroy Ma'at.

Duat is the path from the world of the living to the Egyptian afterlife known as The Sea of Reeds. Duat is sometimes called the Twelve Gates of Hell and has a cavern for each hour of the night of the living world that is tracked by the sun traveling across the sky of the underworld. Duat is full of trials such as lakes of fire, hordes of undead, fire-breathing snakes, and jackals ready to devour unworthy souls.

This adventure can introduce Ancient Egyptian mythology into any campaign with remote trails, mysterious woods, or with a desert theme. The temple of Ma'at can suddenly appear anywhere in a whirlwind of sand or can be a part of ruins the party stumbles upon.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **MA'AT:** Goddess of the stars, harmony, truth, and justice. During creation, Ma'at was created by Ra and the god of magic, Heka, to bring order and cohesion of the newly forming universe making Ma'at one of the oldest of the Egyptian deities. Treat as a **deva**.
- **ATUM:** Atum created himself from a lotus flower and became the first deity. He is also the boatsman who takes souls to the underworld (also known as Atum-Ra). Treat as a **solar**.
- **AGRIPPA:** An ancient Roman general who passed to the underworld. He is handsome, middle-aged, and charismatic. Treat as a **gladiator**.
- **NEFURA:** Priestess of the goddess Hathor who has passed to the underworld. She is calm, quiet, and smart. Treat as an **archmage**.
- **NEPHTHYS:** Goddess of death who is known as the protector of souls and mummies. Treat as a **planetar**.
- **ISIS:** Goddess of life and the mother of all pharaohs. She symbolizes life and helps souls journey to the Sea of Reeds. Treat as a good-aligned **empyrean**.
- **OSIRIS:** God and ruler of underworld who is considered kind and giving. He is the husband of Isis. Treat as a good-aligned **empyrean**.
- **ISFET:** Evil aligned god of chaos and destruction. He is impulsive and despises harmony and peace. Treat as an **erinyes**.

Note: The good-aligned deities are high powered to emphasize the power and immortality of the gods.

CHAPTER 1 – THE TEMPLE OF MA'AT

Great, lotus tipped-pillars rise above the sandstone doorway. Paintings of a powerful goddess and her heroic feats wrap around the pillars. Large statues of a winged goddess are carved along the front of the temple. The temple door lies slightly ajar. A warm, twinkling light glows inside in shades of purple and blue welcoming travelers inside.

A round stone altar sits at the center of the room with a constellation carved into the stone and embedded with illuminated crystal stars. Silver torches burn with blue and purple magical fire revealing many detailed ancient wall paintings depicting a winged women heroically defeating an evil god and banishing him to the underworld. There are also depictions of the evil deity escaping and stealing her heart. A DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check identifies the winged goddess as Ma'at and the evil god as Isfet and their lore.

Lying on the altar are 3 glowing amethyst stones that fit perfectly in the many indentations that form a constellation. A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal that this is the constellation of Orion. A DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check of the altar will reveal a secret message saying, "The secret lies in the Great Pyramids of Giza." Placing the three stones in Orion's Belt will solve the puzzle. (The three pyramids of Giza were once aligned with the three stars of Orion's Belt.)

The third stone gently thuds into place and the altar suddenly glows with a bright, white light. A portal appears in the wall, and a woman quickly enters the room. A golden bird headdress adorns her fine black hair, and her winged arms reach out to place an amulet around each adventurer's neck with a sense of urgency. "With these you shall pass" she explains as she gestures for the party to step through the portal door deeper into the temple.

THE BOATSMAN

The next room leads to a massive cavern with a dim purple light shining down. A giant ancient-style boat made of reeds and wood floats in a large quiet river that leads off into an endless cave. A muscular man with eyes lined in kohl stands in the boat holding a crooked staff.

Ma'at's wings rustle as she quickly moves toward the boat. A man's sandal steps down from the boat and sinks into the sand as he holds out a concerned hand toward the goddess. You notice a large intricate beaded necklace around his neck and the folds of tunic lined with gold stitching as Ma'at greets her friend and easily climbs aboard without help. He waits calmly in silence for everyone to join them. The boat gently rocks as each person walks across its wooden deck. Ma'at stands tall at the stern with her mace gripped tightly in her hand. The boatman easily lifts a massive oar and silently pushes the it into the still water.

DUAT

The boat glides off into the darkness. Gradually a green light appears in the distance. Soon the boat leaves the cave and stops ashore of a desert. Ma'at jumps off the vessel like a seasoned athlete and asks the party to fight with her. She then runs ahead and disappears through the gate as Atum waits for the adventurers to step onto the sandy shore.

Everything is dark except a bright green light at the horizon as an eerie and unearthly sunrise begins to rise. The ground begins to tremble, and the sound becomes louder and louder. A giant horse-drawn chariot bursts forth from the horizon with a massive, falcon-headed god racing across the sky pulling a green fiery sun behind him. The sun seems so close you feel like you could reach out and touch it.

Everything is a strange shade of green in the Duat morning light. A large sandstone gate lies ahead covered in hieroglyphs. The *comprehend languages* spell will reveal the gate is covered in prayers for the deceased, and “The First Hour” is written across the top of the gate. Ma’at takes the lead and helped the party in battle as an NPC.

THE FIRST GATE

On a sandy hill, two wooden stakes are stuck in the ground. One has the head of a beholder and the other a head of a jackal. The two heads bicker with each other like old friends. Another gate lies ahead in the distance with a giant fire breathing snake wrapped around its columns.

When approached, the beholder immediately asks the party members to tell her a joke. The player must tell a joke and make a DC 13 Charisma (Performance) check. If the party fails to tell a joke or failed the check, roll from the Beholder’s Curse Random Encounter Table. On a success, roll from the Beholder’s Gift Roll table.

Note: After hearing 3 jokes, the beholder becomes bored and tells the players to go.

The jackal will answer questions, but will demand tribute for answers. Once players have laid something of value before the jackal, she will truthfully answer questions. She lies if the players fail to offer tribute.

Note: The beholder (**beholder zombie**) and jackal head (**spectator**) do not have a movement speed unless removed from the pikes. They do not attack unless intentionally harmed.

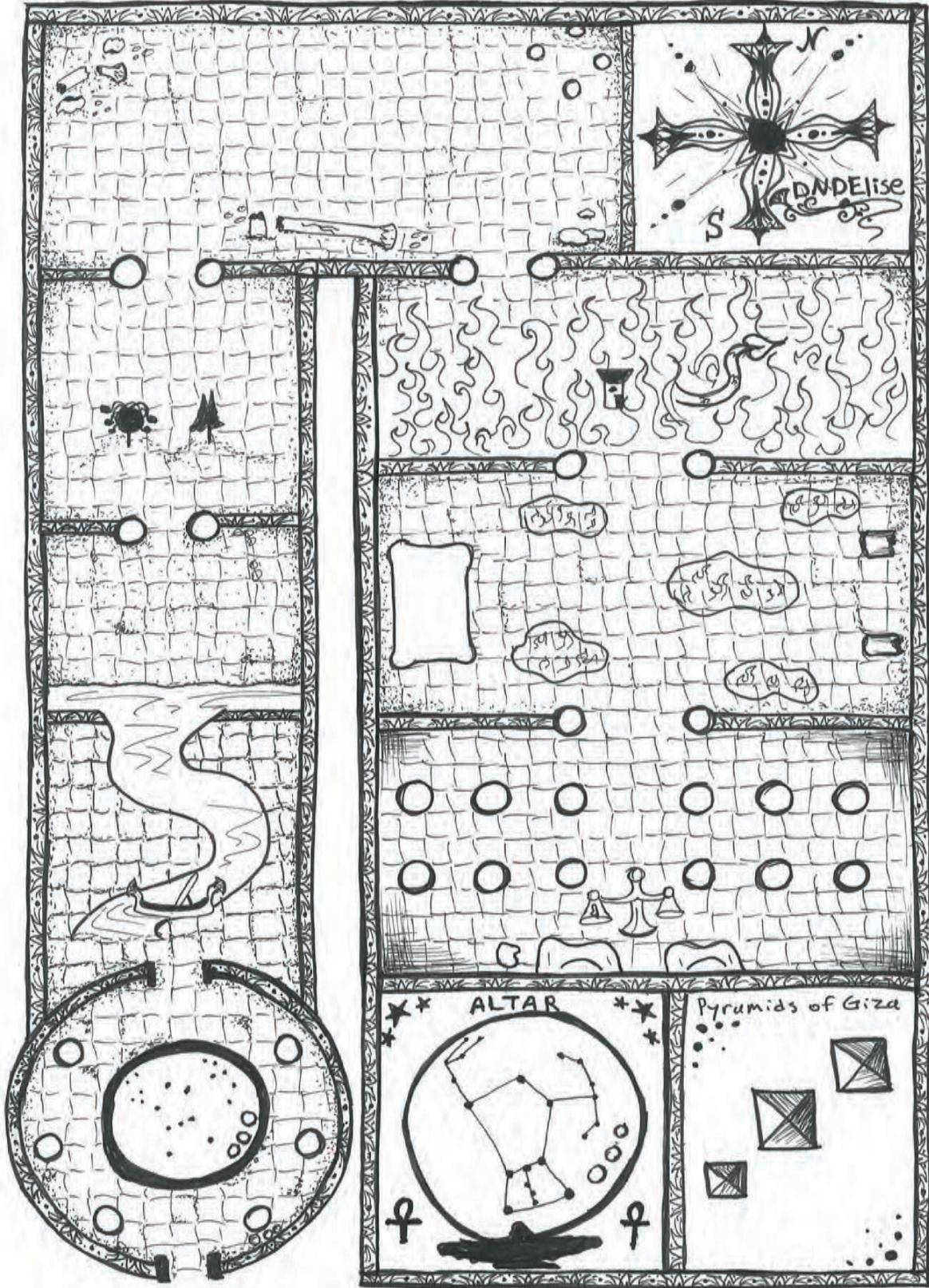
BEHOLDER’S CURSE RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLE

1d10	ENCOUNTER
1	A frost bolt falls from the sky and targets the character.
2	A wight suddenly appears and grapples the character.
3	1d10 angry death dogs appear in the form of jackals.
4	The character’s backpack rips and everything falls to the ground.
5	The <i>sword of vengeance</i> appears before the characters.
6	1d10 ancient zombies appear.
7	2 flaming draft horses pulling a chariot with an Egyptian shield guardian appear.
8	A red slaad with a sword riding a giant vulture appears.
9	A chalice full of poisoned wine appears before the character.
10	An Egyptian Queen wraith riding a warhorse skeleton appears.

BEHOLDER’S GIFT ROLL TABLE

1d10	ENCOUNTER
1	A scroll with the secret name of the fire breathing snake. Speaking the name Apothis will subdue the snake.
2	2 potions of greater healing appear.
3	1 trinket appears.
4	1 bag of caltrops appears.
5	1 flask of alchemist’s fire appears.
6	1 flask of fine wine appears.
7	1 <i>potion of invisibility</i> appears.
8	1 scroll of <i>chromatic orb</i> appears.
9	1 potion of speed appears.
10	1 scroll of <i>entanglement</i> appears.





PATH TO JUDGEMENT

The eerie, green sun is pulled further into the sky. Its solar flares arching in slow motion as they cast shadows onto slow moving lines of souls long passed. Ancient fallen ruins litter the landscape. You walk past many expressions, and the eyes of a woman in ancient clothing meet yours. You see Ma'at pushing through the crowds ahead toward the next gate.

Many lines of souls wind and meander the sandy landscape toward the next gate. 1d20 **snakes**, 1d12 **alligators**, and 1d4 **swarms of insects** infest and wander the vast sandy landscape. They only attack if the party gets within 10 ft. The jackals (**death dog**) devour the heavy hearted and weak souls. The jackals pursue characters with evil alignment. There are rows of large, fiery braziers that guide the lines of souls toward a nearby temple. A woman in priestess robes greets you. Her name is Nefura who was a high priestess of the goddess Hathor (Goddess of happiness, dance, and motherhood represented by horns and a solar disk.) She carries a beautiful silver sword. She introduces her friend Agrippa who was once a general of legions of military forces while he was alive. Nefura can tell you about Duat and about the gods Isis and Osiris who will weigh every soul's heart against Ma'at's feather of truth on their great scales. If souls full of evil outweigh the feather of truth, the soul disappears into oblivion.

LAKE OF FIRE

The entrance of the gate is guarded by a large fire breathing snake. It hisses fire as the party approaches and quickly slithers into a massive lake of white fire that blocks the path toward the next gate. Jackals weave in and out of the fire unscathed. Ma'at rushes into the flames with her mace in hand.

The *comprehend languages* spell reveals that the top of the gate says, "Only those with a true heart may pass." After passing through this gate, the only path forward is through the lake of fire. Those with an evil

alignment must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw for every 20 feet in the fire. On a failed save they take 1d12 psychic damage. All other alignments are unharmed by the flames.

The fire rises high above everyone's head. Occasionally spirits or mirages pass by as jackals playfully chase each other through the flames. Suddenly the face of a gentle, **ancient white dragon** appears, and an Egyptian goddess climbs down and approaches the party through the towering white flames. In a calming voice she says her name is Nephthys. She reaches out to touch one of the party members on the arm (restoring 1d12 hit points.) and asks them what their greatest fear is. If they answer her truthfully, she will guide the group to the next gate and her peaceful dragon will trail behind to ensure the party is unharmed. A DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals Nephthys as the goddess of death and protector of souls. Once the party is at the gate, she points south and says, "The creature you seek is there." Ahead are two massive statues of Osiris and Isis that seem to touch the sky.

APOTHIS

Small lakes of blue fire appear across the uneven sand. You wonder if your mind has played tricks on you. The giant statues ahead seem to have adjusted in a blink of an eye. Your focus is broken by a line of fire stretching out toward the party. A giant snake slithers from a nearby lake of fire and rears its head up high above the party. You see Ma'at stealthing behind a pillar ready to strike.

This sandy area has multiple lakes of fire and an empty abandoned temple with massive pillars. The temple is empty except for a few broken stone benches and a statue of an unknown goddess. A giant snake named Apothis (**spirit naga**, with a *breath weapon* from **chimera**) darts between the lakes of fire and comes out to strike at the party. Six **fire salamanders** and three **salamanders** slither out of the lakes of fire.

Creatures of evil alignment that touch the lakes of fire receive 1d12 psychic damage. Other alignments are not impacted.

HALL OF TWO TRUTHS

You enter an outdoor complex full of lotus-tipped pillars covered in beautifully painted hieroglyphs. Before you stands a massive scale with a gleaming, golden ostrich feather floating above one of the plates. Beyond the scales are two colossal statues. A booming women's voice asks, "Who enters?" as you realize the massive statues are the deities Isis and Osiris.

Suddenly, one side of the giant scales slams to the ground as a creature runs its hand along the other side. The Feather of Truth glows with gold light as it rejects the evil soul disturbing its sacred scale. Ma'at confronts Isfet and demands to have her heart back.

Isis and Osiris move in slow motion and are magically bound to their thrones. The evil god, Isfet, holds up a canopic jar holding Ma'at's heart as Ma'at firmly holds her mace to his neck. Giant braziers of fire light up Isfet who is dressed in a black tunic lined with gold trim. He carries a black *staff of power* and his face is gnarled and twisted like a lich. He sneers as he levitates up to place the jar on the scales, causing them to balance again (20 feet high). He comes back down to forcefully attack the party and Ma'at begins to strike him with her mace. 1d6 **mummies** appear. Everytime Isfet takes a turn, 1d10 **skeletons** appear.

When Ma'at makes contact with her heart in any way, she is suddenly lifted up in the air in a heavenly light. Magic and color burst from her being as her heart restores itself. She spreads her winged arms and slowly spins high in the air as she regains her power. Once the party weakens Isfet below 20 hp, Ma'at turns into a giant female **androsphinx** that dives toward Isfet. She pushes her powerful claws into Isfet as a great shockwave quakes across Duat. The goddess Isis raises her staff and the sand begins to whirlpool around creating a great swirling pit to oblivion. Isis's voice booms as she tells the party to finish Isfet who is now underfoot.

Once Isfet is thrown into oblivion, the ground quickly closes up and everything is peaceful again. The gods are released from their confinement. Ma'at returns to her human form and thanks the party for their great deed. The giant gods nod with approval. Isis

strikes the ground with her staff with a loud thunder creating a river back to the cave. Atum arrives with the reed boat and heads back to the temple. When everyone returns through the portal to the room with the altar, they see their bodies lying on the ground unconscious and pale with death. Ma'at tells them not to worry. She takes an amulet off a party member and their soul is reunited with their body. Their bodies are engulfed with healing light and they gasp for air as their body is brought back to life unharmed.

REWARDS

Once everyone is restored, Ma'at rewards the party for their valiance. The treasure reward for this adventure is at the DM's discretion. Any coins rewarded have ancient symbols on them.



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ART AND LORE BY JOHANNA TAYLOR

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12.2.2015

LAUMA

FOREST HAG VARIANT

Lauma, the moping matriarch of the woods, was once a kindly old spinster who lived in a lonely cottage in the forest. Unable to have children of her own, she would find and take care of children lost in the woods. She weaved clothes for them, comforted them, and protected them while awaiting the return of their parents. She would also take in orphan children and raise them as her own. Over time, her kind, motherly gestures were seen as malicious and greedy, and husbands and widowers accused Lauma of stealing the children. The bitter, hateful words leached out all of her beauty and grace, reducing her to a withered hag burdened by the clothes, dolls, and playthings of the children she's "protected." Now in the forest deep she weaves and waits, beckoning and beguiling children and child-sized travelers, promising to take them in and help them find their missing family, with the intent of keeping them for herself. Surely, she would make a better mother than the ones careless enough to lose their children in the forest. And so the lost will stay with her, tucked away in the misty, broken woods, with their blankets and their toys and the rotting remains of the other children and small adventurers she has abducted.

ARE YOU LOST, CHILD?

Lauma targets smaller adventurers and seeks not to hurt them; only to ensnare them and keep them with her forever. She may try to tempt them with toys, gifts, soup, and shelter in her cottage full of child skeletons and their belongings. She will assume a large adventurer is trying to lead the smaller one away from her if they attempt to leave after stumbling upon her or her cottage.

She has advantage on all perception checks involving small party members like gnomes, halflings, or goblins. If a small party member deals more than 15 points of damage to her, she will turn on them and attack them like any normal enemy.

STATS (D8 HIT DICE)

Medium Fey (Chaotic Neutral)

Armor Class: 17 (natural armor)

HP: 120 (13d8 + 26) **Speed:** 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21	7	15	13	14	15
(+5)	(-2)	(+2)	(+1)	(+2)	(+2)

Saving Throws: CON +5, WIS +5

Skills: Perception +5, Deception +3

Dmg Resist: bludgeoning, slashing, & piercing from non-magical attacks

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 15

Languages: Common, Elvish, Sylvan, Gnomish, Halfling, Goblin

Challenge Rating: 6 (2,400 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: Charisma (spell save DC 13). She can cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: Dancing Lights, Fog Cloud, Suggestion, Vicious Mockery

ACTIONS

Multiattack

Lauma makes 3 attacks: one with her claw (range 5 ft.), two with clawlike roots or branches that burrow and burst out of the ground (range 60 ft.).

