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GM'S MISCELLANY: DUNGEON BACKDROPS III



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DUNGEON BACKDROPS

III



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DROWNED FANE OF THE ELDER GOD 25

Bitter black ichor sprays your face as your axe blade bites into blubber, severing yet another tentacle. As the bloody appendage flops helplessly in the water, the others release their grasp on your companions to slither back towards the beach, offering you a brief respite. Between ragged breaths, you come to realise the full horror of your predicament: there is no way back. With the monster blocking your escape and the waters around you slowly rising, you are faced with a choice: withdraw deeper into the primaeval fane and face its mind-bending horrors with fire and sword, or drown and sink softly into oblivion's deep, dark embrace. What troubles you most, however, is that the latter option seems to be the most reasonable one by far...

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USING A DUNGEON BACKDROP

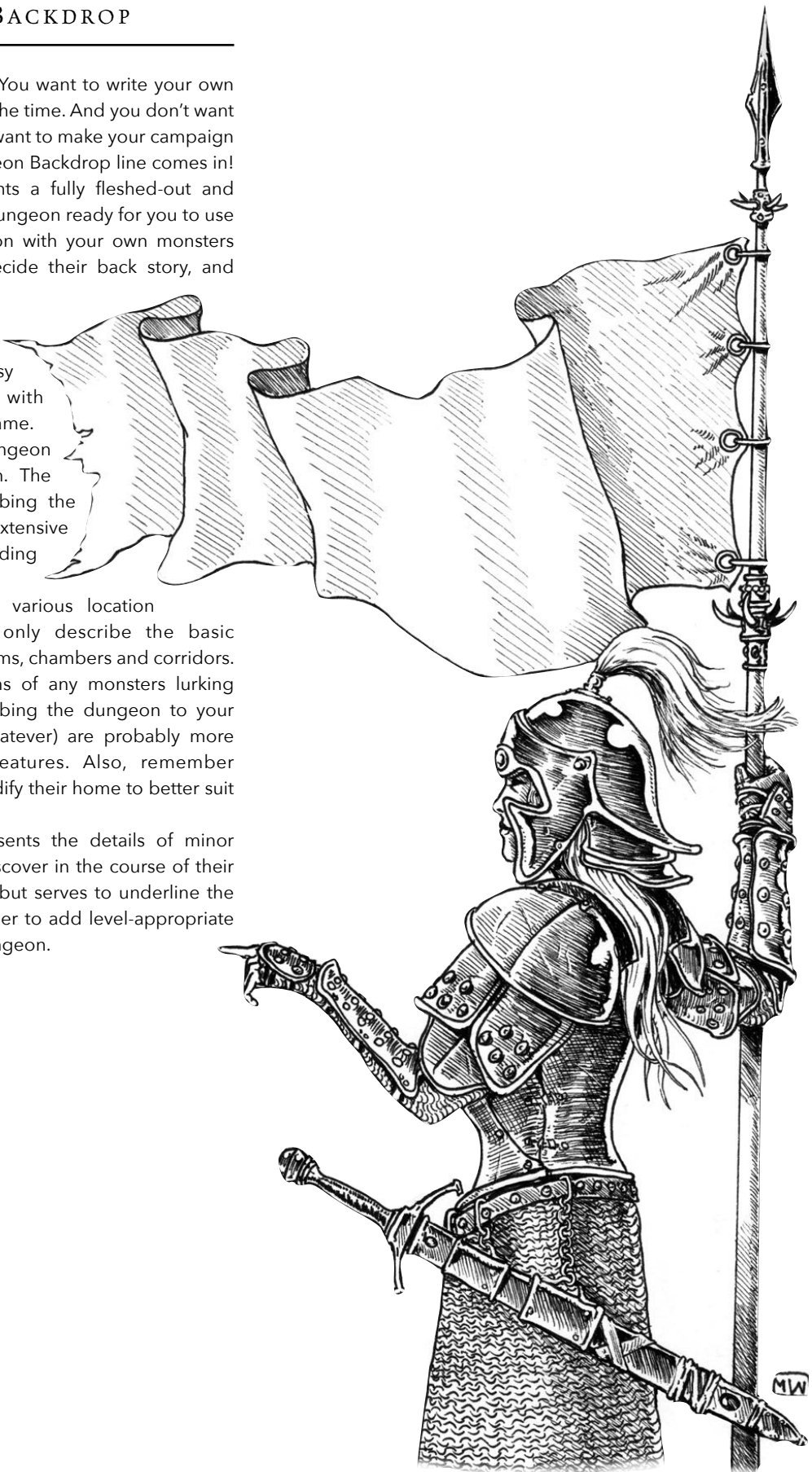
You are a GM, but you are busy. You want to write your own modules, but you just don't have the time. And you don't want to use commercial modules. You want to make your campaign your own. That's where the Dungeon Backdrop line comes in! Each Dungeon Backdrop presents a fully fleshed-out and lovingly detailed self-contained dungeon ready for you to use as you see fit. Stock the dungeon with your own monsters (and—perhaps—their treasure), decide their back story, and you are good to go.

Every Dungeon Backdrop is carefully designed to be easily inserted into almost any fantasy campaign and is compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game.

Tweak and modify this Dungeon Backdrop to make it your own. The parts of this supplement describing the actual dungeon itself feature extensive space for you to make notes—adding treasure, opponents and so on.

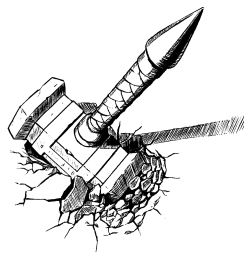
Location Descriptions: The various location descriptions provided herein only describe the basic appearance of the dungeon's rooms, chambers and corridors. They do not include descriptions of any monsters lurking therein. Remember, when describing the dungeon to your players the snarling orcs (or whatever) are probably more noticeable than the room's features. Also, remember creatures in the dungeon will modify their home to better suit their needs.

Treasure: The text only presents the details of minor treasures the characters could discover in the course of their adventure. Most is of little value but serves to underline the flavour of the dungeon. Remember to add level-appropriate treasure when designing your dungeon.



BLASTED DONJON — OF THE — ERDUKR DWARVES

For decades, the Erdukr dwarves have been a dwindling folk. But now, all contact with their ancient hold has ceased. What doom has befallen the dwarves? Did they dig too deep, did their ancient enemies, the Orcs of the Flayed Skull, finally triumph, or did some other doom befall them? Whatever the cause of their fall, the answer lies in the Blasted Donjon of the Erdukr Dwarves!



DUNGEON BACKGROUND

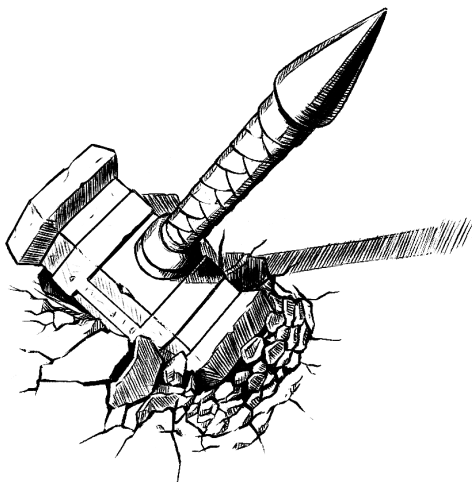
The Erdukr clan have never been a numerous people. Like so many of their dwarven brethren, the clan is cursed with a low birth, and so they feel each death among their own more intensely than would humans. For decades, the Erdukr have been a dwindling people locked in a death struggle with their hereditary enemies—the Orcs of the Flayed Skull—who grow ever more numerous and rapacious.