Claws (Melee Weapon Attack)

+8 to hit, one target, reach 5 ft. (self) or up to 60 ft. (branches). Hit: 12 (3d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Mother's Embrace (Melee Weapon Attack)

+8 to hit, one target, reach 30 ft. Hit: 20 (5d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled by sharp, thorny tree branches if it is a Large creature or smaller (escape DC 16). Until the grapple ends, Large or Medium creatures take 14 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage at the start of Lauma's turn. Small creatures take no extra damage while grappled, but must roll with disadvantage to escape. Lauma cannot use her multiattack strikes until the grapple is broken.

Mother's Song

Lauma sings a sorrowful lullaby that can be heard up to 60 ft. away; the song of a mother looking for her lost child. Each humanoid creature within range that can hear Lauma that also has a dead parental figure or a dead child must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or fall into a melancholic trance. The entranced cannot take any actions or reactions and their movement is zero until the end of Lauma's next turn.

Bramble Trap

Thorny roots ripple and burst out around Lauma in a 20 ft. radius. The ground within the radius becomes difficult terrain for the next three turns.





TIER 3

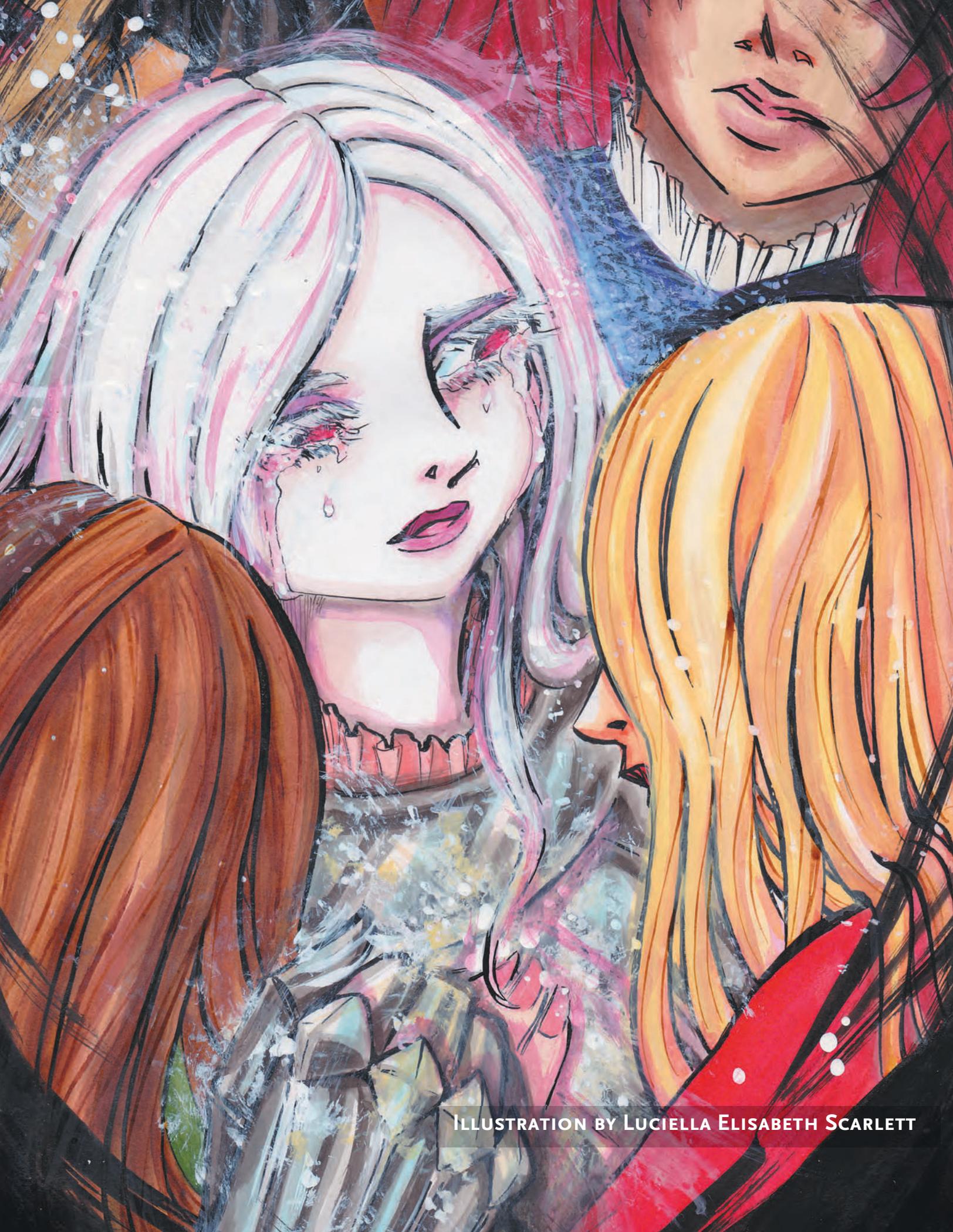


ILLUSTRATION BY LUCIELLA ELISABETH SCARLETT

GALATEYA'S WILL

by *Luciella Elisabeth Scarlett*

CREATURE: *Pygmalion's Statue* | **LEVEL(S):** 10-12

CW: *Narcissistic abuse, domestic violence*

SYNOPSIS

For over a decade, the necromancer Malion has hidden in the wilderness, creating golems infused with spirits of the dead in his obsessive search for perfect beauty. At long last, he produced a doll that he knew it to be his final masterpiece, and, knowing there was no mortal soul pure enough to complete his work, Malion prayed to the goddess of love to bring his statue to life. Against all odds, his blasphemous prayer was heard, and the furious goddess sent her servant to bring Malion to justice.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins with a meeting with Galateya within a mountain cave. Paladins, clerics, or others with a connection to the divine may sense something strange about the location and decide to investigate. Alternatively, the party may hear rumors that something was seen flying to this place, or may simply stumble across the angel while seeking shelter for the night.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventure can be placed anywhere with mountainous terrain. It assumes that the party are, at minimum, neutral, or preferably, good-aligned. Galateya accepts aid even from those whose motivations are less than pure, but not from evil beings who refuse to repent their ways.

Safety tools (e.g. lines and veils and the x and o cards) are highly recommended for this adventure.

STAT BLOCK ADJUSTMENTS

This adventure uses modified versions of stat blocks from the *Monster Manual*, as follows:

A *porcelain golem* (CR 4) is a **flesh golem** with the following adjustments:

- **APPEARANCE:** the golems take the form of women with unblemished skin, sleek hair, and perfectly symmetrical faces. Each has the same slender figure.
- **RADIANT AVERSION:** the golems are averse to radiant damage instead of fire damage.
- **NECROTIC ABSORPTION:** the golems absorb necrotic damage instead of lightning damage.
- **IMPERFECT DEFENSE:** remove all damage immunities except necrotic and poison. Increase AC to 15 (natural armor).

An *advanced doll* (CR 5) is a *porcelain golem* with the following additional changes:

- **ABILITY SCORES:** the doll has an Intelligence of 12 (+1), a Charisma of 14 (+2), and a Dexterity of 16 (+3). Its AC increases to 19 (natural armor).
- **LANGUAGES:** the doll is capable of speaking Common.
- **STEADY:** remove the *berserk* trait.
- **WEAPONS:** replace *slam* with a glaive attack as follows: Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage.

Malion (CR 12) is an **archmage** with the following adjustments:

- **SPELLS:** Replace his 5th level spells with the following: *chain lightning*, *cone of cold*, *mislead*. Replace the 4th level spell *fire shield* with *phantasmal killer*.

- **ITEMS:** Malion is equipped with the following items as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*:
 An *amulet of health* (his HP becomes 153).
 An *amulet of proof against detection and location* (he is immune to divination magic).
- **LAIR ACTIONS:** on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Malion can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects; he can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

Malion summons two specters at a point he can see within 120 feet of him.

Two objects that Malion can see within 120 feet of him animate by way of the *animate objects* spell.

Malion speaks a command word to trigger *glyphs of warding* laid on the floor at a point of his choice within 60 feet of him. Roll 1d6 to determine the outcome:

1-3: The glyph erupts in a 20-foot radius sphere centered on the glyph. Each creature in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 5d8 fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

4-5: Up to five creatures within a 30-foot-cube centered on the glyph must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or suffer the effects of the *bane* spell.

6: The glyph releases the spell *Evard's black tentacles*.

CHAPTER 1 — THE ANGEL IN THE CAVERN

Refer to the *Adventure Hooks* outlined on pg. 179, and then continue as follows:

The sun shines weakly in the morning, but as afternoon stretches into evening, rain begins to fall, gradually developing into a storm. Lightning flashes across the sky, answered by a roar of thunder. As your vision clears, one area continues to faintly glow. You cautiously approach the small cave, picking your way over the sodden ground, and as you do, the fury of the storm seems to subside and a calmness settles over you.

The cave is roughly 20 feet wide, with only a front entrance. It holds an injured (reduce HP to 25) **deva**.

An angel lies sprawled against the back of the cave. Her wings are tattered, and her glorious steel and gold armor is dented and broken, allowing garish wounds to drip onto the cave floor.

The angel can be roused if spoken to or if offered magical healing. She introduces herself as Galateya, and explains the following:

"I was sent to this world with orders to bring down a necromancer who lives in these mountains. I found the order... strange. I am accustomed to fighting fiends and wicked spirits, not human men. Yet it appears I underestimated his strength. He wields powerful magic, and he is guarded by constructs fueled by spirits of the dead. I fought as best I could, yet in the end, I was forced to flee.

"By dawn, my injuries will have healed, and I can return to my mission. I sense that you are warriors of no small skill, and as such, I ask two favors: that you protect me while I recover, and that you accompany me tomorrow and aid me in this task. Can I count on your support?"

GALATEYA HAS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- Malion's lair likely contains all manner of treasures. Galateya has no need of these.
- She is currently under orders by Sune, though she has worked for other gods in the past.
- There were at least twenty dolls in Malion's lair, perhaps more. Some were monstrous, while others seemed all too human. By law of Mount Celestia, undead are to be destroyed without mercy, but Malion comes first.
- DC 13 Wisdom (Insight): Galateya must abide by celestial law, but she secretly holds qualms about attacking intelligent — and perhaps innocent — beings.
- Malion's lair is about two hours away on foot or thirty minutes by flight, and lies in the cliffs alongside a swift-flowing river. Galateya knows of the main entrance, but there may be other ways in.

ROLE-PLAYING GALATEYA

Galateya's personality is calm, almost cold. She speaks politely and formally, with subtle arrogance. Magical healing closes her wounds, but she must rest before she can move again.

DEVELOPMENT

During the night, three porcelain golems track down Galateya's location. The golems attack viciously and without intelligence. They were ordered to take Galateya alive but have no qualms about killing her allies. Galateya herself is of little help in the fight; she can barely move.

- **INVESTIGATION:** the design of the golems is unfamiliar, but they hold traces of necromantic magic. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check identifies that the porcelain is a combination of crystal, clay, and bone.
- By dawn, Galateya has recovered and is keen to return to her mission. Continue to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 — NECROMANCER'S LAIR

From the outside, the only sign of the necromancer's lair is a small crack in an otherwise unbroken cliff face. If Galateya had not pointed it out, you may have missed the place. Looking closely, you can faintly see the shapes of figures waiting inside.

"This is the main entrance," Galateya explains. "The necromancer will be expecting me, I am sure. But perhaps there is another path..." She indicates the roaring river below, fed by a waterfall that gushes over the cliffs up ahead. *"I sensed something down there before, and now I am sure of it: there are dead creatures hiding in the mountain, some of them very close by."*

"What do you suggest? Should we enter through the front, or seek another way?"

1: FRONT ENTRANCE

The front entrance connects to Area 5 (Living Chambers) by a narrow stone passageway. It is guarded by four porcelain golems. If a fight breaks out, the noise draws two advanced dolls that arrive on the third

round: one with curly black hair and an olive complexion (Rhea) and a blonde doll with ivory skin (Phoebe). Rhea calls out a warning: "Leave now, if you value your lives."

- **NEGOTIATION:** Phoebe is nervous and shy. She follows Rhea's lead, and flees inside if left alone. Rhea is loath to trust strangers but has her doubts about Malion. Her closest friend, Laura, disappeared two weeks ago, and she knows nothing of her fate. Refer to Area 5 for further guidance.
- **TACTICS:** The golems attack without intelligence until ordered otherwise. The advanced dolls coordinate intelligently to bring down the adventurers one by one.

2: SIDE ENTRANCE

The place where Galateya senses another entrance is down in the ravine. If no precautions are taken, characters without a flight speed must succeed on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to safely descend, taking up to 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure. The entrance itself is a crevice half hidden beneath the waterfall, which connects to Area 3.

3: SCRAP HEAP

The room is dark save for the sliver of light peering in from Area 2.

The air is still and cold, with a faintly unpleasant odor of iron and decay. Dust swirls and spiders scutter away beneath your feet as you gaze upon the scene before you. Countless life-sized dolls are piled to the ceiling, some still perfect even beneath coatings of dust, others torn into pieces. Their empty eyes leer down at you, lifeless yet ever so lifelike. In between them you catch glimpses of other shapes—scraps of decayed skin and flesh and dried up puddles of old blood dotted across the floor.

This rough cavern is Malion's dumping ground for failed experiments. Occasionally, a porcelain golem enters from Area 4. Unless it spots intruders, it dumps its burden and returns the way it came.

- **INVESTIGATION:** There are no full corpses, only discarded dolls and remnants of bodies torn apart

through Malion's experimentation. The dolls have been stripped of valuables aside from small personal trinkets. Hidden amongst the piles is a single advanced doll that still contains a shred of life, though her face and half her body is splintered and broken. She cannot move or speak without assistance. Divine magic is ineffective, but mending, prestidigitation, or creation can restore her broken tongue.

- **ROLEPLAY:** The doll's name is Laura. Her eyes are unfocused, her sanity in tatters. She alternates between curses and frantic, repeated apologies. She has the same information as the dolls in Area 5, plus the following:

1. All the dolls were once human. It is faint, but Laura can remember some of her former life. She and Rhea were sisters. They lived in a village further north.

2. Malion lied. He said that the dolls were his prized children, but they were merely experiments. All this time, he has been working to create a new, perfect doll. Eliza is nearly finished, and once she is, the other dolls will be thrown on the scrap heap.

- **EXITS:** This area connects to Area 4 by a staircase and an iron door barred on the other side. The door can be opened with a successful DC 20 Strength check, with relevant spells, or by waiting for the golem to pass through.



MAP BY LUCIELLA ELISABETH SCARLETT

4: WORKSHOP

Arcane light illuminates a set of workbenches scattered with spools of wire, boxes of spell components, loose pages of messy notes, and occasionally, a more ominous sign of the workshop's true purpose: scattered fragments of porcelain and blank resin eyes.

A single porcelain golem works inside, cleaning and carrying waste to Area 3. It attacks any who enter, including other dolls.

- **TREASURE:** By spending time to search the room, the party can find the following:
 - Various spell components, including gemstones to the value of 4,000 GP.
 - A mortar and pestle next to a box of desiccated human bones.
 - A diary of Malion's experiments, largely consisting of a list of his complaints about each failure, ranging from "too ugly" to "too argumentative." Names are included. On the last page of the diary, amidst a mess of arcane notation is another name: "Eliza."
 - Detailed instructions as to the creation of a golem. These are written in arcane notation, which takes several weeks to decipher and a year to master.
 - An old and well-worn copy of a religious text describing the worship of Sune.
- **EXITS:** a solid iron door connects to Area 3. This door has a locking bar on the inside. A second door connects to Area 5.

5: LIVING CHAMBERS

A palace of marble and gold stretches out before you, lit by cream-tinged driftglobes floating between tall pillars and lavish water features. Couches and coffee tables are scattered across the space, surrounded by porcelain women clad in silk and brocade, who chat and play card games.

This area houses twenty-five advanced dolls. If the party are allied with Rhea and Phoebe, those two introduce them. Otherwise, the dolls are unprepared and startled by the party's arrival. If combat breaks out, add

2d4 dolls per round. If, however, the party attempts diplomacy, use the following points:

- The dolls saw Galateya before, but only briefly: Malion emerged from his workshop, shouting for the other dolls to capture her, but the wounded angel fled swiftly. Malion's rage was terrible to behold, yet he quickly calmed and retreated to his chambers. He has not been seen since.
- For the most part, Malion treats them well, though he can be frightening at times. Many have been tempted to flee, but they have no reason to believe that the outside world is safer than their home.
- The dolls are proud of their strength and beauty and react poorly to suggestions that they are defective. They have no memory of being anything other than dolls.
- The lesser golems are failures, limited to menial tasks. The other dolls know they are superior and believe they have Malion's favor.
- Sometimes defective dolls return to Malion's workshop and are never seen again. The most recent doll to disappear was Laura, Rhea's closest friend. Laura had tried to stir rebellion amongst the dolls. Malion must have found out, one way or another.
- Unless summoned, the dolls are forbidden to enter either the workshop or Malion's chambers, on pain of death. This is no idle threat: both doors are trapped, and likely guarded by golems. No one has been invited into Malion's workshop for days now, which is unusual.

NEGOTIATION: The dolls are divided. Some are rebellious, others loyal, and many are simply frightened. The split depends on the specific arguments used, but regardless, the dolls must see or hear compelling evidence before they allow the party to enter Malion's chambers.

TREASURE: Area 5 is an open area broken only by marble pillars. It contains a range of amusements for the dolls, including cards, chess, and books, along with weapons that they can skirmish with (glaives, swords, shields, etc.). The area also holds fine dresses, perfumes, and jewelry worth a total of 10,000 GP.

EXITS: Area 5 connects to Areas 1, 4, and 6. A passageway connects to Area 1, shielded only by sets of curtains. The entrance to Area 4 is a stern iron door, and the entrance to Area 6 consists of double doors of polished wood. Both doors are trapped (DC 17)

with glyphs of warding that deal 31 (7d8) acid damage unless they speak the passphrase: “Eliza.”

DEVELOPMENT

On receiving evidence of Malion’s true nature, the majority of the dolls choose to fight alongside Galateya and the party, angrily shaking off any suggestion that they avoid implication. Meanwhile, a minority remains either frightened or unconvinced, and choose to remain apart from the fight and hope that Malion will be merciful if they do not succeed. A smaller group chooses to flee altogether.

Galateya says little of the alliance, save that her primary mission is to defeat Malion. Whatever comes next can wait.

Continue to *Chapter 3* when the party heads to Area 6.

CHAPTER 3 — FINAL SHOWDOWN

When the time comes to confront Malion at last, Galateya has no intention of hiding. She must face him head on. She asks that the others assist in whatever way they can.



6: MALION'S PRIVATE CHAMBER

A short passageway leads into a broad chamber only slightly smaller than the one you entered from. Two figures are seated at a coffee table at the center of the room. The first is a porcelain doll dressed in a pure white lace gown. Her face is expressionless, still, and impossibly, inhumanly perfect. Beside her is a man who seems almost hideous in contrast. His hair is carefully groomed, his clothes clearly expensive, yet the man beneath them is entirely average, and unmistakably human.

He watches curiously as Galateya strides forward. “*Necromancer Malion,*” she declares, “*I grant you one last chance. Surrender now and repent your crimes, or die where you stand.*”

Malion gazes past her to the dolls fanning out across the room. “*I see you have brought friends this time. Traitors, the lot of them. But it doesn’t matter anymore. Not now that I have you. Tell me, Galateya, do you know why your goddess sent you to me?*”

“*Only to destroy you,*” Galateya snarls, and rushes forward, swinging her mace. It flies straight through the image of Malion, which distorts and shatters as the sound of his laughter fills the room.

CREATURES: rows of porcelain golems stand at attention along the sides of the room. They attack on command, and Rhea leads the advanced dolls to counter. Treat this as part of the narrative rather than tracking attacks and HP. Malion has cast *mislead* on the party’s arrival. As Galateya searches for him, his words echo around the chamber:

“*I once studied at your goddess’s temple. I was rejected then. They could not understand the beauty of my creations. But I remained faithful.*”

“*I continued to study. My creations grew more and more beautiful, yet there was always something missing. What use was a perfect face without a perfect spirit to animate it? But the goddess heard my prayer. She sent a spirit of pure goodness and pure obedience—far purer than any wretched human soul.*”

TACTICS: Malion reveals himself by casting chain lightning on the party. He uses phantasmal force on whoever appears to be the greatest threat, and uses misty step and teleport to remain at a range. He avoids attacking Galateya and focuses on the party. Malion is ultimately unrepentant: if his fortunes turn, he tries to flee rather than beg forgiveness, though he does not count on Galateya's speed.

TREASURE: Malion's chambers contain 12,000 gp of gemstones, 500 pp, a *carpet of flying*, a crystal ball, and a copy of his spellbook.

DEVELOPMENT

Upon Malion's defeat, go to the *Conclusion*.

CONCLUSION

Stunned silence settles for a moment, until, just as swiftly, that calm breaks. All across the room, women begin to cry, to laugh with relief, and to spit curses. Some stand alone, shocked and silent, while others cling to each other for support as though they fear letting go.

Galateya watches it all, hand clenched tightly around her mace, until she sighs and lowers her weapon. Her radiant eyes dim, becoming more mundane as a slight smile graces her lips. "I can't do it," she says aloud.

By divine law, Galateya must destroy any undead she encounters. By refusing to do so, she has lost her connection to Mount Celestia. She holds no regrets; if anything, she is grateful to Sune for showing her the meaning of free will. She intends to remain with the dolls to protect them and make sure that they find a place to call home. She knows that the adventurers have a different destiny and wishes them well on their journey.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS:

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE	TOTAL XP
Deva	5,900
Porcelain golem	1,100
Advanced doll	1,800
Malion	8,400

Grant additional XP based on the roleplay milestones accomplished:

MILESTONE	XP PER CHARACTER
Alliance with Galateya	1,500
Alliance with the dolls	3,000

TREASURE REWARDS:

As described in the relevant section of the adventure text.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

In Greek mythology, Pygmalion created a statue so beautiful that he fell in love with it and prayed to Aphrodite to bring his statue to life. I wonder: what was the goddess thinking when she granted that wish? Perhaps we can see Galateya, the spirit she sent, as a gift to Pygmalion in appreciation of his hard work and artistry. Perhaps instead, we can see free will and independence as Galateya's own gifts.

Thank you to my playtesters: Jess Buttriss, Chris Booth and Jayden James, to all the Uncaged contributors who helped shape this adventure, and especially to Ashley Warren for bringing this incredible project to life!

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ILLUSTRATION BY KAYLA CLINE

LEGEND OF THE WHITE SNAKE

by Lysa Chen

CREATURE: *Lady White Snake* | **LEVEL(S):** 11-16

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Chinese legend of Lady White Snake, like a serpent shedding its skin, is a tale that's been renewed many times. At its core, it is a tale of a water snake granted magic and human form when a mortal man drops a god's gift of immortality into the river. It is a story of friendship in which the white snake saves a green snake's life and shares her powers. It is a story of jealousy in which a turtle spirit covets their immortality and plots against them. It is a story of selflessness in which the white snake sacrifices all—trapped in a pagoda for eternity—to save, from the turtle spirit, the same mortal man she's grown to love.

But in some retellings, it is a story of evil and good, Lady White Snake, an evil demon, and the turtle, a well-intentioned monk. Or it is a story of treachery, the green snake betraying her closest friend.

This adventure embodies the multi-faceted nature of the original legend transformed over centuries. The town's healer, Lady White, has been captured, and everyone in the village has a different story to tell. It's up to the characters to decide who they trust, what they believe, and what they're going to do about it. This 90-minute adventure is intended for a party of five level 11-16 characters.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The adventure is broken down into two parts, with one preface you must prepare:

- **PART 0.** Determine the “hidden truth” of this instance of the adventure. This will decide who the characters face at the end.

- **PART 1.** The adventurers arrive in the village of West Lake during the annual tea festival and swiftly discover something's awry: West Lake's healer is missing. Interrogating the villagers, the party hears many stories that don't add up.
- **PART 2.** The characters discover Lady White's prison. Do they free her to save an innocent or to slay a monster? And have they been followed by the true enemy all along? This adventure can have many endings.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

This adventure and locale can be dropped in during your party's wilderness travels, or perhaps your adventurers have heard rumors to lead them in this direction.

- **TEA FOR TWO... OR A PARTY OF FIVE.** The village of West Lake's tea festival is renowned for its charm and delicious brews. It's said the only way to experience these small-batch blends is to visit this annual event.
- **SECRETS OF IMMORTALITY AND POWER.** It's said the villagers of West Lake never age. It's said they never grow sick. If the rumors are true, there must be a way to acquire this power.



PART 0. SNAKE IN THE GRASS

There are many different “bad guys” in the different versions of Lady White Snake’s story. It’s time to determine yours. Roll 1d20 to decide which of the following main NPCs is the enemy of this adventure and the truth they cover up.

CHOOSE YOUR ENEMY

D20 HIDDEN TRUTH

1-5 Brother Two-Head Terrin: He’s secretly jealous of Lady White’s immortality and strength and hopes killing her will release the power for him to claim.

6-10 Lil Green: She acts sweet and shy, but truthfully, she’s always been jealous of Lady White’s status. If she can lure adventurers to Lady White’s prison, perhaps they can free her, and Lil Green can defeat her “sister” when she’s weak.

11-15 Xu Xian: His love for Lady White faded when he saw her true nature. Now all he wants is her power to heal, so his mysterious sickness goes away.

16-20 Lady White: She’s been nurturing the town until she can consume their souls all at once. If someone’s fool enough to free her, she can complete her plot.

PART 1. SPILL THE TEA... FESTIVAL

Estimated Duration: 30 minutes

The characters arrive at the lakeside village of West Lake as the annual tea festival is in full swing. Enjoying the festivities and chatting with townsfolk, the adventurers learn a pillar of the community has gone missing.

GENERAL FEATURES

West Lake is a small village along the edge of a lake by the same name. It is couched by mountains on all sides.

- **WEATHER.** Puffy white clouds dot the sky but do nothing to block the brilliant summer sun.
- **LIGHT.** It’s sunny, almost too sunny, as the light shimmers and bounces off the lake.
- **SMELLS AND SOUNDS.** The air is perfumed by a variety of tea blends and filled with the laughter and chatter of festival goers.

Rounding West Lake, you approach a village of brightly painted houses with clay-tiled roofs and paneled walls thrown open to welcome the breeze. Small docks protrude from the buildings into the water, while some buildings float entirely in the lake. Temporary stalls draped in patterned cloths add more color to the village and line the main street and a small bridge that connects two parts of the town. It is the West Lake tea festival! The breeze is perfumed with herbal, fruity, and tannic notes wafting from the stalls.

CHOOSE A PERSONALITY

D6 PERSONALITY QUIRK

- 1 Speaks only in whispers
- 2 Constantly touches their own hair
- 3 Calls everybody “darling”
- 4 Nervously laughs between sentences
- 5 Loves puns
- 6 Is SUPER SNOBBY about tea

CHOOSE A RUMOR

D6 RUMOR

- 1 There’s a cold going around. The town never used to get sick, but one of the apothecaries has gone missing and the other is too sick to work.
- 2 The tea festival just isn’t the same without Lady White’s medicinal teas.
- 3 If Lil Green asks you to try her teas, don’t. They’re awful.
- 4 You should have come to last year’s tea festival. I don’t know what was in Brother Terrin’s tea-infused wine, but I think I hallucinated someone turned into a big snake!
- 5 Have you been to the Four Winds Pagoda? Aside from the festival, it’s the only thing worth seeing in this town.
- 6 I think the Four Winds Pagoda is haunted! I heard strange noises coming from the top floor one night, but Brother Terrin chased me off for trespassing.

TALKING TO THE KEY NPCs

Your party should cross paths with at least one of these key NPCs. Interactions with the townsfolk are designed to direct the adventurers to these characters.

BROTHER TWO-HEAD TERRIN

Brother Two-Head Terrin can be found observing the tea festival from the bridge that divides the town. The Broken Bridge has several broken railings, but the stone floats in place as if the bridge were complete. If asked about Lady White, Brother Terrin hopes to direct adventurers to the Four Winds Pagoda to defeat her permanently. He can share the following information:

- Terrin mentions he always suspected Lady White was hiding something and up to no good. He is not upset she is missing.
- Terrin is a monk who honors the Four Winds and tends to the nearby Four Winds Pagoda.
- A year ago, before the tea festival, the Four Winds visited Terrin's dreams and revealed Lady White was not a human but a terrible demon sent to destroy West Lake. Terrin concocted a potion to reveal Lady White's true nature. He tricked her into drinking it at the tea festival, and sure enough, she transformed into a giant white snake.
- After the tea festival, the Four Winds captured Lady White and trapped her in the pagoda. He hears terrible hissing and rattling come from the pagoda at night. He fears the day she escapes.
- Believing the characters to be mighty adventurers, Terrin wants them to enter the pagoda and defeat the monster.
- A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Terrin is hiding something. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check convinces him to share he is the one who lured Lady White to the pagoda, using Xu Xian as bait. He insists it was for the greater good.

ROLE-PLAYING BROTHER TWO-HEAD TERRIN

Brother Two-Head Terrin is a male turtle with yellow and green skin, crimson dots on his cheeks, and, notably, two heads. He is a devout monk who tends to the grounds of the Four Winds Pagoda.

Terrin speaks slowly with one head starting each sentence and, after a long pause, the other head finishing it. He also has a habit of talking to himself out loud. Literally.

LIL GREEN

Lil Green can be found weaving her way through the tea festival crowds, trying to convince passersby to try her tea blends. If asked about Lady White, Lil hopes to direct adventurers to the Four Winds Pagoda to save the woman she considers her big sister. She can share the following information:

- Lil is suspicious of the characters at first, wondering who in the town put them up to this. Since the events of the last tea festival, many townsfolk have teased Lil, knowing she is close to Lady White.
- A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Lil the adventurers are not mean-spirited. Lil shares that rumors about last year's tea festival are true. Lady White did transform into a snake, but she is misunderstood. Lady White is not a monster in hiding; she is a river spirit who has chosen to live as a human.
- A successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Lil to divulge she was once a snake herself. A young man intended to slice her open, but Lady White transformed into a human and purchased the snake from him instead. She even shared her powers with Lil, allowing her to be a human, too.
- Lil knows Terrin was the one to reveal Lady White's secret to the town and suspects he has trapped her in the Four Winds Pagoda.
- Believing the characters to be mighty adventurers, Lil wants them to enter the pagoda and save Lady White.

ROLE-PLAYING LIL GREEN

Lil Green was once a green garden snake before Lady White shared her magical gifts, including the gift to transform into a human. She appears as a Shou woman in her twenties with olive skin and black hair.

Lil is fascinated by human mannerisms and sometimes can be caught staring at others and copying their motions. When confronted directly, she is nervous and shy, speaking her s's with a s-s-stutter.

XU XIAN

Xu Xian can be found in the shuttered town apothecary that he used to run with his wife. He's been sick since last year's tea festival, and although he once had powerful healing powers, he hasn't been able to cure himself. Xu is resigned to his fate and just wants the characters to leave him alone. However, if they mention Lady White, he springs to life, sending himself into a coughing fit, and asks what they've heard. He can share the following information:

- He fell in love with Lady White when they were apothecary apprentices. Although they both proved to be skilled healers, the mysteries of herbal medicines seemed to share their secrets with Lady White naturally... perhaps magically.
- He never questioned this until last year's tea festival. Brother Terrin insisted he and his wife try a special tea-infused wine. They drank the tea, and Lady White transformed into this monstrous snake-like creature. The creature fled.
- A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Xu to share the rest of the story. Lady White returned to their home, in human form, but Xu Xian no longer felt safe. Brother Terrin convinced him Lady White was a danger, and Xu helped Terrin lure Lady White to the Four Winds Pagoda by pretending he was captured. Lady White was captured, and Xu hasn't seen her since.
- Xu has continued to grow sicker since that day and can no longer practice medicine. Unable to cure himself, he wonders if he is dying of a broken heart or a guilty conscience.
- Believing the characters to be mighty adventurers, Xu wishes for them to enter the pagoda and determine if he made the right choice.

ROLE-PLAYING XU XIAN

Xu Xian is a Shou man in his late fifties with black hair peppered with streaks of grey and an unkempt beard. Once the town's apothecary, along with his missing wife Lady White, Xu has fallen ill. He wears simple

linen robes often soaked with cold sweat.

Speaking is a struggle for Xu. He talks in short phrases and labored intakes of breath.

PART 2. SHEDDING TRUTHS & LIES

Estimated Duration: 60 minutes

Whether directed by Brother Two-Head Terrin, Lil Green, Xu Xian, or all of the above, the characters find themselves at the Four Winds Pagoda.

GENERAL FEATURES

Four Winds Pagoda stands atop a plateau overlooking West Lake. A garden of fragrant white flowers and berried bushes surround the aged stone pagoda. The pagoda is 20 feet in diameter and 80 feet tall. Faded paint on the stone surface outside depicts false windows filled with fantastical creatures peering from inside. Crimson wooden doors, 10 feet wide and 15 feet tall, are set into the base.

- **Weather.** Sporadic gusts of wind swirl around the plateau, seemingly from all directions.
- **Light.** The sun shines just as brightly here. If the characters visit at night, the moon is full, the sky is clear, and the white flowers emanate a slight warm glow.

As characters enter the pagoda, read the following text:

The inside walls of the Four Winds Pagoda are painted in brilliant hues, yellow, red, blue, and green swirls outlined in gold on every inch of stone. Suspended 40 feet in the air is a large creature: half-snake, half-woman armored in pearlescent white scales, with gleaming scimitars that hang by her sides.

Lady White (a **marilith**) is trapped inside an invisible bubble-like prison. While trapped, she cannot harm those outside and cannot be harmed. Her goal is to convince the characters to help her escape through persuasion or trickery.

If the characters are hostile to Lady White, she taunts them. If they want to kill her, if they want to gain her power, they can only do that by freeing her first.

If the characters talk to Lady White to help her, she can share the following:

- Lady White used to be a simple river snake. When Xu Xian was a young boy, he was visited by one of the Four Winds, who gifted him a seed of immortality. Not understanding this gift, Xu Xian threw it into the river where Lady White ate it.
- Lady White always felt grateful to Xu Xian, and, after she transformed into a woman, they fell in love. Lady White dedicated her magic to supporting the apothecary and the town.
- Brother Terrin is simple-minded and doesn't understand her nature. Perhaps he even wants her immortality for himself. He tricked her into drinking a potion that revealed her true form to the town. Then he convinced Xu Xian to pretend to be captured, and in trying to save her husband, Lady White became trapped instead.
- She wants to be reunited with Xu Xian.

ROLE-PLAYING LADY WHITE

Lady White appears as a pale Shou woman in elegant robes, with a winding snake's tail where her legs would be. She speaks with a gentle, measured tone always, even when angry — especially when angry. Her movements are smooth and gliding, and when she swings her scimitars, it is like a whirling dervish of blades.

FREEING LADY WHITE

The only way to free Lady White is by shedding truths and lies. Each character must share with the group a deep truth about themselves they've never spoken before. If the characters have lied to each other, then only admitting that lie and sharing the truth will suffice.

Once the truths are spoken, the invisible barrier shimmers and disperses, and Lady White floats gently to the ground.

WHO DO THEY FACE?

If the characters attack Lady White, she defends herself. Otherwise, the ending depends on your results of *Part 0*:

- If you rolled Brother Two-Head Terrin (a **warlord**), he followed the adventurers to ensure they killed Lady White. If they do not, he attacks. Lady White, weakened, escapes to safety.

- If you rolled Lil Green (a marilith), she followed the adventurers hoping they'd free Lady White so Lil Green could attack. She gets one opportunity attack as Lady White tries to flee; if she hits, she knocks her unconscious and then attacks the party.
- If you rolled Xu Xian (an archdruid), he followed hoping the adventurers would extract the secret to Lady White's medicinal powers. He attacks, while Lady White escapes to safety.
- If you rolled Lady White (a **marilith**), she was a demon after all and attacks.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lysa Chen has designed *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures for Wizards of the Coast and the Adventurers League. With roots in event organizing for her local AL scene, Lysa's passion lies in growing and creating a more inclusive *D&D* community. She serves as a Community Manager for Dungeon Masters Guild and the Adventurers League and produces and hosts Behold Her, a podcast about women in the world of tabletop games. You can follow her on Twitter @mercyfuldm, or visit her website: lysachen.com.





MADNESS OF THE VALKYRIES

by Asa Wheatley

CREATURE: *Valkyrie* | LEVEL(S): 12 | CW: *Infanticide*

SYNOPSIS

Hundreds of years have passed since the great war of Valhalla, but the repercussions are known throughout the lands. The Valkyries were once Odin's greatest warriors who ferried the dead to the eternal resting place of Valhalla. Odin tells it that their duties asked too much of them and their minds were corrupted. In fits of uncontrollable rage and anguish, they began to slaughter the warriors they once protected. Only four Valkyries survived the war; in their cowardice, they fled to Midgard and hid amongst the mortals. You have been tasked with finding the last Valkyrie and destroying her, once and for all ending the Madness of the Valkyries. But there may be more to learn in the once-great halls. *Madness of the Valkyries* is a 3-5 hour adventure for characters of 12th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

As a one-shot, the adventure dives straight in with the party having already accepted the challenge as their boat crests onto the shores of Grojtfall; however, it is possible to integrate The Stranger into a campaign and have the hook for the adventure appear more naturally within an existing world.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

There was a great war for the honor of Valhalla, but the tales known to the wider world are skewed by Odin's lies. The Valkyries were not crazed; it was Odin who forced Valhalla into a war with the Valkyries. Odin was a cruel master who abused his position. When one of the Valkyries returned to Valhalla bearing a half-mortal child, Odin's anger could not be contained and he murdered both the Valkyrie and her child.