Desperate for help, the dwarves believed the honeyed words of Ninazu Urusilim—a self-proclaimed “puissant worker of the mystic arts”. Ninazu promised the dwarves he could help them defeat the orcs and bring peace to the clan. Ninazu Urusilim is a necromancer and demonologist steeped in the blackest of the arcane arts and used the dwarves as unwitting assistants to help him summon a powerful otherworldly creature into the world. Instead, his magical doings—which reached a climax a few days ago—brought disaster, death, and destruction to the Erdukr clan when he lost control of the summoned entity.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The characters can stumble on the Blasted Donjon of the Erdukr Dwarves by happenstance and decide to explore the locale on a whim. Alternatively, use one of the hooks below to lure the characters to the crypt:

- **Dead Dwarf:** Travelling through the hills, the characters stumble upon the body of a dead dwarf. A cursory investigation reveals the dwarf has been savagely attacked before being eviscerated. The dwarf’s tracks are easy to follow and lead back to the Blasted Donjon of the Erdukr Dwarves. Dependent on your design for the dungeon, you could place a clue as to the dwarf’s killer—perhaps ichor of a sinister nature or a hewn demonic body part near the dwarf’s body. Any good-aligned adventurer should be keen to determine what killed the dwarf and the level of threat to any nearby settlements.



- **Missing Dwarves:** No members of the Erdukr clan have been seen in the surrounding settlements for some time. Normally, this would not elicit any concern, but several merchants were expecting to do business with them, and, in turn, their customers are getting annoyed. A merchant, Aleksandra Ikitiera (NG female human), approaches the characters and offers them each 50 gp to go to the Erdukr’s home to see what is wrong. If they can, they could also bring back the cases of dwarven brandy she has already paid for.
- **Searching for Ninazu:** The necromancer and demonologist Ninazu Urusilim is a reviled and hated worker of magic wanted in several kingdoms for his blasphemous doings. The characters have been hired to investigate a recent sighting of the man. Their search brings them into the adventure when they arrive at a nearby village. The locals provide the party with rumour #6. Alternatively, if you have a suitable reoccurring villain in your campaign, you could use them instead of Ninazu.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A character can use Diplomacy to gather information about the Blasted Donjon of the Erdukr Dwarves. This takes 1d4 hours and 1d4 gp. The character gains one more rumour for every additional 1d4 hours and 1d4 gp they spend.

1. The Erdukr clan are in decline. The dwarves are skilled artificers and miners, but their numbers have been dwindling for decades—perhaps centuries. They are the implacable enemies of the (far more numerous) Orcs of the Flayed Skull tribe.
2. The Erdukr clan of dwarves are fabulously wealthy. Deep mines below their clan hold yet hold much gold and silver for the industrious dwarves to extract.
3. The Orcs of the Flayed Skull tribe are foul even by orcish standards. They use the skulls of their enemies as decorations and eat the flesh of their slain foes.
4. A stranger was seen climbing in the hills near the Erdukr clan hold months ago. The man spoke in a strange fashion and wore clothes of exotic cut. He had the air of a magician about him. He has not been seen since; perhaps he is staying with the dwarves.
5. When the Erdukr were more numerous, they delved deep and built themselves a vast underground hold. As their numbers declined, they retreated from the hold’s deeper reaches. Who knows what could lie forgotten in the dark, waiting to be found?
6. The Erdukr dwarves are desperate—they fear eventual defeat at the hands of their hereditary foes, the Orcs of the Flayed Skull. To swing the balance in their favour, they sought out a wizard to work great magics on their behalf.

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

The Erdukr can dwell in a range of rugged hills or mountains. The descriptions below have been designed to work with either location.

WILDERNESS DRESSING

Use this list to add life and detail to the dungeon's surrounds:

1. The trail passes a lofty, rocky crag of grey, slick rock. Moss and lichens grow on the crag's stone, and this section of trail is muddy.
2. Deep footprints mar the ground. A character skilled in tracking can tell they were made by a running dwarf. The footsteps lead out of the hills. (These are the footsteps of the dwarf detailed in the "Dead Dwarf" adventure hook.)
3. The surrounding terrain is rugged and steep; only scrub grass and a few bushes find purchase in the thin soil.
4. A large bird of prey soars high above the characters' heads, hunting for its next meal. Suddenly and silently, it plunges out of sight behind a ridge.
5. The wind whips over the party, chilling the air and plucking at their cloaks. The temperature drops as dark clouds glide across the sky. Gloom cloaks the surrounds.
6. The entrance to an abandoned mine pierces a cliff. The mine's upper level is dry and could serve as a good campsite, but the lower levels are hopelessly flooded.
7. A ray of sunlight bursts through the clouds to glint off something metallic. If the characters investigate, and you have not used the Dead Dwarf adventure hook, refer to "The Adventure Begins".
8. Dark clouds scud across the sky, plunging the area into deep gloom. Sensitive characters feel a profound sense of doom and foreboding that only grows as they draw closer to the Erdukr's home.
9. The howling of a distant wolf echoes through the air. The wolf is some distance away and (probably) poses no danger to the party.
10. The wind picks up, and the temperature drops. Gathering dark clouds threaten rain; if the characters do not find shelter, they are likely to get wet and cold.

THINGS TO FIND

Use this list to determine what the characters discover if they search the dungeon's surroundings. Modify the value of items found to suit your campaign.

1. Old tracks show the path taken by many booted humanoids. A skilled tracker can determine the type of creatures who left the tracks. (This depends on your setup, but the tracks were likely left by dwarves or orcs.)
2. Slain orcs, their bodies mouldering and equipment rusting, lie where they fell. There is no sign of any dwarven bodies amid the carnage. A skilled healer

determines the skirmish likely took place several weeks ago).

3. An old campsite fills the space under an overhang. Two part-collapsed tents face each other over an ash-filled fire surrounded by a ring of blackened rocks.
4. The clan mark of the Erdukr—two axes crossed over a hammer—has been chiselled into the face of a gigantic boulder overlooking the thin trail. Lichen and moss grow over the boulder, partially obscuring the sigil.
5. A heavy, crudely crafted arrow lies splintered and broken in front of a rock. A character examining the arrow can determine it was not dwarf-made.
6. Scuff marks on the rock show where someone has scrambled upwards recently.
7. An oddly-shaped outcrop of rock looks like a frozen tentacle emerging from the surrounding stone. It is wreathed with lichen and moss.
8. A small hut of dry-stone walls topped by a slate roof stands hard in the shelter of a craggy ridge. Built long ago as a shelter from harsh weather, the hut has seen better days. The hut is well stocked with firewood.
9. A narrow opening in the rock leads into a large, dry cave. Piles of bat guano cover the floor, and hundreds of bats hang from the ceiling. At night, they emerge to range through the surroundings in search of food.
10. The clan mark of the Erdukr—two axes crossed over a hammer—is carved into the stone ground. The sigil is worn and easy to miss. An arrow next to the sigil points toward the clan's hold.

ORCS OF THE FLAYED SKULL

The characters may encounter roving bands of Flayed Skull orcs as they explore the hills. Such encounters could be nothing more than a nuisance or the characters could stumble into a large war band of the foul creatures.

The characters may want to learn more about the Orcs of the Flayed Skull. A character with local knowledge may know something about the orcs.

- The Orcs of the Flayed Skull are foul even by orc standards. They use the skulls of their enemies as decorations and eat the flesh of their slain foes.
- The Orcs of the Flayed Skull are the implacable, hereditary foe of the Erdukr dwarves.
- The orcs live several days journey into the hills (or mountains depending on your setup) in an old mining village and the mines which run under it.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

The dungeon has several notable locations.