The remaining Valkyries revolted against their master, seeking vengeance for their fallen sister. And so, the war began. Not one to be maligned, Odin spread word of the Madness of the Valkyries — a lie he created to protect his position. Now Odin disguises himself as The Stranger, seeking adventurers to kill the Valkyries for him as he fears defeat at their hands.

A note on the gods and pantheons: This adventure works best using the Norse pantheon as presented in the 5th Edition *Player's Handbook*. However, as in our world, many different regions and peoples worship different gods, so it is plausible that none of the party will worship or have encountered the Norse pantheon before this adventure.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **THE STRANGER:** He looks like nothing more than a one-eyed old man in a black cloak, but hiding in this disguise is the powerful god Odin. He recruits adventurers to kill the Valkyries for him as he is too afraid to do it himself. He uses his influence to spread lies about them and their supposed betrayal to instill a hatred for them among the people.
- **SKULD:** The last of the Valkyries. There were nine sisters who served Odin. After the war, Skuld and three of her sisters managed to escape with their lives, but now only Skuld remains. She is waiting to die and wishes only that it be in battle to noble fighters, as she knows her death brings about the rise of her daughters.

CHAPTER 1 — THE RUINS OF GROJTFALL

The waves rock your boat softly as you approach land. Mount Verogur lies ahead, an imposing stone monument to the Gods. You remember the words of The Stranger: "*Mount Verogur, that is where your greatest challenge awaits.*" His dark hood covered most of his face, but the gnarled skin of a well-travelled man showed from within. As he spoke, the tavern-goers around you shifted their attention to him. "*The Valkyries were nine sisters, the greatest of warriors and the ferriers of the dead to the great Valhalla. Odin cherished them, but their minds were not strong enough, and in horrific fits of uncontrollable rage, they slaughtered those they had once carried to Valhalla. Odin fought well and protected the great realm, but four of the treacherous Valkyries escaped to Midgard and hid among the mortals.*" You remember this tale from your childhood — you remember the Madness of the Valkyries and how people would claim it had afflicted women prone to anger and hysterics. The Stranger continued and spoke of rumours: the location of the final Valkyrie, Skuld, at Mount Verogur. "*Grojtfall, the town located at the base of the great mountain, is plagued with attacks from the undead — warriors trapped in this realm after the Valkyries abandoned their positions.*" An unusual silence filled The Axe and Bear, and it was not long before you finished your drinks and sought a vessel to take you to Grojtfall. You asked for no reward or thanks. You took it upon yourselves to seek out the Valkyrie, for you are heroes, after all.

The boat crests onto sand, and you are brought back to Grojtfall--or at least what remains. The town, only 100 feet ahead, lies in ruin. Bodies--those of the undead, some seemingly humanoid others larger and more grotesque — line the streets beneath crumbled buildings and shattered statues. Everything is still in Grojtfall. As you step farther in, closer to the looming mountain, you spot two figures, searching through the ruins.

The attacks from the undead were summoned by Odin as a way to seed animosity towards the last remaining Valkyrie, Skuld, who resides on Mount Verogur.

SPEAKING WITH SURVIVORS

If the party approach the figures, they see two humans, a male and a female, both around 40-50 years old, searching through the ruins for some of their possessions. The male, Karagad, is stern and harsh. His wife, Thora, mostly stays quiet. Karagad blames the Valkyrie for the destruction of the town, and if the party inquires, he tells them there are rumours she lies hidden in her halls for someone to challenge her.

DEVELOPMENT

Mount Verogur looms over the town of Grojtfall and is hard to miss. Whether the party speaks with the survivors or not, the next step in their journey is to climb the mountain.

CHAPTER 2 — MOUNT VEROGUR

THE CLIMB

This climb is not arduous or hard, but it is important to convey the time it takes and the heights to which the party climbs. Mount Verogur is over 5,000 feet above sea level. Skuld waits hidden behind the Hall of the Valkyries for noble adversaries to challenge her to battle.

As you begin your ascent of Mount Verogur, you are stunned by its immense and imposing size. You trek for hours, and the higher you climb, the colder the environment around you becomes. As night draws near, you come across a large alcove to the east of your path. You take a quick look and see a set of grand doors await you.

DEFENDERS OF THE LEGACY

As you make your way towards the doors, you see they were once elegantly carved and intricately decorated, but over time, they have lost their beauty. They stand 20 feet high and 15 feet wide; three female figures with blue war paint decorating their skin and armour, wielding spears and shields, guard the entrance.

This is the Entrance to The Hall of the Valkyries, and guarding the doors are three Shield Maidens, if you are playing with a large party, add more Shield Maidens so there is one fewer Shield Maiden than players. For the purposes of combat, the Shield Maidens act as **gladiators** with the following alterations and characteristics:

- The Shield Maidens no longer age and haven't for hundreds of years.
- Their only duty is to protect Skuld and the Hall of the Valkyries.
- Celestial is the only language they speak.
- They believe anyone who approaches the Hall of the Valkyries is hostile.
- The Shield Maidens defend the doors to the Hall of the Valkyries until death. None of them will ever retreat; however, they will not pursue fleeing enemies, either.

DEVELOPMENT

After the defeat of the Shield Maidens, the party can continue into the Hall of the Valkyries.

CHAPTER 3 — THE HALL OF THE VALKYRIES

INTO THE HALL

This once-great hall is now nothing but a shadow of its former self. It once told the great tales of the Valkyries, but those carvings have fallen into ruin. The Hall is made up of five locations: the Entrance, the Central Chamber, two Burial Chambers, and the Higher Hall.

THE ENTRANCE

Stepping past what remains of the grand entrance, you make your way into a deserted walkway. You look up at the cracked and ruined ceiling too high to reach. Faded carvings in the walls tell stories of the Valkyries — you presume—but they are too damaged to know the details of these once-idolized warriors. Ahead lies an opening to a large central chamber.

THE CENTRAL CHAMBER

This chamber is a test set up by Skuld to show any who venture inside the danger of trusting Odin's words.

Inside this large central chamber sits the history of the Valkyries. Across the walls, fragmented engravings of these once-renowned warriors tell their tales. The ceiling, towering 100 feet above you, has a seemingly-untouched carving of the ninth Valkyrie, Skuld, as she ferries the dead to Valhalla. Flanking both an eastern and western alcove stand eight statues: four on either side of the chamber, two on each side of the alcoves. To the right of each of the Valkyries rest shields carved into the wall. One thing stands out to you about these statues: they all seem to be missing their weapons. As you step farther into the room, words carved into the stone next to the first statue on the western wall catch your eye: 'Gordul holds an axe like no other and carves my enemies asunder, for my Valkyries are as sharp as their weapons' ODIN. At the base of the statue reads a name: 'Gordul.'

An axe made from the same stone as the statues lies in the room; a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds it.

The rest of the items are scattered throughout the three rooms. The exact location is vague so you are able to change this depending on the challenge you wish to give your party. If you want them to solve the puzzle easily, the items should be placed in their corresponding Burial Chambers. If you prefer to give your party a

challenge, hide some of the stone weapons within the burial tombs of the Valkyries, as well as throughout each of the chambers.

If the party tries to ascertain what weapons they would be holding based on the look and design of the statue, they must succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence check for each of the statues.

If the party brings the axe to the statue of Gordul and places it in her hand, read the following:

The axe takes a bit of forcing but eventually fits. The grinding of stone is replaced by another, louder sound. Your eyes dart around the room, and before you, you watch rushing water shatter through each of the shields carved into the walls. An imposing stone tablet with glowing runes and writing etched into it crashes down, closing off the entrance from which you came, but you have a more pressing concern as the room rapidly fills with water.

If the party investigate the stone tablet that now blocks their way out, read the following:

The tablet reads: "Gordul would cleave but not with axe; a sword would fit better. Odin speaks of the Valkyries as his weapons of death and nothing more. He thinks his knowledge is almighty and his followers question none, but we know the truth of war, of death, of life, and the Valkyries. Odin speaks of madness that inflicts us, an infliction he is responsible for; responsibility is but a curse to him. Geirahod is unbeatable with a spear, and Sveid an inspiration in battle. Rota controlled the storms we rode through, as Geirdriful aimed unwavering. Hjorr tapped into the arcane as Lagerda needed nothing but her hands. Skuld and I chose the axe and shield."

The puzzle is fairly simple but has the added element of the room filling with water. The room fills with water in 10 minutes; after this time the party begins to suffocate (see condition in *PHB*) under the water. If you have a sand timer, this is the perfect time to use it; otherwise, a normal stopwatch will suffice.

To stop the water and open the ceiling leading to the Higher Hall, the party must correctly place the stone weapons with each of their corresponding Valkyries as per the list below. Each of the Valkyries have their names engraved into the base of their statue; this is also the order they appear in the room from west to east:

- *Gordul* — *Sword*
- *Hjorr* — *Wand*
- *Geirahod* — *Spear*
- *Skeggjold* — *Axe*
- *Sveid* — *Horn*
- *Lagerda* — *Empty hands*
- *Geirdriful* — *Bow*
- *Rota* — *Staff*

Once the puzzle has been solved, read the following:

The flow of the water comes to a slow stop as the ceiling splits down its center and opens to reveal another room above you.

THE BURIAL CHAMBERS

These burial chambers contain some of the weapons of the Valkyries; others will be scattered throughout the Central Chamber. These chambers house the bones of the the dead Valkyries that Skuld could retrieve. The tombs that lie behind the memorial stones are mostly empty unless you decide to hide some of the stone weapons within them.

These chambers house memorials to each of the deceased Valkyries, they are simple carvings with only slight changes between each of them.

THE HIGHER HALL

This hall runs around the edge of the Central Hall but also acts as its ceiling. It is only openable via the puzzle in the Central Hall; it leads to an opening onto a cliff edge of the mountain.

The ceiling to the Central Chamber now acts as the floor to the Higher Hall. A simple stone walkway encircles the room below with the majority of this room now floorless due to the open ceiling. As you step onto the higher platform, a single naturally-occurring cave leads outside to a cliff edge on the other side of the mountain.



SKULD

Skuld sits in the middle of this cliff edge awaiting the party. She believes they are worthy and hopes they have learned of Odin's lies. She is ready for battle and wants to fight for what she believes is next for her, knowing her defeat will call upon the Shield Valkyries.

As you step out onto the platform that makes up the side of the mountain, you see the grand figure of a Valkyrie awaiting you; her dress is similar to that of the Shield Maidens you fought outside the Hall, but her armour is speckled with the blood of her enemies and her war paint is smeared after years of battle. She stands a commanding 12 feet tall as her voice carries across the open mountain air, 'You have come further than many before you. I know who sent you, but I do not know if you do. Odin is as much of a trickster as Loki, shifting forms and shapes to get those unaware to do his bidding. He was much the same when we called him master... father even. But when Hjorr returned with a mortal child, his rage was uncontrollable and our vengeance was swift. So began the war of Valhalla. Four of my sisters died so the rest of us could live, and now I am all that remains, our legacy a concoction of Odin's lies. I am tired of hiding; I am tired bending beneath his lies. So I, Skuld, the final Valkyrie, ask you, are you ready for battle?' Skuld's wings unfurl in a radiant white light as her axe and shield appear in her hands.

For the purposes of combat, Skuld is a **planetar** with the following alterations:

- Skuld carries a shield so her armour class is increased to 21,
- Skuld wields an enlarged greataxe that she is able to hold with either one or two hands. It does the following damage:
- **Enlarged Greataxe.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 2d8 + 7 slashing damage plus 22 (5d8) radiant damage if wielded with one hand or 2d12 + 7 slashing damage plus 22 (5d8) radiant damage if wielded with two hands.



CONCLUSION – THE COMING WAR

The death of Skuld marks the calling of her kin: The Shield Valkyries of Skuld. They have been waiting for their summons, to storm Asgard, and so, the great war of Ragnarok begins.

The final blow, is dealt and Skuld falls. She whispers something almost imperceptible, and before you can react, a crack of thunder shakes you. You see a sky full of armoured female warriors atop winged steeds; they look down upon you and speak in unison, *"We are the Shield Valkyries of Skuld, the kin she has made in her time in Midgard. We bring the war to Odin, and the war is just beginning."* In a flash of lightning, the Shield Valkyries are gone, and Skuld has passed. It is then that you realise what Skuld said as she fell; the word echoes in your ears: *"Ragnarok."*

REWARDS

Here is what characters earn from the adventure:

CREATURE	XP GAINED
Shield Maidens	1,800 XP (for each Shield Maiden)
Hall of the Valkyries Puzzle	1,000 XP
Skuld	15,000 XP

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This adventure was written to portray the way in which society will so easily take the word of a man over a woman as truth. Norse/Viking mythology and history has always been seen as progressive in the way that women were allowed to fight alongside men but even with this, like many medieval societies, women were treated as inferior to men. I wanted to present this in a way where this prejudice is dangerous to those that believe it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asa Wheatley resides in Buckinghamshire, England with a voracious appetite for everything Norse and *D&D* related. He has written a number of adventures previously for the DMs Guild, alongside multiple comics. He is always telling a story in one way or another, and can be found on Twitter as [@AsaWheatley](#).





GHASTLY GRINS

by Judy Black

CREATURE: *Dullahan* | LEVEL(S): 13-15

SYNOPSIS

A city deep in the woods is plagued by a series of beheadings of the leadership. A twisted bargain and a dark secret are threatening to destroy this town forever. Your adventuring party finds themselves brought in to help stop the Dullahan who has been summoned against her will to enact political revenge. *Ghastly Grins* is intended for characters of 13th – 15th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The city of Ardara is in the woods. Perhaps you were sent by the king or are traveling through the woods on a trip. It can be added in as an adventure on a travel to a new destination.

As the characters arrive to Ardara (pronounced 'Ardra'), it's immediately clear that something is wrong. The windows are boarded up, and there is no one on the streets. Everyone that you do see wears a metal brace around their neck, despite it looking terribly uncomfortably. A guardswoman ushers them over and quickly into the Dry Forrest, the local inn and tavern. She wants to answer their questions and warn them of the dangers of the city.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The town of Ardara is on edge as change is arriving after the latest elections to the town leadership. The first attacks began soon after the new officials took their positions. These attacks are fueled by the greed and petty anger of Andes, a councilmember who believes he should have been voted mayor. Andes is willing to do whatever it takes to assume his rightful role, even if that means killing everyone else on the council, the

mayor and the guards. He's stolen the Dullahan's head from Enelen, another long-standing council member and warlock who has made a pact with the Dullahan, that has allowed a creature to carry out his bidding and get rid of his enemies.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **ENELEN:** Councilwoman and elf warlock whose patron is the Dullahan.
- **ANDES:** Old mayor who is using the Dullahan to stop his political rivals.
- **IRIS:** Guardswoman who knows all the good gossip.
- **TIBS:** Older elf, owner of the Dry Forrest Inn who has seen strange going ons and the Dullahan.
- **BRIX:** A young up-and-comer who has just been elected mayor and is ready to change the old city.



CHAPTER 1 – THE CITY

The smell of rich ale, cinnamon and a fresh fire greet you the moment you step inside. The Inn is grand, and old, but well-kept with furniture that's clearly seen its fair share of bar fights. Inside you notice: the bar-keep, an older elf male, two human patrons sitting at a table, and a single elf sitting by the fire and staring into it with intensity. All of them but the older elf male wear a strange collar around their throats. As soon as the heroes enter and the barkeep sees their exposed throats, he ushers them over.

"What are you, daff? Get over here and get on your guard before you lose your head!"

The guardswoman is Iris and the barkeep is Tibs. The two can provide the following information:

- A horsewoman is roaming the streets and beheading leaders and anyone who tries to stop her.
- Iris has heard rumors that it is a fey creature, an Unseelie bringing darkness.
- Tibs, the barkeep, claims he's seen strange happenings in the woods behind his house where councilwoman Enelen lives. He's seen the creature return from there.
- The attacks began shortly after the recent election two months ago when there was a massive upheaval as the current and long-serving mayor, Andes, was ousted by a newcomer Brix. Many of the council members were all voted out as well. A year of particularly bad crops, which the townspeople blame the leadership for, led to a shifting of politics and new leaders.

Iris suggests they talk to Mayor-elect Brix, the only person who has survived an attack.

THE TALK WITH BRIX

Iris agrees to take the party to the mayor-elect, who lives in a small, fairly simple house. There are only a few guards there. Iris explains Brix has insisted the guards stay in the city and protect the people, not her. They are greeted by Brix's wife, Gina, a human, who is relieved to see adventurers here to help.

Mayor-Elect Brix is a halfling with a bright smile, wildy curly red hair and a large bandage around her

throat. She speaks with a raspy voice and is difficult to hear at times.

WHAT BRIX KNOWS

She explains that the first attack happened a month and a half ago as she was returning home from celebrating her win at the Dry Forrest. She was walking home down the main road, late in the night. She was a little tipsy and walking with the captain of the guard when she heard the sound of horse hooves. Something grazed the side of her neck and she bolted to hide. Suddenly, something collapsed on top of her and she was pinned until she heard silence.

She saw dark, pure black, horse hooves in front of her and caught the image of a tall, headless horsewoman walking the streets. Brix stayed still and counts herself lucky that the creature didn't find her. She recounts that the creature had a long blade and that at her hip she wore a whip made out of a spine. Atop the rider's body sat not a head but a carved Jack o' Lantern with a horrifying grin carved into it. The Dullahan eventually remounted her horse and fled towards the forests.

When she freed herself, she found the body of the guard captain headless on top of her and her own neck gushing blood. She was patched up by the local doctor and has been told to not leave the house again.

However, Mayor-Elect Brix plans to break this promise. She's idealistic and believes that someone needs to talk to the people, listen to their concerns and assure them that something is being done. She plans to head to the town hall to speak the next day, going in the middle of the afternoon and planning on being home before dark.

"I didn't become mayor to sit in my house and do nothing! Confirmation process or not, someone needs to listen to everyone who lives here!" Brix bares a lot of guilt for the death of the guard captain and is trying to find an answer to these attacks before any more lives are lost. Since she was the first person attacked, she believes that she is the target and is willing to give herself up to this beast if it will save her city.

She's not sure who would want her dead, but points to current mayor, Andes. She disagrees with him politically and could see him as someone potentially involved. However, he's rubbish at magic, and an old paladin who wouldn't commune with dark spirits.

With a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the characters notice Brix's wife Gina ushering them over. As the characters leave, Gina approaches the characters and begs them to please make sure Brix doesn't get herself killed. She begs them to solve this before tomorrow so Brix can speak without having to worry about the Dullahan. Gina believes that Enelen is responsible for all this. Enelen lives in the woods and is rumored to have made a deal with dark spirits to remain in power.

DEVELOPMENT

Brix points to Enelen's home and tells them to be careful and that the old woman is paranoid.

CHAPTER 2 — ENELEN'S HOUSE

The trail to Enelen's house is easy to follow but as they get closer there will be traps that can trigger along the approach. The traps require a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice. Roll a d4 to determine the type of trap. After 3 traps, the party reaches the house.

HOUSE TRAPS (DC 15 DEXTERITY CHECK TO DISARM):

D4	DESCRIPTION
1	Mechanical trap. A net falls from the trees above. DC 15 Strength save to escape the net.
2	Hidden Pit. A pit hidden by leaves is revealed. 2d10 damage from the fall.
3	Poison Darts. Hidden darts shoot out from the trees. +8 to attack; 2d4 + 2d10 poison damage.
4	Swinging Log. A log drops from the trees and swings down. +6 to attack; 5d10 bludgeoning damage.

When the party arrives at the house, read the following:

Enelen's home is a cozy cottage in the forest. A well-kept garden out front grows vegetables, nightshade, and strange black orchids. The house is quiet but a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals someone left in a hurry, the door is still open.

DEVELOPMENT

The inside of the house reveals someone left in a hurry out the backdoor. ADC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals many books about fey and a map with a marked location deep in the woods but not too far from the cottage. The books are all strewn about as though gone through in a hurry with notes about how to protect against fey, it points to cold iron as the best weapon.

A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds several pieces of cold iron on a workbench.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals a humanoid set of tracks running into the woods and a second humanoid tracks following behind them. The tracks are very recent and screaming breaks the silence of the evening.

When the party follows the trail, it leads to a cave near the woods. Read the following:

The trail ends in a dark cave that smells of decay and rot. Moaning and groaning echoes from within.

THE AMBUSH

As the party enters the cave, they are ambushed by a 1d6 + 3 ghosts. After completing combat, read the following:

The tunnel opens into a small clearing filled with moss and a small dripping waterfall.

THE PUMPKIN

In the center of the clearing sits a simple pumpkin and a simple steak knife. The walls have horrible, ghastly grins drawn on them. A search reveals no exits in the area and no other way forward. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals pieces of pumpkin on the ground. After a face is carved into the pumpkin, a trap door opens beneath the pumpkin.

THE BASEMENT

When the door opens, read the following:

The stairs spiral down into the darkness where the smell of moss and blood hangs heavy in the air.

At the bottom of the stairs, a simple room is discovered. An older elf woman with dark skin and golden hair sits on the floor, holding her hands to a wound at her side. She holds up a dagger up at the character's approach but is obviously outmatched and will not attack.

Enelen is hesitant to talk but willing to answer questions. She explains that:

- Andes stole her tome and has been forcing her patron out after he stole the Dullahan's head.
- Enelen has just gotten away and come here to die to free herself and her patron.
- She tells them that her patron's tome and head are in Andes' home in his office locked in a cold iron-lined box that the fey can't touch.
- Andes is doing this to kill Mayor-Elect Brix and retain power over the city.
- If they can get the head back, they can free the Dullahan.
- Enelen warns them that the Dullahan wields a Vorpall Sword that can behead creatures in one swing.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters are pointed towards the town and Andes' house, the largest in the city square. They're urged to hurry before Brix is out of her house again and vulnerable.

CHAPTER 3 – THE CONFRONTATION

With the information, the characters go to confront Andes.

The home appears empty, not even the hired help can be found around the house. It's a lavish home filled with extravagant luxuries. Following Enelen's instructions, the characters find Andes in his office.

In his office, the characters can find Andes. He summons the Dullahan. Andes wears heavy armor and a shield. He shouts a prayer before welcoming the characters to best him and his silent champion.

TACTICS. Andes is focused on taking down the characters and keeping them from the cold iron-lined box with the head that he keeps on his person. The Dullahan protects Andes and attempt to keep him alive. If her head is collected and returned to the Dullahan, she and her horse are no longer be hostile to the characters. Until her head is back with her, she follows Andes' commands. Upon the return of her head, the fight ends as the Dullahan beheads Andes.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the fight has ended, proceed to ending A if the Dullahan is spared and/or if Andes is killed by the characters and ending B if the Dullahan has been killed.



CONCLUSION, PART A

Enelen joins the party, limping towards the office.

Andes is defeated and the Dullahan is reunited with her head. She puts it back on when she and Enelen are reunited. It becomes clear the two are lovers and not just a patron and warlock. Enelen thanks you profusely and asks you to please join them in swearing in their new mayor. The Dullahan offers her Vorpals Sword as gratitude for helping her and Enelen.

The party is free to enjoy the ceremony and the city.

CONCLUSION, PART B

Enelen does not join the party, dying quietly where she was left. The threat of the Dullahan has been dealt with and Brix can be sworn in as the city starts a new path.

Brix and her wife thank you profusely and the characters are guests of honor at the ceremony to see Brix sworn in as new mayor. Her first act as mayor is to honor the heroes and name this day a new holiday in their honor. The characters can help create the holiday.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS:

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE	XP
Ghasts	450 (per ghast)
Dullahan	25,000
Andes	20,000
Nightmare	700
Solving the Jack o'Lantern	50 (per person)

TREASURE REWARDS:

ITEM	VALUE
A Cold Iron-Lined Box	15 gp
Town Reward	2500 gp

VORPAL LONGSWORD

Weapon (Longsword), legendary

You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, the weapon ignores resistance to slashing damage.

When you attack a creature that has at least one head with this weapon and roll a 20 on the attack roll, you cut off one of the creature's heads. The creature dies if it can't survive without the lost head. A creature is immune to this effect if it is immune to slashing damage, doesn't have or need a head, has legendary actions, or the GM decides that the creature is too big for its head to be cut off with this weapon. Such a creature instead takes an extra 6d8 slashing damage from the hit.



DULLAHAN

Medium humanoid (fey), neutral

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 262 (35d8 + 105)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Con +9, Wis +11, Cha +12

Skills Insight +11, Perception +11, Religion +9, Stealth +10

Condition Immunities Charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Elvish, Undercommon
Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

- **Fey Ancestry.** The Dullahan has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.
- **Innate Spellcasting.** The Dullahan's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:
At will: *dancing lights, detect magic*
1/day each: *clairvoyance, darkness, detect thoughts, dispel magic, faerie fire, levitate (self only), suggestion*
- **Fey Resilience.** As a bonus action, the Dullahan can restore 5d8 of health every turn unless she has been hit with necrotic damage in the previous round.
- **Magic Resistance.** The Dullahan has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
- **Spellcasting.** The Dullahan is a 20th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 19, +11 to hit with spell attacks). The Dullahan has the following cleric spells prepared:
Cantrips (at will): *guidance, mending, resistance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *bane, command, cure wounds, guiding bolt*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, silence, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, clairvoyance, dispel*

magic, spirit guardians

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, freedom of movement, guardian of faith*

5th level (3 slots): *contagion, flame strike, geas, mass cure wounds*

6th level (2 slots): *blade barrier, harm*

7th level (2 slots): *divine word, plane shift*

8th level (1 slot): *holy aura*

9th level (1 slot): *gate*

ACTIONS

- **Multiattack.** The Dullahan can make two attacks with her Vorpal Sword.
- **Vorpal Sword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 4d6 + 7) slashing damage. When you attack a creature that has at least one head with this weapon and roll a 20 on the attack roll, you cut off one of the creature's heads. The creature dies if it can't survive without the lost head. A creature is immune to this effect if it is immune to slashing damage, doesn't have or need a head, has legendary actions, or the DM decides that the creature is too big for its head to be cut off with this weapon. Such a creature instead takes an extra 6d8 slashing damage from the hit. The DM can also allow characters to make a death saving throw to avoid decapitation and instead take the 6d8 extra damage.
- **Summon Servant (1/Day).** The Dullahan magically summons a nightmare. The summoned creature appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet of its summoner, acts as an ally of its summoner. It remains for 10 minutes, until it or its summoner dies, or until its summoner dismisses it as an action.

Legendary Actions

The Dullahan can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Dullahan regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

- **Spine Whip.** (1 Action) The Dullahan makes one additional attack with her spine whip. It has a reach of 15 and a +8 to hit. It deals 2d12 slashing damage.
- **Lucky.** (2 Actions.) The Dullahan can reroll an attack with the Vorpal Sword and take the higher result.
- **Cast a Spell.** (1–3 Actions.) The Dullahan expends a spell slot to cast a 1st-, 2nd-, or 3rd-level spell that she has prepared. Doing so costs 1 legendary action per level of the spell.

ANDES

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (18 with *mage armor*)
Hit points 225 (30d8 + 90)
Speed 30 ft.

STR 15 (+2) **DEX** 20 (+5) **CON** 16 (+3) **INT** 18 (+4) **WIS** 15 (+2) **CHA** 18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +11, Con +9, Cha +10
Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +8, Stealth +11
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Elvish, Undercommon
Challenge 18 (20,000 xp)

- **Fey Ancestry.** Andes has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.
- **Innate Spellcasting.** Andes' innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:
At will: *dancing lights*
1/day each: *darkness*, *faerie fire*, *levitate (self only)*
- **Spellcasting.** Andes is a 11th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:
Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *message*, *poison spray*, *shocking grasp*, *ray of frost*
1st level (4 slots): *burning hands*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *gust of wind*, *invisibility*, *misty step*, *shatter*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fireball*, *haste*
4th level (3 slots): *dimension door*, *Otiluke's resilient sphere*
5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold*
6th level (1 slot): *chain lightning*
- **War Magic.** When Andes uses his action to cast a spell, he can make one weapon attack as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

- **Multiattack.** Andes can make three scimitar attacks. Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 18 (4d8) poison damage. In addition, the target has disadvantage on the next saving throw it makes against a spell Andes casts before the end of Andes' next turn.
- **Hand Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target is also unconscious while poisoned in this way. The target regains consciousness if it takes damage or if another creature takes an action to shake it.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I want to thank my Roll for Trouble crew for being such a huge help with this. The story of the Dullahan was one my grandfather, Tibs, would tell me when I visited him as a girl. I loved the monsters of his home in Ireland so this game is dedicated to him. Clann Mhig Fhionnghaile Abú!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judy Black is a tabletop game fan and part of the Roll for Trouble Twitch channel. She's an author, nerd, and embodiment of chaotic good. You can find her online @judyblackcloud or join in her campaigns live @RollforTrouble. Visit her website to learn more about her books: judyblackcloud.com







TIER 4



THE TALE OF TWO SPHINXES

by Jessica L. Washburn

CREATURE: *Gynosphinx* | **LEVEL(S):** 17-20
CW: *Grief, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), abuse*

SYNOPSIS

In the beginning, a pair of sphinxes — one male and one female — guarded a desert temple in relative peace. They watched over a vault that held a magical ring that could change the world. The androsphinx — Bazymoros — succumbed to corruption; he denounced the trickster god who created him. Bazymoros forged a pact with the demon god, Baphomet, becoming violent and sought to claim the item in the name of his patron.

In an effort to save the world, the gynosphinx Asmuzi defeated him. She locked Bazymoros away, never again to see the light of day. The androsphinx remained as an example of what not to become. It has been so long since this battle that much of the knowledge of Bazymoros has disappeared from the collective memory of the races that inhabit the world. All that remains is the knowledge of the dangerous gynosphinx made from the flesh of human and creature. . . and the treasure she keeps.

The Tale of Two Sphinxes is a 3-4 hour adventure intended for level 17-20 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Local stories tell of a vicious gynosphinx guarding a wondrous magical item — the Ring of the Sphinx. The adventure takes place in a lone desert temple and can be introduced in the following ways:

- the party has been asked to retrieve the item
- the party is lost in the desert, stumbling upon the temple

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This is a 5 room puzzle dungeon based on the stages of grief/PTSD. Each room reveals the true legend of the sphinx, showing a different part of Asmuzi's recovery.

The gynosphinx and an androsphinx were created to guard the Ring of the Sphinx. (DMs are encouraged to choose a trickster deity appropriate to the campaign.) The god had a benevolent streak and wanted mortals to have a way of keeping balance within the realm. The sphinxes were tasked with testing characters to determine their worthiness to wield the ring. While the ring has no good or evil properties, it is capable of shaping the world to the whims of its wielder.

All internal puzzles can be bypassed as each room is only separated by a simple, locked oaken door that can be easily smashed with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check or lock-picked with a DC 10 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. Breaking the door will trigger a treant and lock picks will trigger a potion in the following room. The person who picked the lock will need to pick the person to drink (using Table 1 for status effect). Not taking the time to solve puzzles also causes the release of Bazymoros. In order to complete the adventure at this point, the party will have to:

- Assist Asmuzi to defeat Bazymoros. Upon his defeat, Asmuzi deems the party unworthy, giving them a much weaker item in its place.
- Join Bazymoros and slay Asmuzi. Defeating her will not unlock the vault, as she reconfigured the vault with the trickster god to only be opened by her. If she dies, the item remains locked away until the end of days for mortals.
- Slay both Bazymoros and Asmuzi. The vault will not open until the end of days.

CHAPTER 1 – TRAUMA

The desert is oppressive; winds whip abrasive sand as the party marches on towards the First Temple of the World. You have wandered for hours when you crest one final dune, tired and nearly hopeless.

Before you, a large sandstone temple sits. The winds cease their abuse. Upon approach, you can see the temple shows no signs of aging. There is writing on a massive granite slab. There are no knockers or knobs on the door.

The granite slab holds a warning, the sound of Asmuzi's voice ringing in the party's heads:

*Beware all who travel here,
inside lies a treasure dear.
Respect the riddles of the keeper,
lest the treasure's cost becomes steeper.*

FIRST ROOM: SHOCK

You enter a darkened room as torches light themselves on the wall. In the center of the room, a sword embedded in a pedestal. On the Northmost Wall, a simple oaken door; to the right of the door sits a mural of a beautiful, black sphinx. Her face has four claw marks that run across; her lion body - which lacks wings - looks powerful. On the Western Wall, there are eight bricks arranged in two columns, four bricks deep - all of which are engraved with writing. You see other images: a sun causing a fire on the Eastern Wall along with a handsome, white androsphinx. He has a fearsome look on his face, teeth bared in a snarl. His eagle wings are spread wide and the serpent headed tail also has its mouth open. On the Southern Wall, a painting of the sword in the pedestal.

A DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the following text that wraps around the sword's pedestal, in Sphinx (or Common):

*I may be a beautiful work of art,
but I also am a piercer of hearts.
Here is where the story starts;
Begin to arrange the moving parts.*

These are clues to help the party arrange the bricks in the proper order. The sun and Bazymoros' image to the east are titled "Rage Burning, Hot Like Sun" and "Lashing Out, And War's Begun." Asmuzi's image is titled "Marring Face, Barring Beauty"; the sword is titled "Sharpened Words, Cut Right Through Me." The eight bricks have a hand-hold and can be easily moved.

The DM can arrange the bricks in any order, so long that they are mixed up. A completed brick puzzle will read the following:

<i>Rage Burning</i>	<i>Hot Like Sun</i>
<i>Lashing Out</i>	<i>And War's Begun</i>
<i>Marring Face</i>	<i>Barring Beauty</i>
<i>Sharpened Words</i>	<i>Cut Right Through Me</i>

Incorrect brick placements result in 1d10 lightning damage. For each additional mistake, add 1d10.

DEVELOPMENT

Completing the brick puzzle unlocks the sword from the stone pedestal. A DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check on Asmuzi's picture reveals a slot where the sword fits. The party needs to decide who puts the sword into Asmuzi's "heart." Sliding the sword into the slot releases a horrible scream in the chamber. Everyone must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. The adventurer that slid the sword into place rolls with disadvantage on their Constitution saving throw. For each character that has failed their saving throw, they need to roll 1d6 to determine which STAT will be affected until the end of the next room (see Table 1). For instance, if someone rolled CHA, they would have disadvantage on skill checks like Persuasion or Deception. The goal is to have the party rely on each other to solve the next puzzle or ask for assistance. If a character asks a companion for assistance, they do not have disadvantage on their check.

TABLE 1:

1 - CON	2 - CHA
3 - INT	4 - WIS
5 - DEX	6 - STR

SECOND ROOM: DENIAL

The room is dark, save for the glowing light of a lantern sitting in a boat to the far right. Water laps at the boats as they bump into the stone ledge. You are currently in a room with a 8-foot ceiling.

There are five expertly crafted boats, each containing an item somewhere in the boat. Creatures with darkvision can easily see the water bucket, heart of glass, and the lantern. They can see the water, though it is dark; they also see the riddle on the wall and 60 feet into the room (the length of the room is 120 feet). (Sink, Shame, Freeze, Bloom, Burst).

- **SINK:** A gold coin - on bench of boat
- **SHAME:** Water in the bottom and a bucket on bench
- **FREEZE:** A heart of glass - affixed to the prow (inside)
- **BLOOM:** A chunk of rose quartz - on bench of boat
- **BURST:** A lantern affixed to the prow (inside)

The riddle on the wall:

*In front of you five boats now sit.
This may be a test of wits.
One will sink and one will bloom,
yet another will freeze the gloom.
Another still will burst in flame
while the last sits quietly in its shame.*

If the party touches the gold coin, the boat travels 25 feet before turning to gold and sinking. The boat sinking triggers an encounter with 10 **giant sharks**.

If the party touches the heart of glass, the boat travels 60 feet, freezing the pool. It summons two **ice devil** constructs.

If the party touches the rose quartz, they become immediately entangled in vines and must make a DC 19 Strength saving throw to get out. On a failed save, they are grappled. It also summons a **marilith** construct.

If the party sets foot in the lantern boat, it immediately catches fire. They must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw to leap out of the boat. On a failed save, they take 1d12 fire damage.

The solution is to take the boat of Shame to the end of the room.

CHAPTER 2 – BARGAINING

Before you leave the previous room, you find an inscription upon the door:

*As you wander through Life's Garden
Sometimes, you may need to strike a bargain.*

Upon entering, the new room is lush and green. Four stoic figures sit on a bench: a child of 6-7 years old, a teenager, an adult, and a crone. When the party enters, the figures become more lively — happy to see them. The child leaves her place upon the bench and approaches the party, telling them that she looks forward to becoming an adventurer and is looking for items to get her started in exchange for information.

A character who makes a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that each figure appears to be the same person at different stages of life. A character who uses the spell *true sight* can see the four stages of Asmuzi: pre-trauma, trauma, post-trauma, and as she is now.