1. **The Twin Gates:** Twin Gates warded the Donjon of the Erdukr Dwarves. Now, only one of the passages is traversable.
2. **The Grand Hall:** Built to amaze visitors and celebrate the Erdukr's glorious history, this grand chamber is replete with carvings of dwarven victories over their foul foes.
3. **The Processional:** This chamber once provided access to the dwarves' deeper halls. A huge cave-in now blocks such access.
4. **Chamber of the Gate Warden:** Herein dwelt Fargrim Erdukr, the Gate Warden.
5. **Guardroom:** Two dwarf warriors charged with watching over the Twin Gates dwelt here.
6. **Ransacked Storeroom:** This once-organised storeroom has been comprehensively ransacked and looted.
7. **Chamber of Summoning:** This chamber was one of two required by Ninazu Urusilim to complete his ritual. The other chamber is location 10.
8. **Shattered Armoury:** The dwarves kept a goodly supply of weapons and armour here for use in the defence of the Twin Gates.
9. **Bedchamber:** Herein dwelt another important dwarf charged with protecting the Erdukr's home.
10. **Hidden Summoning Chamber:** The characters may never realise this hidden chamber exists.

GENERIC DUNGEON FEATURES

Many of the dungeon's locations share certain features:

Illumination: Darkness.

Ceilings: Unless otherwise noted, the ceilings throughout the dungeon are eight feet high.

Walls: The dungeon's walls are of smoothed and dressed stone. In places, the dwarves have decorated the walls with carvings or reliefs depicting great moments from their long, glorious history.

Floors: The dungeon's walls are of smoothed and dressed stone. Generally, they are flat and unimpeded

Stone Doors: Stone doors set on nested hinges ward the donjon's various rooms and chambers.

Slain Dwarves: Slain dwarves lie scattered about the hold; descriptions of several appear in "Dungeon Dressing".

Stairs: Carved from stone, the stairs in the dungeon have half-foot risers and count as difficult terrain.

Statues: Stone statues of the dwarves' greatest heroes watch over certain areas of the donjon. Such statues depict stout dwarven warriors clad in plate armour armed with a battleaxe or warhammer.

GENERIC DUNGEON HAZARDS

Some parts of the hold are unsafe:

Unstable Rubble: Piles of rubble may shift and slide under the characters' feet. Such areas are difficult terrain.

Unstable Ceilings: Unstable ceilings are prone to collapse if they are unduly prodded or if combat takes place beneath them.

- **Collapse:** The ceiling collapses, filling the square below it and all adjacent squares with rubble. Characters in the area suffer damage from the falling rocks and are part-buried. A characters with swift reactions may negate the buried result and only suffer half damage from the falling rocks. Squares filled with rubble are difficult terrain.
- **Part-Buried Characters:** Conscious characters part-buried in the rubble can free themselves with or without the help of their unburied companions.

DUNGEON DRESSING

Use this list to breathe life and detail into the dungeon:

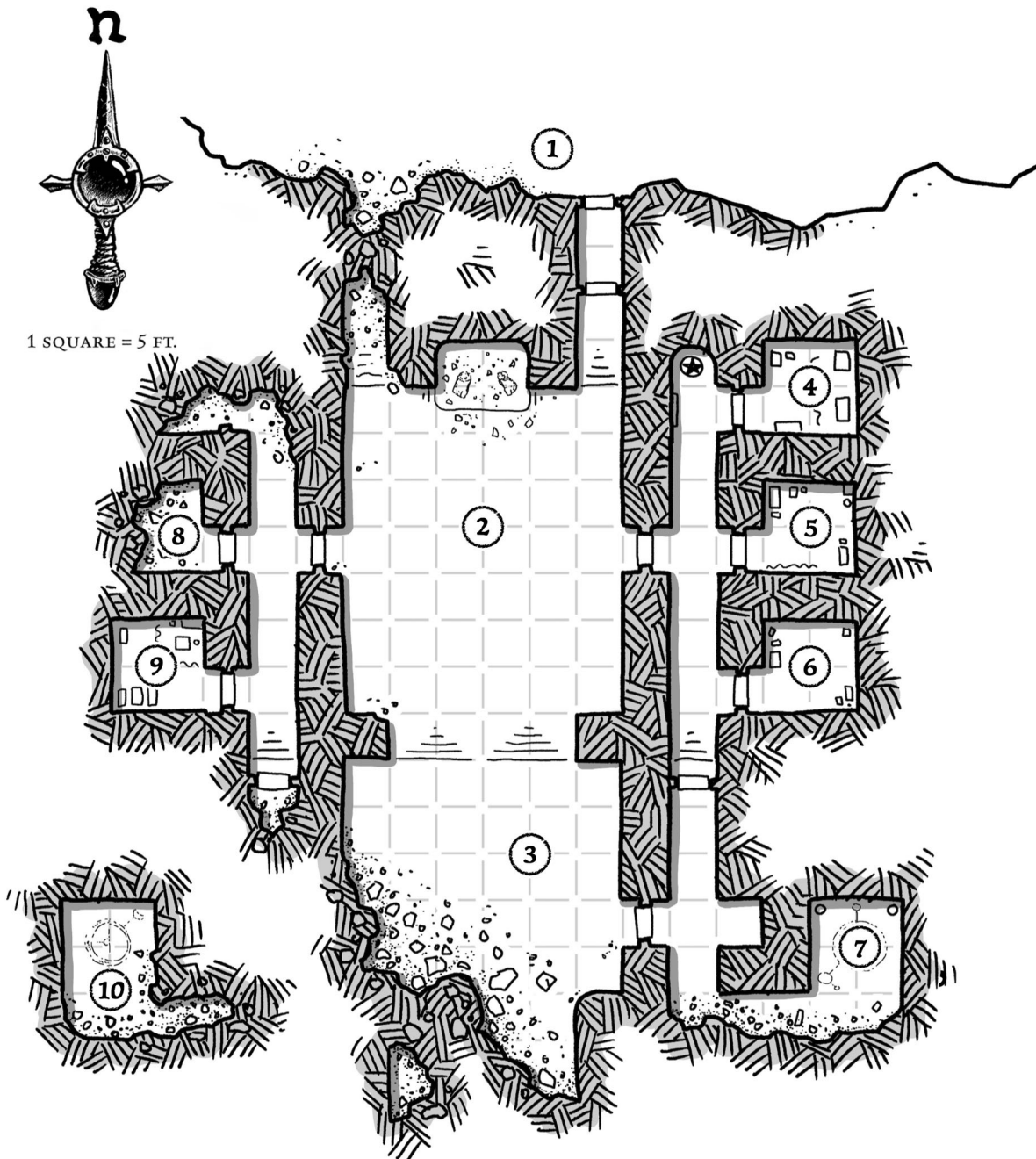
1. Smeared bloodstains on the walls and floor tell of something being dragged through here.
2. A warhammer, its head covered in a drying, viscous black ichor, lies on the floor.
3. An eviscerated dwarf sprawls on the floor; their armour is rent, and their axe lies nearby.
4. The floor is pitted as if someone had dribbled acid or something similar onto it. The faint trail leads toward the Twin Gates.
5. A small pile of rubble—perhaps fallen from the ceiling—creates an area of difficult terrain.
6. Chunks of dwarf are scattered about; it appears something literally pulled the poor dwarf limb from limb.
7. A slain dwarf sprawls on the floor; the dwarf is missing an arm, and a spray of dry arterial blood paints a grim picture of the dwarf's final moments.
8. The faint aroma of incense hangs in the air.
9. Dust and grit sift down the ceiling.
10. A disembowelled dwarf slumps against a wall. Their blood and gore decorate the floor and wall. A battleaxe drenched in greenish ichor lies near the dwarf's outstretched hand.

THINGS TO FIND

Use this list to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party find if they search a dungeon location. Modify the value of items found to suit your campaign.

1. A heavy one-foot-long key carved from stone lies at the end of a black iron chain sized to fit around a dwarf's neck. Carvings of hills and mountains decorate the key.
2. A well-hidden storage niche in one wall, at dwarven shoulder height, holds a *potion of healing*.

3. A bloody pouch holds a half-dozen round platinum coins.
4. A beautifully wrought stone potion vial lies on the floor. The vial is empty, and its stopper lies nearby.
5. A crossbow bolt lies on the floor; its tip is dented.
6. A battleaxe, its blade covered in black ichor, lies on the floor in the middle of the area.
7. Portions of the ornate wall carvings in this area have been deliberately defaced.
8. A wall carving depicts a heroic dwarf warrior standing atop a pile of orc corpses. The dwarf's black eyes glimmer in the party's lights. Investigation reveals they are onyx (each worth 100 gp).
9. A pouch stuffed into a recess behind a wall carving holds ten gold coins.
10. The tapestry hanging in this area glimmers strangely in the light. It depicts a wilderness scene lit by a blazing sun. Gold and silver thread have been cunningly woven into the tapestry to pick out the sun's rays. The tapestry is worth 200 gp.



Tagged and untagged copies of this map can be downloaded at ragingswanpress.com

GM NOTES

Construct Guards: Some of the carvings on the walls in locations 2 and 3 could be magical or construct guardians that survived the Erdukr's destruction.

Further Adventures: More of the Erdukr's hold lies behind the massive collapse to the south of location 3. To access the areas beyond, the characters will require powerful magic—perhaps gaseous form, dimension door or the like—or much careful excavation.

1: THE TWIN GATES

Twin Gates warded the Donjon of the Erdukr Dwarves. Now, only one of the passages is traversable.

A stout eight-foot-high stone door—partly open—pierces the cliff. About 30 feet to the west, a rockfall has blocked what might have been another entrance.

Illumination: Outside, the illumination depends on the time of day. Beyond the Erdukr's outer gate, the light level drops one step. Beyond the inner gate, it drops another step.

Stone Outer Doors: These thick stone portals are perfectly balanced to be easily openable from the inside. They open into the donjon.

Blocked Passage: A great collapse of rubble has blocked the western passage leading to level 2. It is impassable without the use of magic, such as *gaseous form*, or extensive (and careful) excavation.

2: THE GRAND HALL

Built to amaze visitors and celebrate the Erdukr's glorious history, this grand chamber is replete with carvings of dwarven victories over their foul foes.

The ceiling of this lofty chamber is 30 feet high. Elaborate bas-relief carvings of dwarves slaying orcs decorate the walls and ceiling. To the south, wide steps ascend to another chamber.

Wall Carvings: Elaborate, high-quality bas-relief carvings depicting the Erdukr's many victories over their foul, monstrous enemies decorate the walls.

High Ceiling: The ceiling in this chamber rises 30 feet above the floor and features similar carvings to the walls.

Sundered Statue: The rubble and ruin of a 25 feet tall statue stand upon a five feet high plinth. Only the statue's carven feet and part of its legs remain intact. It depicted the Erdukr's first and mightiest chief.

3: THE PROCESSIONAL

This chamber once provided access to the dwarves' deeper halls. A huge cave-in now blocks such access.

An immense collapse fills the southern part of his lofty chamber. More elaborate carvings of innumerable dwarven victories cover what's left of the walls.

Wall Carvings: Elaborate, high-quality bas-relief carvings depicting the Erdukr's many victories over their foul, monstrous enemies decorate the walls.

High Ceiling: The ceiling in this chamber rises 30 feet above the floor and features similar carvings to the walls.

Unstable Rubble & Ceiling: An unstable pile of rubble fills part of the chamber. A character wise in engineering or mining examining it realises the debris is unsafe. See "Generic Dungeon Hazards" and "Further Adventures" for more information.

4: CHAMBER OF THE GATE WARDEN

Herein dwelt Fargrim Erdukr, the Gate Warden.

This tiny room holds a chest, desk and chair. A tapestry covers the opposite wall.

The characters may not initially realise the tapestry here actually divides the room in half.

Door: The door to this chamber is part-closed.

Tapestry: A tapestry hangs from the ceiling, dividing the room in two. The tapestry is a dark but starkly beautiful view of a vast natural cave. A perceptive character who can see it realises the tapestry ripples slightly when the characters open the door into this chamber.

Furniture: A chest, desk and chair stand without the tapestry. Behind it lie another chest and Fargrim's bed. The chests have been smashed open and contain Fargrim's scattered possessions—clothes, boots and so on.

5: GUARDROOM

Two dwarf warriors charged with watching over the Twin Gates dwelt here.

Two beds—one overturned—and a tapestry hanging on one wall are the major features of this looted, gore-splattered chamber. Two dead dwarven warrior sprawl on the floor.

Door: The door to this chamber stands open.

Tapestry: A tapestry hangs from the wall; it depicts a view of a prominent landmark in the surrounding wilderness.

Furniture: The furniture here is sturdy and of good, if a little plain, design. It is all gore-splattered.

Dead Dwarves: These two dwarves died shockingly brutal and violent deaths. Their armour is rent in many places, and both have suffered terrible wounds. An appropriately skilled character examining the wounds may be able to gain valuable insights into what killed the dwarves.

6: RANSACKED STOREROOM

This once-organised storeroom has been comprehensively ransacked and looted.

Opened boxes and crates—their contents strewn across the floor—are scattered about this chamber.

Door: The door to this chamber stands open.

Scattered Boxes and Crates: Overturned and opened boxes and crates lie scattered about this room. The dwarves stored the fruits of their labour here before selling them to visiting human merchants and their other customers.

The contents of the turned-over and emptied boxes and crates scattered about this chamber create difficult terrain.

GM NOTES

These locations contain innumerable opportunities for searching characters to find minor dwarven treasures. They also offer an opportunity for you to seed handouts depicting the Erdukr's decline or clues to the recent disastrous events at the hold.

Dead Dwarves' Wounds: *The identify of the creature who slew these dwarves depends on your design. This is a good place to reward attentive players by providing subtle clues to suggest what the characters may face in the future.*

Missing Dwarves: *If you are using the Missing Dwarves adventure hook it is likely that the dwarven brandy Aleksandra Ikitiera asked the characters to retrieve will be found here.*

GM NOTES

Magic Circle: Add such detail and flavour to the magic circle as appropriate to foreshadow (or explain) the identity of the creature responsible for the Erdukr's destruction.

Dwarf-Crafted Weapons: Location 8 is a good room to place some dwarf-craft weapons and armour for the characters to find—if they take the time to sort through the rubble. This has the twin-purposes of providing treasure and suggesting to the characters that it might be worth excavating other parts of the collapsed hold.

7: CHAMBER OF SUMMONING

This chamber was one of two required by Ninazu Urusilim to complete his ritual. The other chamber is location 10.

Rubble partly blocks the entrance to this small chamber. A magic circle of elaborate design covers the floor to the north.

Door: The door to this room has been shattered; however, the rubble lies without the room in the corridor. This strongly suggests something burst forth from the room.

Unstable Rubble & Ceiling: An unstable pile of rubble fills part of the chamber. A character wise in engineering or mining examining it realises the debris is unsafe. (See "Generic Dungeon Hazards".)