- The child is the easiest (Persuasion DC 10). They seek trinkets or baubles that the party might not miss. The child wants an item from every person. Upon receiving items, the child provides information about the beginning of the temple and why it was created. The child's temperament remains happy.
- The teenager is looking for weapons (DC 15). They face problems head on and lack the means of protecting themselves. They want two weapons. Once the weapons have been given, the teenager gives information about Bazymoros' corruption. The teenager's temperament, while cocky, is uncertain - their eyes dart about the room, as if expecting something or someone at any moment.
- The adult is looking for armor (DC 20). They seek to be able to weather the blows that the world

If the characters brute force their way through the puzzles, read:

You arrive in a room filled with chaos and pain. Before you, Bazymoros the White and Asmuzi the Black are fighting to the death. Asmuzi has sustained damage, pleading for your assistance. Bazymoros is mostly unscathed and shouts that he was locked away unfairly. Which side do you choose?

REWARDS

If they are successful in clearing the dungeon, the characters obtain the *Ring of the Sphinx* (Legendary item), as well as other trinkets that had been collected by Asmuzi before she needed to guard the vault full time. The Ring of the Sphinx can also be used by the party to summon Asmuzi, should they need her assistance in any future endeavors. This feature is independent of the three wishes.

RING OF THE SPHINX

Ring, legendary

A magical ring that has two lion paws grasping an amber cat's eye gem. While wearing this ring, you can use an action to expend 1 of its 3 charges to cast the *wish* spell from it. The ring has an additional property to summon Asmuzi to assist the party, should they have need of her in the future. In order to summon the gynosphinx, they must press on the paws; claws will extend from the ring, striking the gem and produces a clear ringing sound. While the ring has limited wish spell uses, the bearer of the ring can summon Asmuzi as needed once per day.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

This module was a very personal writing experience for me. As a person who has experienced traumatic events not unlike Asmuzi, I wanted to make a module that reflected on the healing process and what it may mean to reach acceptance. For me, my own acceptance does not bring me joy — but it also does not bring me sadness. It simply is. The healing process is different for everyone. I only hope that my module provides a thoughtful way of understanding a process that is different for everyone and that we can use our time at the table to become more empathetic and understanding of others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica is an aspiring writer and copy editor who looks forward to releasing more projects and supplements for *D&D 5e*. You can find her on Twitter as @HealthPakStream. She may or may not be a halfling bard.



ASMUZI

Large monstrosity, lawful neutral

Armor Class	22 (natural armor)
Hit Points	367 (21d20 +147)
Speed	40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws	Dex +9, Con +14, Wis +9, Cha +11
Skills	Arcana +12, History +12, Perception +8, Religion +8
Damage Resistance	Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks
Damage Immunities	Psychic
Condition Immunities	Charmed, Frightened
Senses	Truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages	Sphinx, Common
Challenge	21 (30,000 XP)

Inscrutable. The sphinx is immune to any effect that would sense its emotions or read her thoughts, as well as any divination spell that she refuses. Wisdom (Insight) checks made to ascertain the sphinx's intentions or sincerity have disadvantage.

Magic Weapons. The sphinx's weapon attacks are magical.

Spellcasting. The sphinx is a 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It requires no material components to cast its spells. Asmuzi has the following cleric spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *spare the dying*, *resistance*, *guidance*, *thaumaturgy*, *mending*
- 1st level (4 slots): *bless*, *cure wounds*, *inflict wounds*, *shield of faith*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *prayer of healing*, *blindness/deafness*, *aid*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration*, *spiritual weapon*, *bestow curse*
- 4th level (3 slots): *death ward*, *freedom of movement*, *guardian of faith*

- 5th level (3 slots): *beacon of hope*, *revivify*, *greater restoration*
- 6th level (1 slot): *forbiddance*
- 7th level (1 slot): *conjure celestial*
- 8th level (1 slot): *earthquake*
- 9th level (1 slot): *true resurrection*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sphinx makes two claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack. +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Asmuzi can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. She regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

- **Claw Attack.** The sphinx makes one claw attack.
- **Teleport** (Costs 2 Actions). The sphinx magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.
- **Cast a Spell** (Costs 3 Actions). The sphinx casts a spell from its list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

LAIR ACTIONS

- On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Asmuzi can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects; she cannot use an effect again until she finishes a long or short rest:
- The flow of time is altered such that every creature in the lair must reroll initiative. Asmuzi can choose to not reroll.
- The effects of time is altered such that every creature in the lair must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become 1d20 years older or younger (Asmuzi's choice), but never any younger than 1 year old. A greater restoration spell can restore the creature's age to normal.
- The flow of time within the lair is altered such that everything within moves up to 10 years forward or backward (Asmuzi's choice). Only Asmuzi will be immediately aware of the time change. A wish spell can return the caster and up to seven other creatures designated by the caster to their normal time.
- Asmuzi shifts herself and up to seven other creature she can see within her lair to another plane of existence. Once outside her lair, she cannot use lair actions but she can return to her lair as a bonus action on her turn, taking up to seven other creatures with her.

BAZYMOROS

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class	22 (natural armor)
Hit Points	367 (21d20 +147)
Speed	40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	10 (0)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	23 (+6)

Saving Throws	Dex +6, Con +11, Int +9, Wis +10
Skills	Arcana +9, Perception +10, Religion +15
Damage Immunities	Psychic, Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks
Condition Immunities	Charmed, Frightened
Senses	Truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages	Sphinx, Common
Challenge	21 (30,000 XP)

Inscrutable. Bazymoros is immune to any effect that would sense his emotions or read his thoughts, as well as any divination spell that he refuses. Wisdom (Insight) checks made to ascertain Bazymoros' intentions or sincerity have disadvantage.

Magic Weapons. Bazymoros' weapon attacks are magical. Spellcasting. Bazymoros is a 18th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). He requires no material components to cast his spells. He has the following spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*
- 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *thunderwave*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *invisibility*, *Melf's acid arrow*, *mirror image*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*
- 4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*
- 5th level (3 slots): *cloudkill*, *scrying*
- 6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*, *globe of invulnerability*
- 7th level (1 slot): *finger of death*, *plane shift*
- 8th level (1 slot): *dominate monster*, *power word stun*
- 9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sphinx makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack.* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (3d10 + 6) slashing damage.

Roar (3/Day). The sphinx emits a magical roar. Each time he roars before finishing a long rest, the roar is louder and the effect is different, as detailed below. Each creature within 500 feet of the sphinx and able to hear the roar must make a saving throw.

- **First Roar.** Each creature that fails a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw is frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- **Second Roar.** Each creature that fails a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw is deafened and frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature is paralyzed and can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- **Third Roar.** Each creature makes a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 44 (8d10) thunder damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Bazymoros can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. He regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

- **Claw Attack.** He makes one claw attack.
- **Teleport** (Costs 2 Actions). Bazymoros magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.
- **Cast a Spell** (Costs 3 Actions). He casts a spell from his list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

APPENDIX A: FEATURED CREATURES

THESE CREATURES ARE FEATURED IN THIS ANTHOLOGY. EACH USES STATS FOUND IN THE *MONSTER MANUAL*. THE PAGE NUMBERS BELOW CORRESPOND WITH THE ADVENTURES THE CREATURES ARE FOUND IN.

Cambion, pg. 95
Drider, pg. 147
Drow, pg. 65
Hag(s), pg. 157
Harpy, pg. 123
Lamia, pg. 47
Medusa, pg. 113, 139
Merfolk, pg. 7
Night Hag, pg. 101
Succubus, pg. 95



APPENDIX B:

ORIGINAL CREATURES

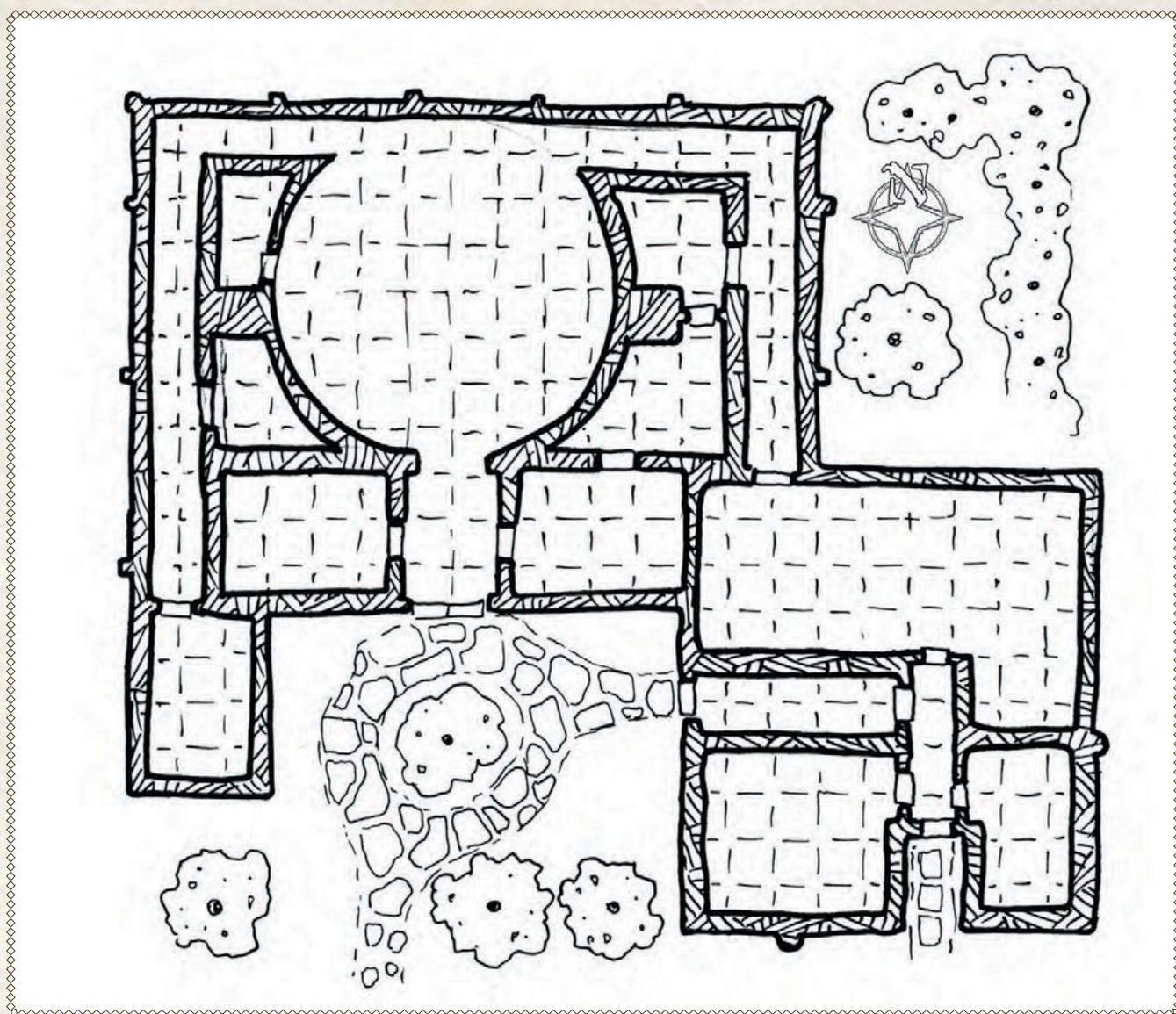
INFUSE YOUR ADVENTURES AND CAMPAIGNS WITH ORIGINAL *UNCAGED* CREATURES,
MONSTERS, AND CHARACTERS!

- Advanced Doll*, pg. 179
- Asmuzi (Sphinx)*, pg. 216
- Banshee*, pg. 73
- Bazymoros (Sphinx)*, pg. 217
- Boo-hag*, pg. 79
- Calypta (Dryad)*, pg. 28
- Dryad*, pg. 28
- Dullahan*, pg. 206
- Elder Sea Hag*, pg. 37
- Furies*, pg. 92
- Kumiho*, pg. 57
- Lady White Snake*, pg. 187
- Lauma*, pg. 175
- Ma'at (Goddess)*, pg. 167
- Melusine*, pg. 131
- Porcelain Golem*, pg. 179
- Pygmalion's Statue*, pg. 179
- Siren*, pg. 20
- Valkyrie*, pg. 193
- Worg Puppy*, pg. 37



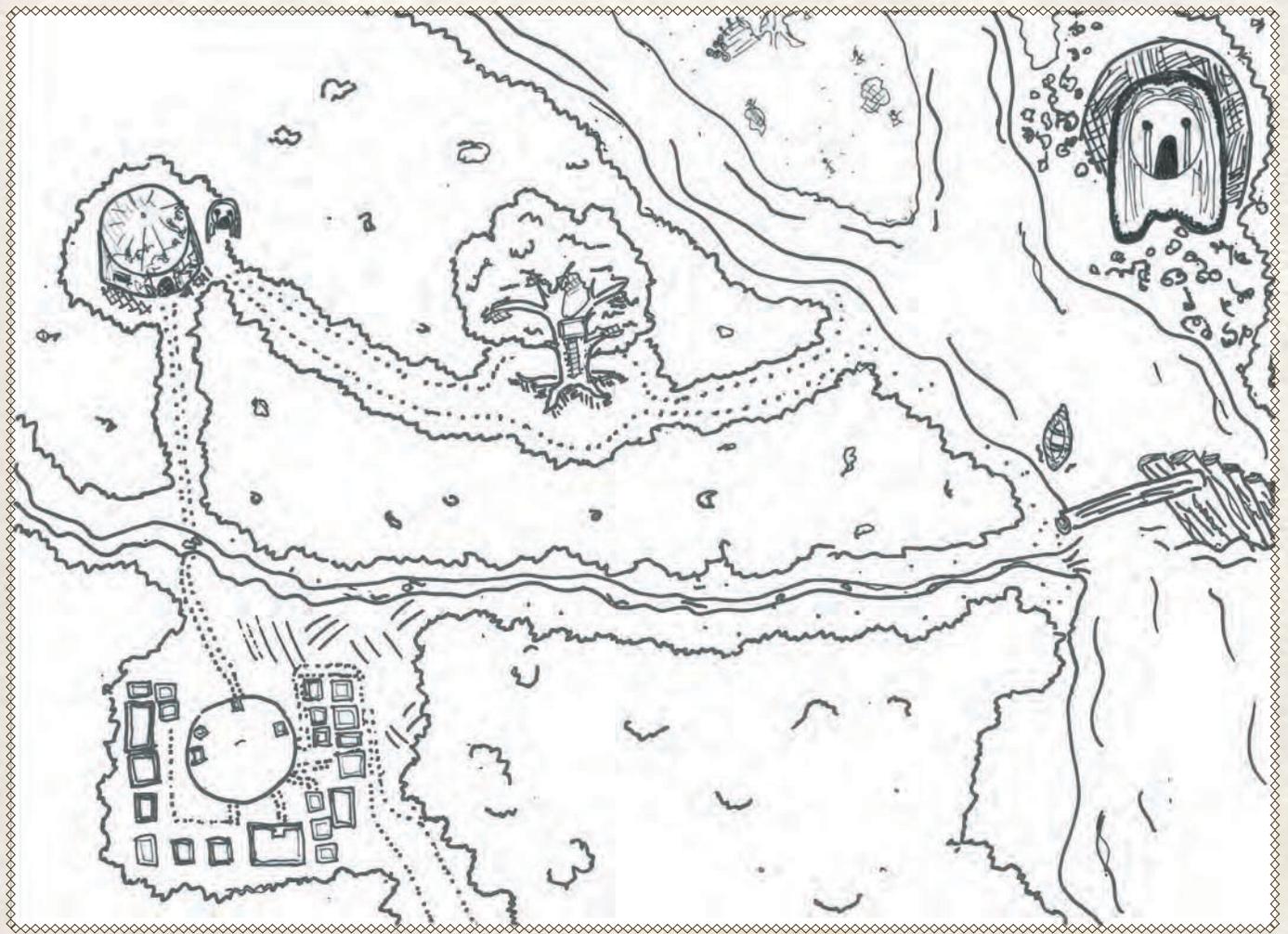
APPENDIX C: MAPS FOR PLAYERS

THE WITCH'S HOUSE (FROM MAID IN WATERDEEP, PG. 7)



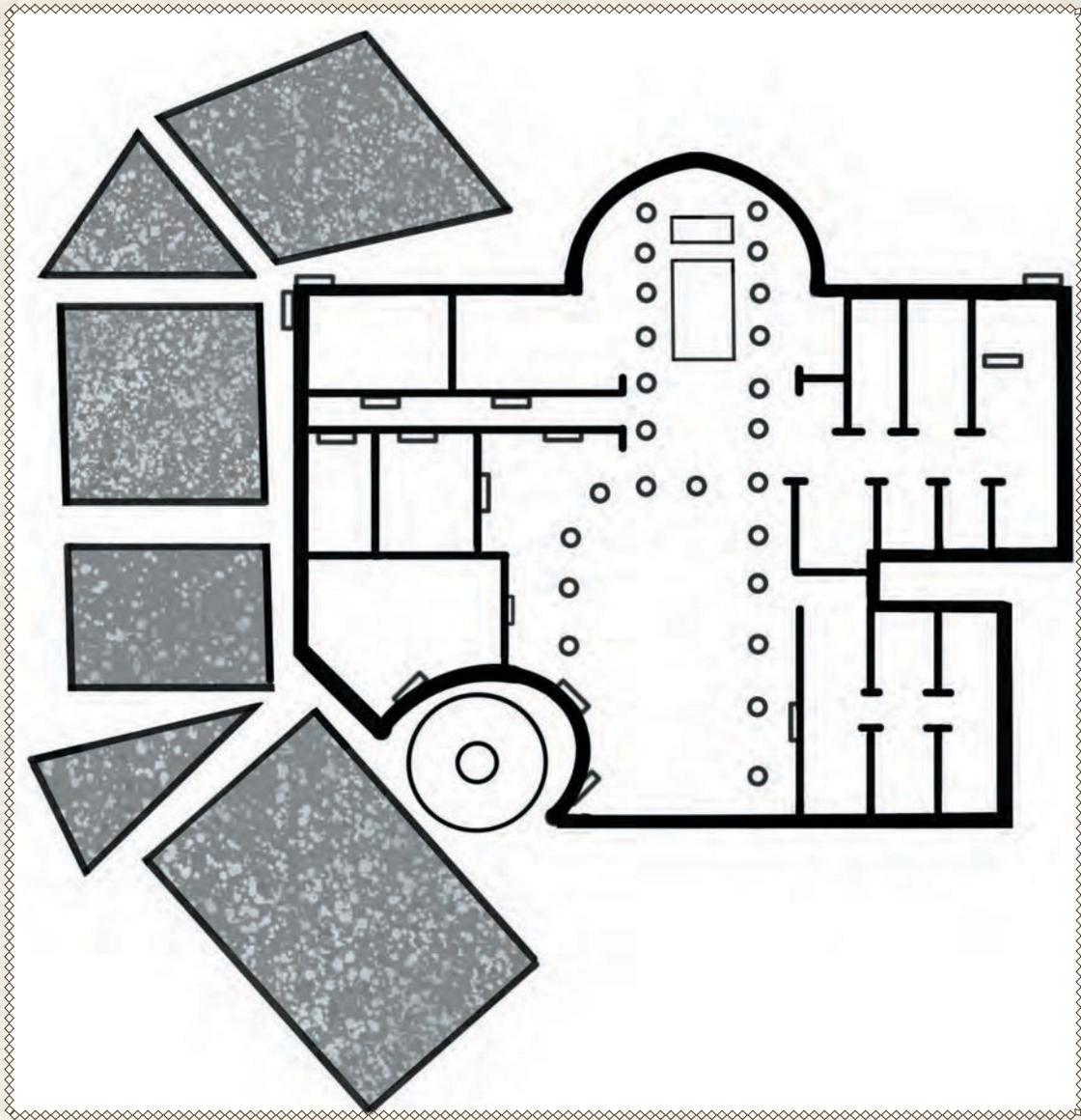
Map by Dyson Logos

THE VILLAGE, RIVER, AND FOREST (FROM THE WEeping WOMAN, PG. 39)