Magic Circle: The remains of a magic circle dominate the north part of this chamber. A character wise in magical matters examining the circle can determine that the circle was part of a ritual designed to summon a demon or devil. A character wise in magical matters able to cast summoning spells realises this is one of a pair of circles required for the successful conclusion of the ritual. (The other circle lies in location 10).

8: SHATTERED ARMOURY

The dwarves kept a goodly supply of weapons and armour here for use in the defence of the Twin Gates.

The western part of the chamber has collapsed. Weapons—most horribly bent or broken—jut from the rubble.

Door: The door to this chamber is closed.

Unstable Rubble & Ceiling: An unstable pile of rubble fills part of the chamber. A character wise in engineering or mining examining it realises the debris is unsafe. (See "Generic Dungeon Hazards".)

Buried Arms & Armour: Characters carefully digging through the unstable rubble may find various items of interest, such as dwarven weapons and armour. Add such items as appropriate to your campaign.

9: BEDCHAMBER

Herein dwelt another important dwarf charged with protecting the Erdukr's home from all intruders.

Tapestries cordon off one corner of this chamber. Without the tapestry stands a table flanked by benches and one chest.

Door: The door to this chamber stands open.

Tapestries: The tapestries depict scenes of battle in which dwarves are crushing an orc horde.

Furniture: A table, two short benches and a chest stand without the tapestry. Behind the tapestry lies a small bed and another chest. The chests contain mundane equipment, clothes and so on. A perceptive character searching the chests discovers a small pouch containing 15 gp and 3 pp.

10: HIDDEN SUMMONING CHAMBER

The characters may never realise this hidden chamber exists.

A collapse of rock and rubble blocks the entrance to this chamber. A rubble-strewn summoning circle covers much of the floor.

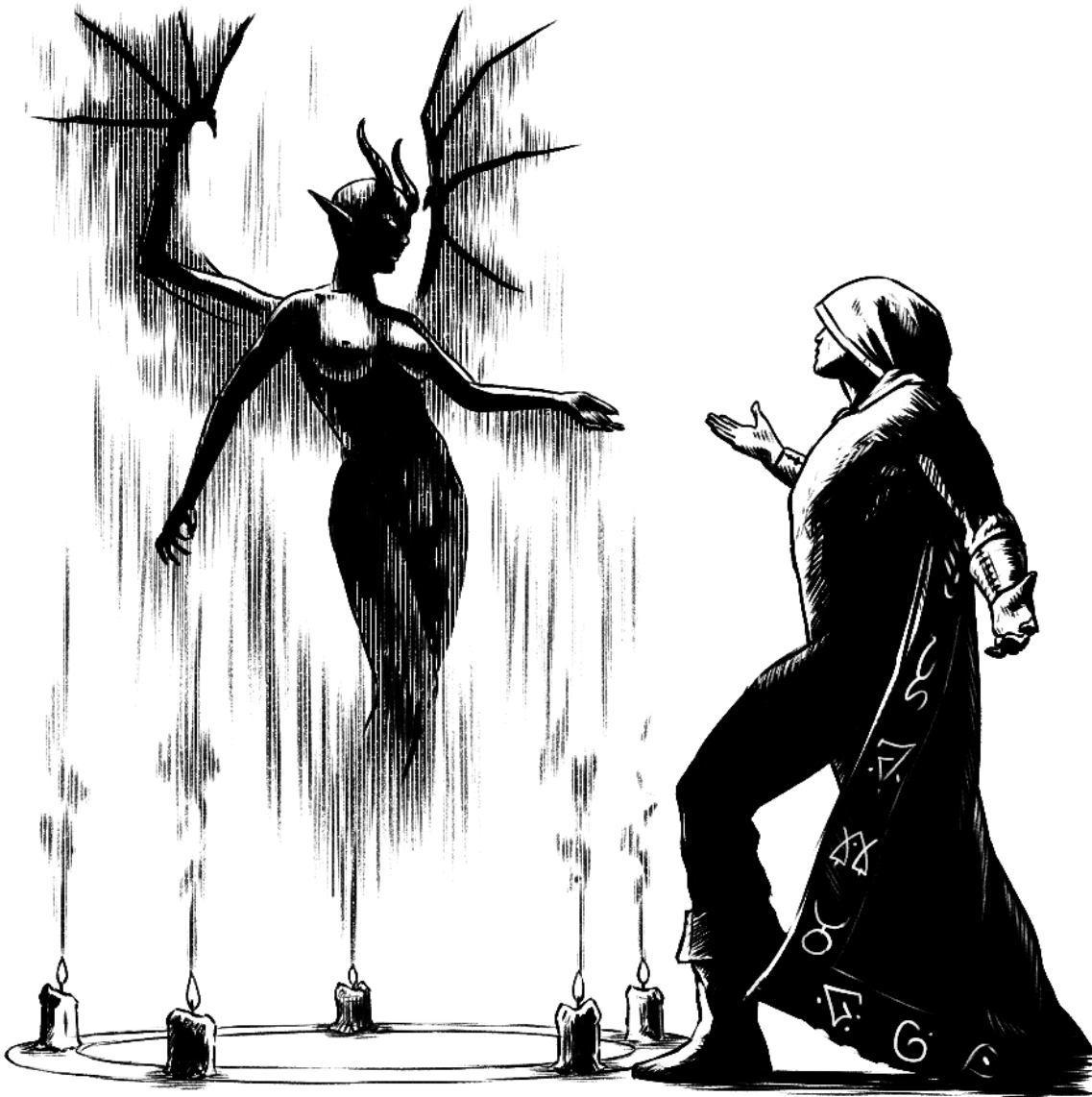
Unstable Rubble & Ceiling: An unstable pile of rubble fills part of the chamber. A character wise in engineering or mining examining it realises the debris is unsafe. (See "Generic Dungeon Hazards".)

Summoning Circle: The remains of a magic circle dominate the north part of this chamber. A character wise in magical matters examining the circle can determine that the circle was part of a ritual designed to summon a demon or devil. A character wise in magical matters able to cast summoning spells realises this is one of a pair of circles required for the successful conclusion of the ritual. (The characters have likely already discovered the other circle in location 7.)

GM NOTES

Magic Circle: Add such detail and flavour to the magic circle as appropriate to foreshadow (or explain) the identity of the creature responsible for the Erdukr's destruction.

Ninazu Urusilim Dead? Perhaps Ninazu died during or immediately after the summoning. Alternatively, perhaps—trapped—he starved or suffocated to death here. If you decide that is the case add his body to the description and prepare suitable treasure for the characters discovering the corpse of this skilled demonologist (who, of course, could have risen as some form of undead).



AFTERMATH

The Blasted Donjon the Erdukur Dwarves doesn't have to fade from the campaign once the characters have completed their initial exploration of the site. Much of the hold remains yet unexplored—easy access is blocked by the massive collapse in location 3.

Similarly, the fate and location of Ninazu Urusilim could remain a mystery, depending on your design of the dungeon. The characters could determine that the foul demonologist must be punished for the destruction of the Erdukur clan—along with his other crimes—and hunt him down.

RESOLVING ADVENTURE HOOKS

If you used any of the hooks presented in "The Adventure Begins", use these notes to resolve the adventure's aftermath:

- **Dead Dwarf:** The characters may bury the body of the dead dwarf either by the road where he fell or back at the Erdukur's home. If they do neither, they begin to hear stories of a haunting in the hills—travellers being accosted by a spectral dwarf who attacks them when they refuse to help him.
- **Missing Dwarves:** Once the characters have explored the accessible parts of the dungeon and returned to Aleksandra Ikitiera with news of the dwarves' fate, the campaign can progress in a number of directions. Perhaps that is the end of it, and the characters go on their way. Alternatively, Aleksandra could ask the characters to dig through the rubble to reach the parts of clanhold cut off by the massive collapse in location 3.
- **Searching for Ninazu:** If the characters did not find Ninazu during the adventure, their quest continues. Ninazu could be long gone to wreak havoc elsewhere, or he could be trapped behind the massive collapse in location 3.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

As discussed in the preceding section, the Erdukur's home does not have to fade from the campaign once

the initial adventure is over. Much of the hold remains inaccessible; if the party contains a dwarf, they may feel honour bound to find out what happened to the rest of the Erdukur clan. Alternatively, if the creature that destroyed the clan escaped the characters, they may feel that they have to hunt it down before it causes untold mayhem and death in the locality.



CURSED TOWER — OF THE — ASTROMANCER

Strange things have started to happen at the Tower of the Astromancer. Its mistress, the half-elven wizard Tuulitar Vihas, has not been seen for weeks and the locals whisper that the tower is cursed. Odds lights and sounds emanate from the place and calls that something must be done grow louder and more insistent. Dare the heroes brave the Cursed Tower of the Astromancer?



DUNGEON BACKGROUND

One of Dunstone's tallest buildings, the Tower of the Astromancer, stands on Selka Street on the north edge of town. From here, it commands unrestrained views of the Mottled Spire and the open sky.

Herein dwells Tuulitar Vihas, the self-styled Astromancer. She lives with her apprentice but, as a powerful wizard, has no need for guards.

Tuulitar is independently wealthy, having a diverse range of investments in far-off Languard. Thus, she has no need to earn money satisfying adventurers—answering their irritating questions, sating their constant need for magic scrolls and so on—but occasionally hires such folk. For this reason, adventurers are not always summarily turned away from her tower-home.

Tuulitar owns several powerful—eye-wateringly expensive—spyglasses and telescopes and is building an ornate and complicated orrery in her tower. She pours all her money into this project, and the rest of the tower, its furnishings and so on, while fine are dated as a result.

Recently, strange things have been happening at the Tower of the Astromancer, and some folk have begun to believe it and its residents are cursed.

FOLK OF THE TOWER

Two people dwell in the Tower of the Astromancer:

- **Tuulitar Vihas the Astromancer** (N old female half-elf wizard 9) believes great power lies in the stars and is determined to unlock that power for herself. To this aged half-elf, nothing else matters.
- **Reima Itkonen** (NE male human wizard 5) schemes against his mistress, although he professes great loyalty to, and admiration of, her. He serves her solely to steal her power and lore. Reima has a black heart and cares for no one but himself. He is a proficient deceiver, though, and appears to be a thoroughly pleasant and helpful, if a little obsequious, chap.

THE CAUSE OF THE CURSE

A key part of your preparation for *Cursed Tower of the Astromancer* is determining what has recently happened at Tuulitar Vihas's tower to give it such a fell reputation. Use one of the below explanations or design your own:

- **Mind-Bending Vile Star:** Tuulitar recently took possession of a fallen vile star recovered from the Mottled Spire. The meteorite comprises a rare metal that has a terrible warping effect on the astromancer's mind.
- **Reima's Machinations:** Reima Itkonen, the astromancer's apprentice, covets her wealth, magic items and spellbooks. Thus, he has started poisoning his mistress, which has driven her to madness.

- **The Thing From Beyond the Stars:** Many things lurk in the spaces between the stars. When Tuulitar attempted a powerful divination spell, the magic formed a portal into her mind and an alien thing filtered down from the stars to possess the astromancer; its control is less than perfect, however.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The characters can hear of the Cursed Tower of the Astromancer by happenstance and decide to explore the locale on a whim. Alternatively, use one of the hooks below to lure the characters to the tower:

- **Forgotten Lore:** Tuulitar wants to read a certain book that lies in the library held at the Dreaming Spires in Languard. She engages the characters to retrieve the book and provides a letter of introduction to the Mistress of the Spires—the two are old friends. She needs the book quickly and urges the characters to hurry. Undoubtedly, complications will ensue either on the road or at the Dreaming Spires. When they return with the book, they fail to gain admittance to the tower.
- **New Stars and Planets:** As her knowledge grows, Tuulitar adds to the orrery she builds in her tower. She has received word that a new consignment of parts is ready for delivery. Tuulitar engages the characters to travel to the Great Forge—the temple of Abarin in Languard where the parts wait and escort them back to Dunstone. Delays and distractions mean the characters are away for a few weeks. When they return, they discover that things are amiss at Tuulitar's home.
- **Cursed Whispers:** The characters are in Dunstone, resting between adventures. While lingering in their favourite tavern, they hear two locals gossiping about the Cursed Tower of the Astromancer. The characters automatically learn rumours #1 and #2 from "Whispers & Rumours" below.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A character can use bribes and honeyed words to gather information about the Cursed Tower of the Astromancer and its mistress, Tuulitar Vihas. This takes 1d4 hours and costs 1d4 gp. The character learns another rumour for every additional 1d4 hours and 1d4 gp they spend. Use the list below to determine what the character learns.

11. Something has recently happened at the Tower of the Astromancer. For about two weeks, no one has been admitted to the tower, strange noises have been heard coming from within, and no one has seen the astromancer Tuulitar Vihas.
12. Tuulitar Vihas—the astromancer—sometimes hires groups of adventurers to travel into the Mottled Spire to recover

objects from the ruins riddling the nearby territory. One such group returned three weeks ago.

13. The astromancer's apprentice, Reima Itkonen, is not well-liked around town. He is entirely too nice to be genuine, and some folk whisper of his savage temper.
14. There are rumours of strange stirrings in the wild and rugged uplands of the Mottled Spire. Orcs have been seen in greater numbers further south than usual. Given these rumours, it won't be long before the town's population of adventurers expands—which will be great for the local economy.
15. The astromancer is a powerful wizard; as her title suggests, she is obsessed with the stars and the heavens. She can sometimes be seen on her tower's roof at night, surveying the night sky.
16. The astromancer, Tuulitar Vihas, has no time for adventurers bothering her in the hopes she will craft them magic items—her research is too important to waste time on such trivialities.

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

The (Cursed) Tower of the Astromancer stands on Selka Street on the northern edge of Dunstone. From here, the tower commands unrestrained views of the Mottled Spire and the open sky. Selka Street is named after the nearby river; most of the shops on the street sell fishing, camping and survival gear.

SELKA STREET BY DAY

Use this list to add life and detail to the tower's surrounds:

1. Two locals, arm in arm, wander along the street. When they get close to the Tower of the Astromancer they cross the road and speed up—it is as if they do not want to walk in the tower's shadow.
2. Beggars and street folk are conspicuous by their absence on the street near the Tower of the Astromancer.
3. Several peasant children sit on a wall near the astromancer's tower, intently watching the place. By their conversation, it seems like they are daring each other to run up and knock on the tower's door. There's lots of bravado but no real action.
4. The shops are open up and down the street, and a smattering of people—mostly adventurers, explorers other outdoor types—are browsing their wares.
5. A cat emerges from between two buildings, clutching a dead rat in its jaws. It stalks off to enjoy its meal.
6. A wagon rumbles down the street, and pedestrians step aside to let it pass.
7. Four soldiers march along Selka Street ostensibly to keep the peace. One of them casts an uneasy glance at the tower as they pass.
8. The shops are open up and down the street, and a smattering of people—mostly adventurers, explorers other outdoor types—are browsing their wares. The

businesses near the Tower of the Astromancer seem quieter than those further away. In these shops, the characters can haggle for bargains

SELKA STREET BY NIGHT

Use this list to add life and detail to the tower's surrounds:

1. Dark shadows fill the street, and all the shops are shut. Lights glimmer from shuttered windows above the shops, but few people are abroad on Selka Street.
2. A thin stray mongrel ambles along, sniffing the ground. It stiffens, and its hackles rise as it intently watches a shadow. A low growl escapes its throat.
3. It is a cloudless night, and numberless stars blaze down over the town from the inky-black sky.
4. The gentle sounds of life—muttered conversations, laughter, and soft singing—emanate from the houses lining Selka Street. Ahead, stands the Tower of the Astromancer—dark, silent and gaunt.
5. Bats flutter hunt for food. If a character is unlucky, one of the bats gets tangled in their hair.
6. Faint clouds drift across the moon, giving it an insubstantial, evil cast. A wan, thin light filters down to bathe the tower and town.
7. The street near the tower is devoid of traffic; if the characters plan to break in, there are no witnesses.
8. The yowling of a cat breaks the quiet of the night. Strangely, other cats—and some dogs—join in. A great cacophony of yowling and barking fills the air.