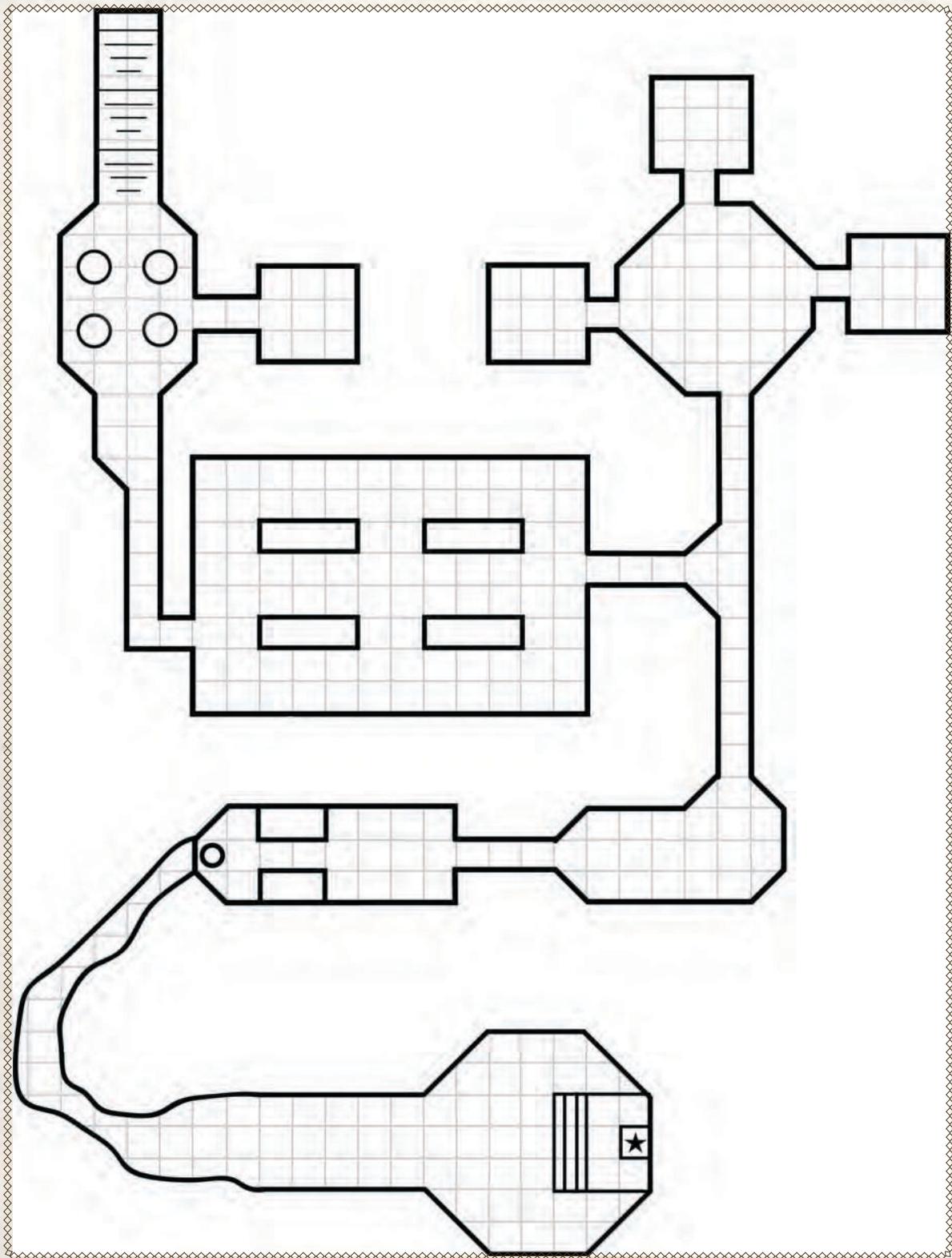
Map by Kristina Sisto Kindel

ENAXI'S PALACE (FROM *LOST CHILDREN, FOUND FAMILY*, PG. 47)



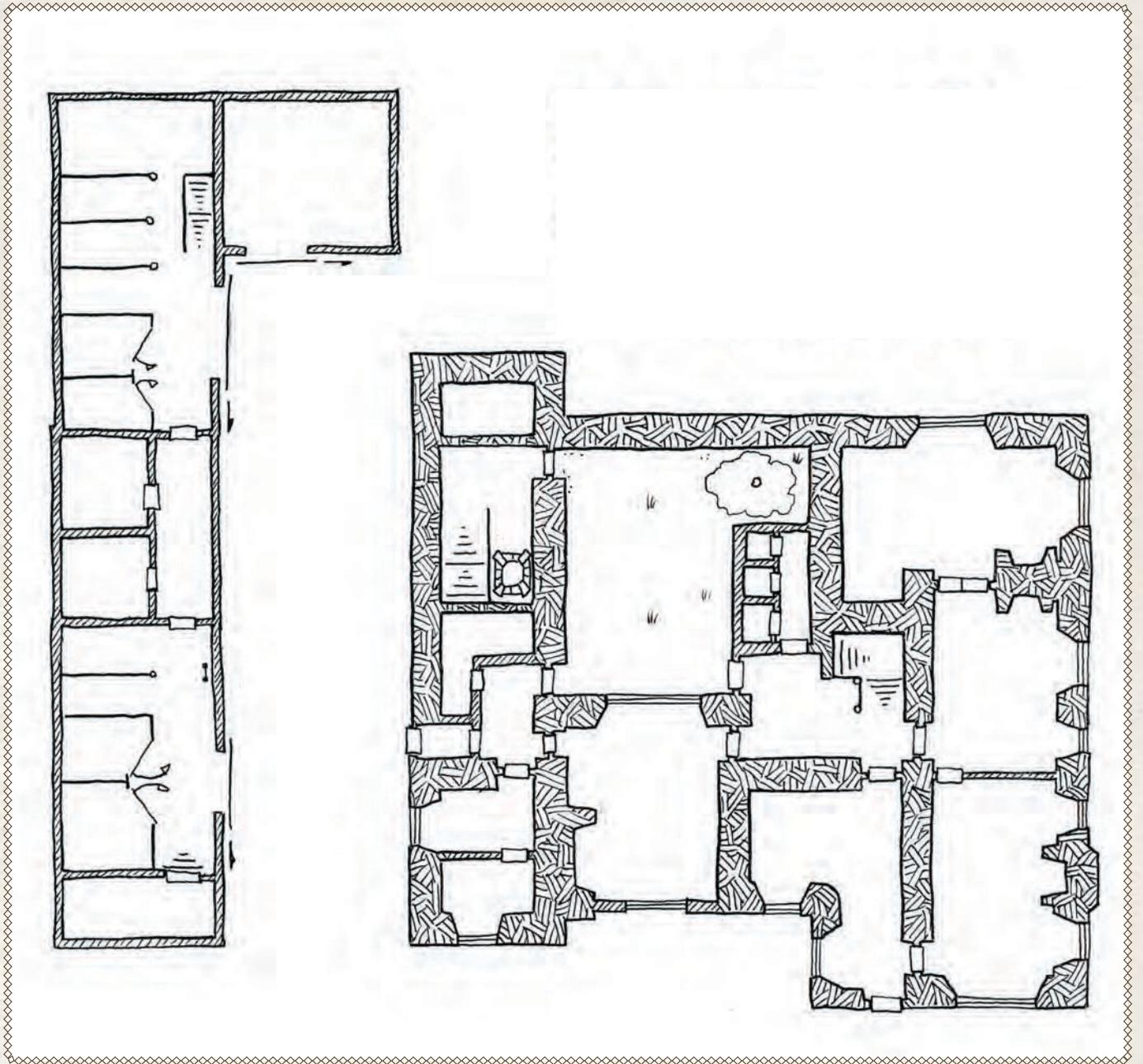
Map by Catherine Evans

THE CRYPT (FROM *THE BANSHEE'S TALE*, PG. 81)

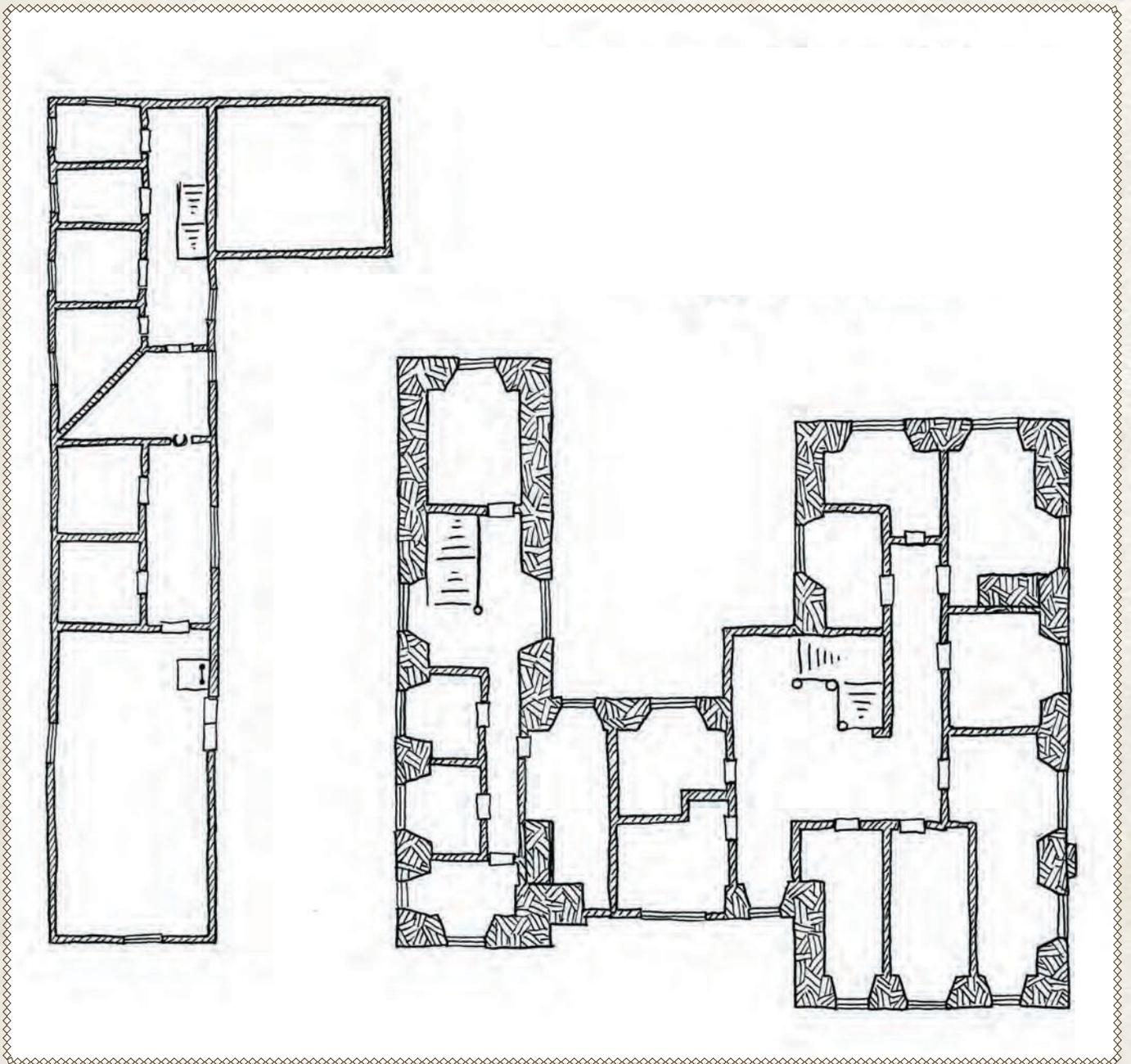


Map by Annabeth Lennon

THE COPPER KETTLE INN, GROUND FLOOR (FROM *THE SECRET OF SHADOW GROVE*, PG. 109)



THE COPPER KETTLE INN, UPPER LEVEL (FROM *THE SECRET OF SHADOW GROVE*, PG. 109)



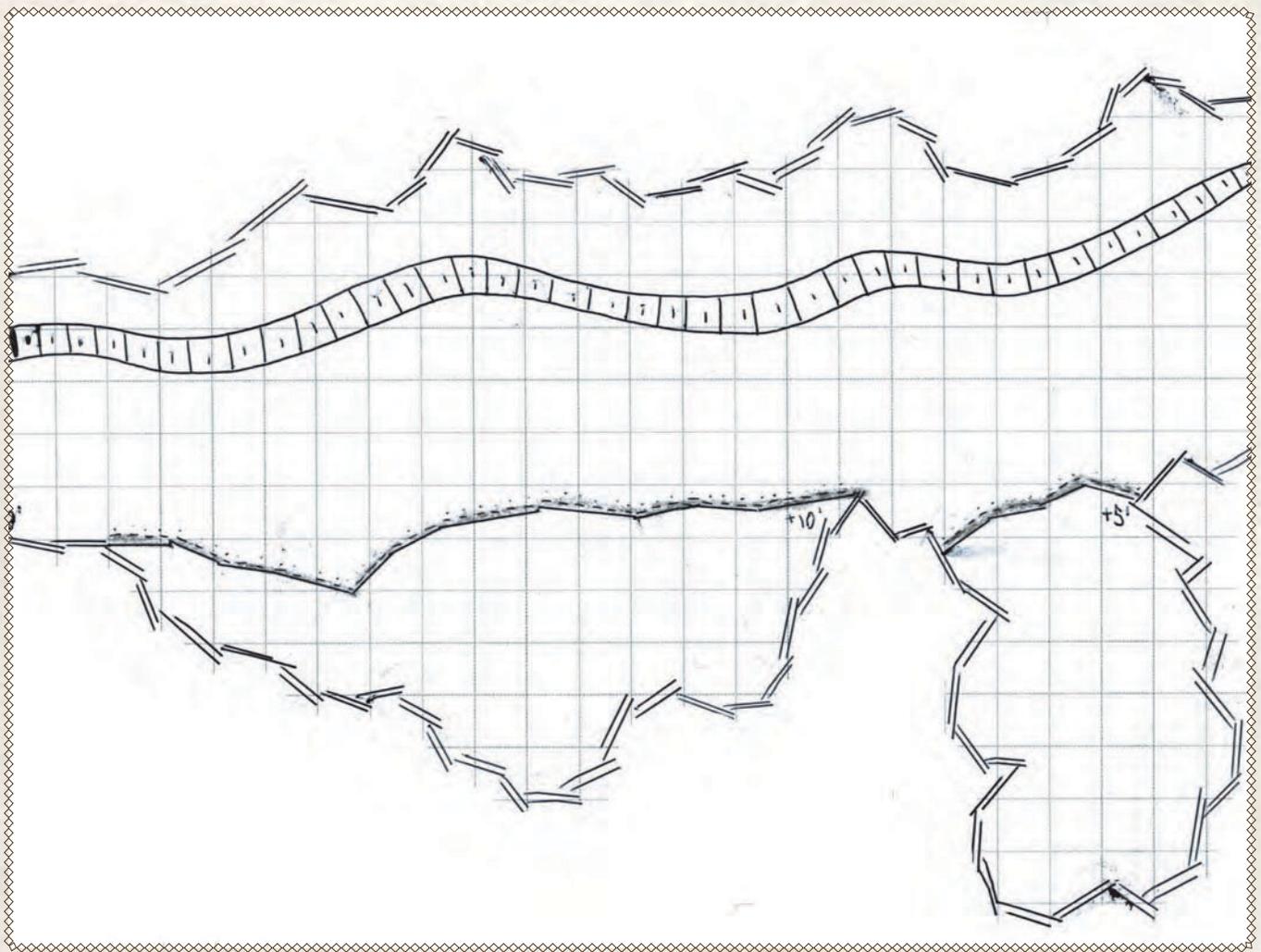
Map by Dyson Logos

THE CAVE OF WONDERS (FROM *LOST GODS*, PG. 101)



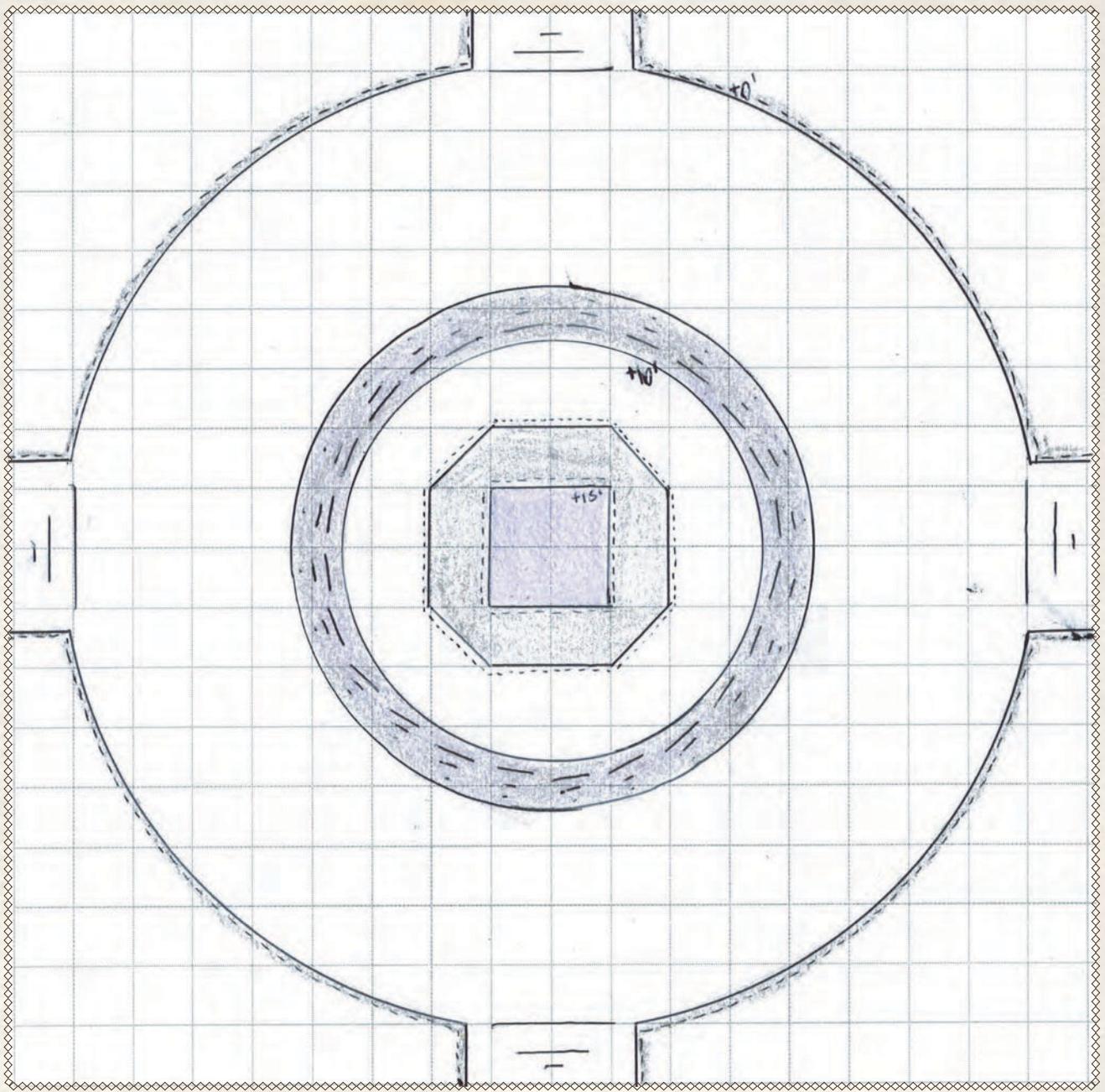
Map by Natalie Wallace

THE ABANDONED MINESHAFT (FROM MAIDENS OF THE WEAVE, PG. 147)