ODD EFFECTS

The (Cursed) Tower of the Astromancer has been gaining a fell reputation of late—mainly because of the strange effects emanating from the tower. Use this list to generate the details of such strange effects:

1. Bobbing balls of magical violet light dance atop the astromancer's tower.
2. Low sounds akin to sobbing, punctuated by wailing, drift from the arrow slits of the astromancer's tower.
3. A yellowish-red light flashes at one of the tower's arrow slits. Then, it turns blue.
4. A flock of birds flies toward the tower and then suddenly wheels away, screeching loudly.
5. A loud screech—like someone in the depths of great sorrow and pain—echoes from within the tower.
6. Strange shadows seem to writhe across the tower's walls. Some of them form glyphs and sigils.
7. A faintly luminous mist sometimes rises from the tower's roof. The colour of the mist—in some undefinable way—defies classification.
8. One or more of the characters feels a kind of mental intrusion when they are close to the tower—it feels like some unknown, incorporeal entity is trying to force its way into their mind.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

The tower has several notable locations.

1. **Portal of Stars:** Twin double doors provide the only easy access to the tower.
2. **The Orrery:** This double-height chamber holds Tuulitar's pride and joy—an orrery that she uses to track and recreate the positions of various astrological bodies.
3. **Hallway:** From here, explorers can access the tower's upper floors.
4. **Library:** High wooden shelves filled with books on astronomy, geography and other mundane but learned subjects line this chamber's walls.
5. **Study:** From this plushly appointed chamber, Tuulitar can gaze out at her orrery.
6. **Kitchen:** This chamber serves both as a kitchen and a food store.
7. **Hallway:** This hallway doubles as a seating area.
8. **Reima's Quarters:** Herein dwells Tuulitar's scheming apprentice Reima Itkonen.
9. **Tuulitar's Quarters:** Here dwells the astromancer, Tuulitar Vihas. Several powerful arcane protections ward this chamber.
10. **Tome Vault:** Tuulitar keeps her spellbooks and a few other rare and valuable esoteric volumes here.
11. **Treasure Vault:** This warded vault contains Tuulitar's treasures—her gold, silver and gems—along with a few magic items she does not regularly carry with her.
12. **Observatory:** Atop her tower, Tuulitar observes the passage of stars and other bodies across the heavens.

GENERIC DUNGEON FEATURES

Many of the tower's locations share certain features:

Illumination: Magical light fills the tower; one or more globes equivalent to a *dancing light* hover on the ceiling of each area. Their illumination is controlled with a series of command words.

Ceilings: The ceilings are 12 feet high in most areas.

Walls: The walls are of dressed field stone plastered over to enable decoration with frescos and murals. In some places, tapestries serve as decoration.

Ground Floor: Flagged, the ground floor is flat, unimpeded and in good condition.

Upper Floors: Creaking wooden boards comprise the tower's upper floors. Moving silently across these creaking floors is difficult.

Internal Doors: Stout wooden doors ward the tower's chambers. Doors open into the rooms.

Spiral Staircases: Narrow, cramped and built for defence, the spiral staircase provides cover for combatants fighting foes lower down the stairs. Squares containing a spiral staircase count as difficult terrain. Esoteric symbols and sigils are deeply incised into the stairs' risers.

Tapestries: Tapestries hang throughout the tower, depicting a variety of scenes. (Refer to the relevant room description). Each tapestry is worth between 50 gp and 100 gp. A character behind a tapestry is somewhat concealed. Characters can scale a tapestry quite easily; however, a tapestry only supports 130 lbs. of weight. Heavier characters rip the tapestry from the wall once they have climbed 10 ft.; such climbers suffer 1d6 damage and land prone. Common sense suggests that the tapestries are unlikely to support heavy climbers.

DUNGEON DRESSING

Use this list to breathe life and detail into the tower:

1. Arcane sigils are incised deeply into the floor.
2. A tapestry depicting a rugged range of hills sprawling under a night sky hangs on a wall. The weavers used silver thread to pick out each star. A falling star in the centre of the tapestry is shown plunging toward the hills.
3. The beautiful furniture in this chamber is delicate and ornate—it is clearly of elven artifice.
4. Reddish-black spots on the floor could be dried blood or spilt red wine.
5. A gossamer spiderweb fills a corner where the ceiling abuts a wall. A red spider with black dots all over its body squats at the web's centre.
6. A bobbing orb of faintly glowing yellow light slowly drifts through the air.
7. The heady scent of esoteric spell components mixed with the smell of musty old books hangs in the air.
8. A beautiful painting, done in vivid colours and depicting a blazing star falling toward a range of hills, decorates the entirety of one wall.
9. Odds sounds (perceptive character hears) filter down from an upper floor. They could be weeping or tittering.
10. A strange, indefinable feeling hangs in the air. Modify this entry to complement the cause of the "curse" hanging over Tuulitar's tower.