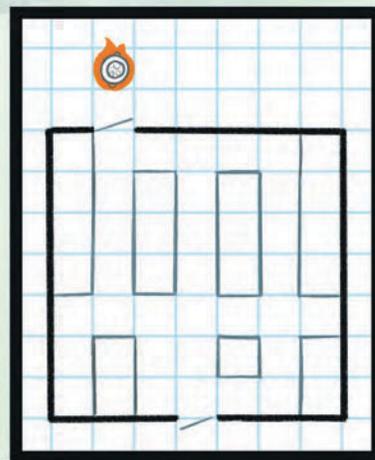
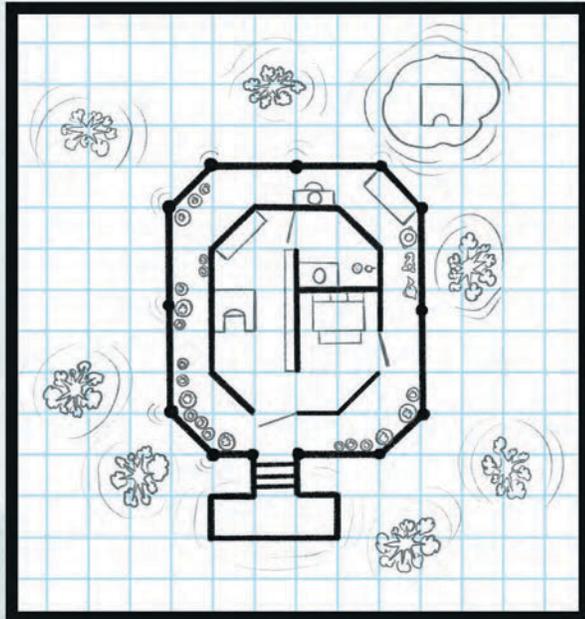
Map by Emily Smith

THE MAIDEN'S SANCTUARY (FROM MAIDENS OF THE WEAVE, PG. 147)



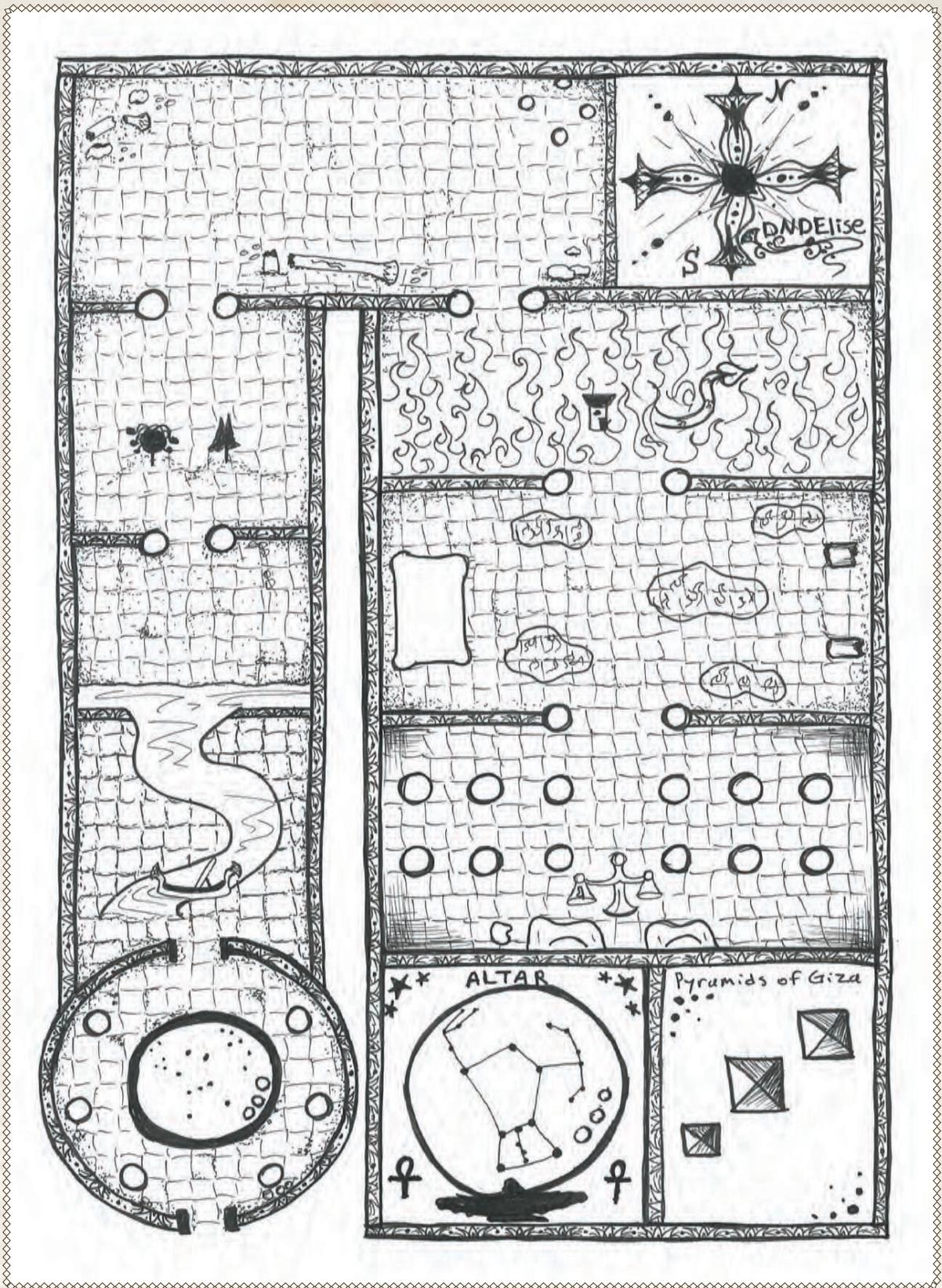
Map by Emily Smith

APPALLING MORASS (FROM APPALLING MORASS, PG. 157)



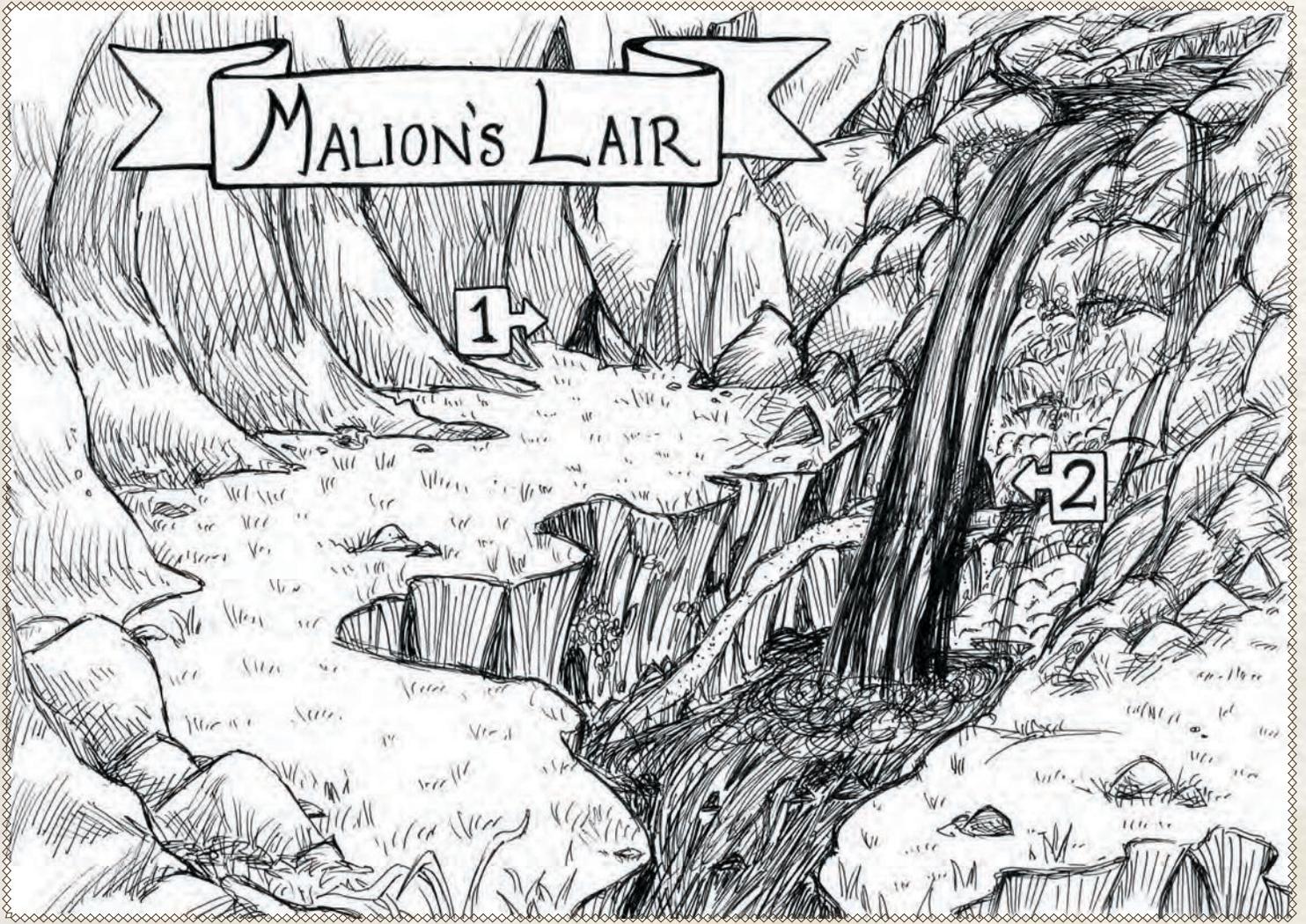
Map by Ma'at Crook

THE TEMPLE OF MA'AT (FROM HEART OF A GODDESS, PG. 167)



Map by Elise Cretel

MALION'S LAIR (FROM GALATEYA'S WILL, PG. 179)



Map by Luciella Elisabeth Scarlett

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FluorescentWolf is known for her landscape and character realism, as well as skill in matching various art styles. Throughout her life, she has been fascinated by anthropology and astronomy, and these themes resonate in her personal works.

GWEN BASSETT

Gwen (“gwendybee” across the web) is a freelance fantasy illustrator who will take any excuse to paint bright colors, flashy magic, and dramatic lighting. In her spare time, she likes to eat inadvisable quantities of dessert and pet other people’s dogs.

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Jen is a freelance cartoonist/narrative designer living in the forests of Washington and available in multi-dimensional experiences. You can see her art in the comics *Teenage Wasteland*, play her *D&D* adventures like *The Experiments of Dr. Skulldial*, you can touch her art if you print out her Paper Smalls, you can hear her play a tiefling ranger on podcast *d20Dames*. You cannot taste or smell her unless you bake food in her name and then you must tweet a pic of that to @thejenya. www.HauntedVaultStudios.com

JOHANNA TAYLOR

Johanna is a fantasy illustrator, concept artist, and comic artist based in Utah. She loves to create stories with quirky characters getting into even quirkier situations, and watch them try to make sense of things. She likes to play *D&D*, cross-country ski, and feed crows.

KAYLA CLINE

Kayla is an illustrator and graphic novelist whose work frequently evokes gaming culture, the occult, and science fiction. Her work can be found on several actual play shows, comics, and more. View her work on kaylacline.com.

LIZ GIST

Liz is a hobbyist artist and freelance editor. They grew up fascinated with mythology and look for any excuse to burrow into that part of their psyche. Follow them

on Twitter @crit_liz for puppy photos, mini painting and far too many tiefling PCs.

SAMMY WARD

Sammy is a freelance illustrator and independent comics creator. Her work tends to delve into the world of fantasy and horror inspired by folklore and mythology. In between work and playing *D&D*, Sammy is constantly drawing skulls and drinking excessive amounts of tea. You can follow her adventures online @sammywarddraws.

WOUTER FLORUSSE

Wouter is a fantasy illustrator based in the Netherlands. His work has graced the cover of many titles published for *D&D*. His website is wouterflorusse.com.

ABOUT OUR COVER ARTIST

SAMANTHA DARCY

Crafted from only the finest twigs and glammers, Samantha Darcy was well-nurtured in exchange for her father’s freedom. She was beloved by all her neighbors, though her presence would frighten the livestock and cause the room to chill. The families would vie for her attention on the hot summers’ days, and found they preferred the taste of soured milk. Samantha saw her first artistic inspiration behind their straining smiles, and delighted in drawing all their prettiest nightmares.

An illustrator for tabletop roleplaying games, Samantha has risen far above those humble beginnings. She has contributed to works both great and small, including the *Uncaged Anthology*, *Rolled & Told*, and countless commissions. She currently labors on the *Adventurer’s Fashion Primer*, a book sorely needed by creatures of every type.

Samantha lives in a tower of toadstools and teeth, located somewhere in the strange wilds of Indiana. She dwells there with her loving husband — a musical clockwork filled with bartered voices, and their darling son — who she made herself, using only the finest twigs and glammers.

EDITORS

ASHLEY WARREN

Ashley is the founder, creator, and producer of the *Uncaged Anthology*. She writes for Wizards of the Coast, Onyx Path Publishing, and more. Ashley is a cast member on *Tales from the Mists*, which airs on WotC's official Twitch channel. Additionally, she is the founder of the RPG Writer Workshop and the author of countless titles on Dungeon Masters Guild. Her website is ashleywarrenwrites.com; Twitter, [@ashleynhwarren](https://twitter.com/ashleynhwarren).

DR. A. KELLY LANE, PH.D.

Dr. A. Kelly Lane is a biologist and education researcher by day, a TTRPG player, GM, and streamer by night. Kelly loves playing games both live and in person. Being an avid promoter of all things inclusive, she couldn't pass up the opportunity to be involved with this wonderful project. The talent and kindness in this group have been astounding and Kelly has learned a great deal from those involved. You can find her [@AKellyLane](https://twitter.com/AKellyLane) on Twitter where she discusses higher education, gaming, and inclusivity.

BRENT JANS

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Hannah is a professional nerd with two cats, several hundred books, and never enough time for *D&D*. She co-produces the actual play show *Worlds Apart*, where she also plays the strong barbarian mom Mara. DMs Guild credits include the *College of the Opera* (gold bestseller), the *Temple of Shattered Minds*, and upcoming projects — follow her on Twitter ([@wildrosemage](https://twitter.com/wildrosemage)) for updates, cat pictures, and general geekiness.

JEFF ELLIS

Jeff has written and published multiple adventures using the *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition Open Gaming License* to the *Dungeon Masters Guild* and is happy to be working as a contributing editor for the first time on *Uncaged*. He is humbled by all of the talent present in these anthologies and is honored to have helped in what little way he could. You can find out more about him on Twitter [@manyeyedmonster](https://twitter.com/manyeyedmonster).

JESSICA WASHBURN

Jessica is an aspiring writer and copy editor who looks forward to releasing more projects and supplements for *D&D 5e*. You can find her on Twitter as [@HealthPakStream](https://twitter.com/HealthPakStream). She may or may not be a halfling bard.

JESSICA ROSS

Jess is a teacher, editor, and podcaster. You can listen to her play *D&D* with some of her favorite ladies on *d20 Dames* and tune in while she GMs *Blue Rose* for some of her besties on *Bitches & Liches*. Check in with her shenanigans on Twitter [@writejessr](https://twitter.com/writejessr).

JOE NEHMER

A nine year old boy in 1983. Glorious red box basic *D&D*. Elmore cover. What? No board?... what. is. this. So many summer days making spell books from chopped up looseleaf, and seeing dungeoneer and crusader alike fall to glorious *AD&D* deathtrap dungeons. Thrilled to be a contributing editor for the *Uncaged Anthology*!

LIZ GIST

Liz is a hobbyist artist and freelance editor. They grew up fascinated with mythology and look for any excuse to burrow into that part of their psyche. Follow them on Twitter @crit_liz for puppy photos, mini painting and far too many tiefling PCs.

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Michael Haney is currently finishing his creative writing degree from the University of South Florida. When he isn't isn't writing about the occult or editing, he is devoting his free time to playing ttrpgs. You can find him on Twitter @michaelhaneyc.

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TK JOHNSON

TK is a full-time southern gothic/dark fantasy writer and part-time eldritch horror. They have been derailing campaigns since early childhood, but their most diabolical plans are unveiled every Friday evening as DM in the Twitch actual play, Tales From the Mists. Their spooky stories can be found at www.tkjwrites.com. Legends say that you can find TK lurking in the hills of Kentucky with their familiar, Samson, when the moon is full, the fog is thick, and the harvest is ripe for the Ancient Ones' return.

DONORS

A huge, heartfelt thanks to those who donated to our project.

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Alex is a best-selling creator whose work can be found on DMsGuild.com.

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Joe also served *Uncaged* as an editor; learn more about him on pg. 216.

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Phil is the owner of P.B. Publishing, which produces immersive content for *Dungeons & Dragons* 5e. Learn more at www.facebook.com/PBPublishing

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Sersa Victory is a designer of deathtrap dungeons for dark fantasy tabletop and video games. His work includes *Tomb of Mercy*, *Necropolis of the Mailed Fist*, *Testament of Malice*, and the upcoming text adventure game *Ember Undying*.

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