THINGS TO FIND

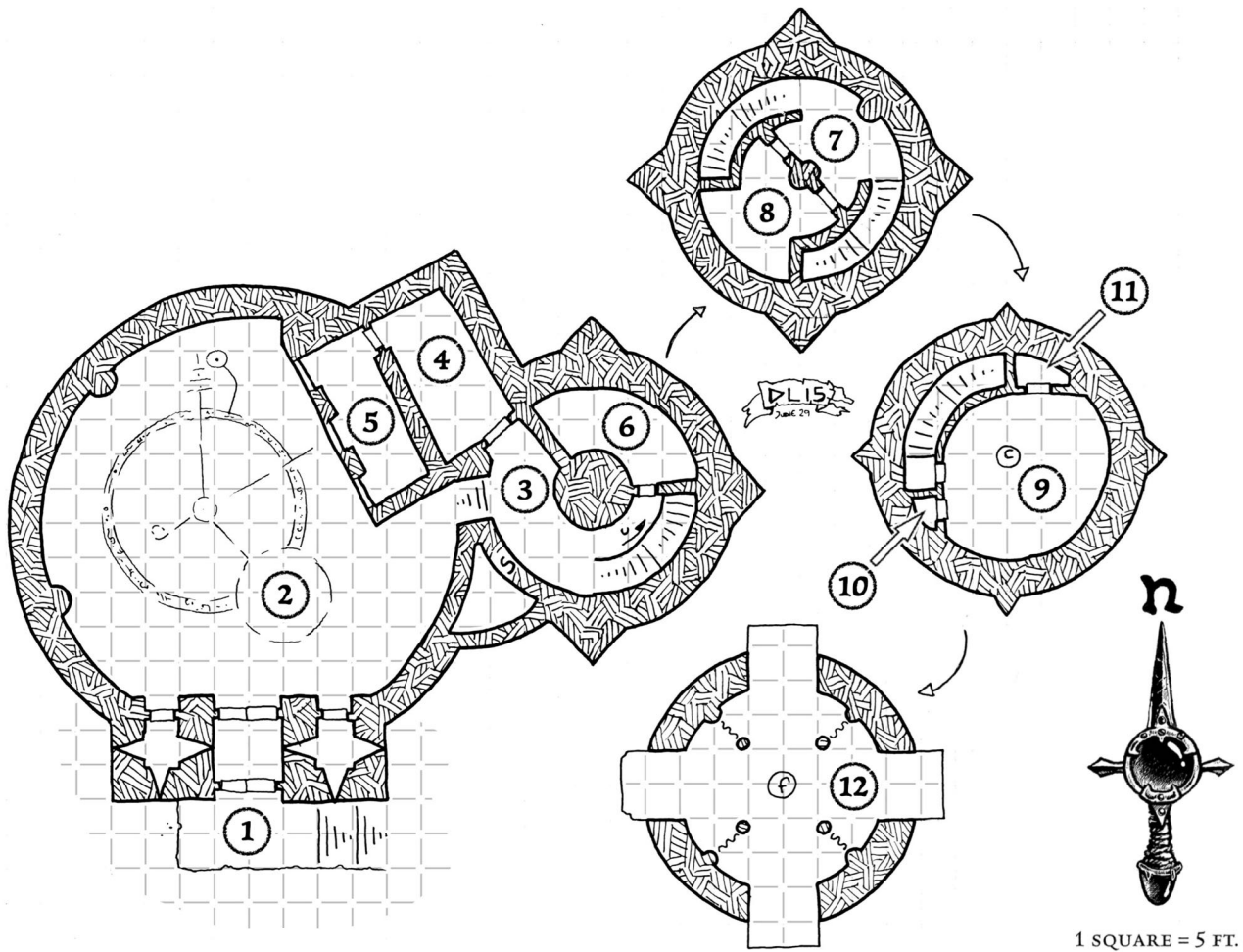
Use this list to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party find if they search a tower location. Modify the value of items found to suit your campaign.

1. The beautiful image of a well-known constellation is painted onto a swath of black wall. The stars seem to shimmer in the light—ground-up gemstones have been added to the paint to create the effect.
2. A fragile glass decanter half filled with white wine and two matching glasses stand on a side table.
3. A scroll case contains a fresh sheet of vellum. A clean ink pen and a pot of ink are positioned next to the case.
4. Painted with vivid colours, this small picture depicts a star blazing across an inky black sky. The paint is old and

cracked, suggesting the painting is decades, if not centuries, old.

5. Scratch marks on the floor suggest that something heavy has been dragged through the area.
6. A book lies open on a side table. The book is a treatise on the night sky, and Tuulitar's handwritten notes festoon its margins.
7. A faint blood smear mars the wall by the nearest door.

8. A scroll, dropped carelessly lying behind a piece of furniture, holds a *magic missile* spell.
9. A tightly-rolled piece of parchment shows a map of the nearby Mottled Spire. The map shows the locations of several known ruins in the near reaches of the hills as well as several intriguing locations marked with a star symbol.
10. A wine glass—miraculously not damaged—lies on its side by a long stain on the floor; clearly, the glass was full when it was dropped.



GM NOTES

The doors in location 1 offer the only relatively easy way to get into the tower. Characters that can fly can, of course, access the roof. Some characters may be able to squeeze through the arrow slits. If the doors are barred, characters without access to fly, gaseous form or reduce person may struggle to enter the tower.

Some characters may simply knock on the door. Determine, in regards your setup, how likely it is that Tuulitar or her apprentice, Reima, answer the door if the characters do so.

Arcane Defences: The tower's front doors are an excellent place for a non-lethal arcane trap.

An orrery is a mechanical model of the planetary system that illustrates or predicts the relative positions and motions of the planets and their moons. It may also show the relative sizes of these bodies; however, since accurate scaling is often not practical due to the actual large ratio differences, a rough approximation may be used instead.

Remember, Tuulitar's orrery is a work in progress, and she is exceptionally knowledgeable about the heavens. Thus, her orrery may include planets and moons of which the characters are unaware.

1: PORTAL OF STARS

Twin double doors provide the only easy means of accessing the tower.

Atop a flight of stone steps, iron-banded double doors pierce the tower's windowless walls.

Stair: The wide set of stairs leading up the tower's entrance is difficult terrain. The stairs lack a balustrade or handrail.

Arrow Slits: The tower's arrow slits are too narrow to squeeze through but do admit slivers of light into the interior.

Iron-Banded Oak Double Door: These tough doors provide access to the tower's interior. The doors have a bar that can be dropped into place from inside (which makes them extremely difficult to force open).

2: THE ORRERY

This double-height chamber holds Tuulitar's pride and joy—an orrery she uses to track and recreate the positions of various astrological bodies.

A large and complicated metal contraption dominates this large double-height chamber. High windows pierce the northeastern wall.

The Orrery: A number of differently sized orbs are suspended from metal poles attached to a convoluted gear-like mechanism set into the chamber's floor. A complex series of gears and levers enable the movement and positioning of the orrery. The orrery itself is both extremely valuable and a work in progress. As Tuulitar's understanding of the major stars and planets grows, so does her creation.

Windows: These paneless windows enable Tuulitar to observe her orrery from a suitably elevated position.

Stair: This short set of stairs is difficult terrain. Esoteric symbols and sigils are carved into each stair's risers.

3: HALLWAY

From here, explorers can access the tower's upper levels.

Tapestries cover the walls of this short hallway. Against the tower's outer wall, stairs spiral upwards.

Stairs: This short flight of stairs is difficult terrain.

Tapestries: Thick tapestries hang from the walls.



4: LIBRARY

High wooden shelves filled with books on astronomy, geography, and other mundane but learned subjects line this chamber's walls.

High bookshelves packed with books, scrolls, small statuettes, models and the like line the walls of this small chamber.

High Wooden Shelves: Crammed with books, scrolls and small decorative nicknacks, these deep shelves reach almost to the ceiling. A character can scale these shelves easily. The books here are mainly treatises on the natural world with a special focus on the stars, celestial bodies and history. None are particularly rare or valuable. Notable volumes include:

- **Ivanka's Constellations:** Written centuries ago by a dwarven seer, this tome describes the cyclical motions of various astronomical bodies. It also details several comets that visit the planet at long intervals.
- **Imatar Tiera's Diary:** This fragment of the famed wizard's diary has led Tuulitar to believe a fragment of Vile Star may yet lurk in the ruin of Imatar's home.

5: STUDY

From this plushly appointed chamber, Tuulitar can gaze out at her orrery.

Three paneless windows pierce one wall of this room. An ornate desk of dark wood and a matching high-backed chair stand before the middle window.

Windows: Set about six feet above the floor of location 2, these three windows provide an excellent vantage point to study the orrery in location 2.

Ornate Desk: A scattering of open books, scraps of parchments, an ink pen, ink pot and so on cover the desk. A tray holds a half-empty bottle of wine and a cut crystal wine glass of the highest quality. The desk has two long drawers; both contain more papers.

6: KITCHEN

This chamber serves both as a kitchen and a food store.

This small kitchen is crammed full of everything you would expect to find in such a place. A large fireplace dominates the outer wall.

Fireplace: A wide fireplace dominates the outer wall. A spit and various other cooking paraphernalia stand nearby.

Kitchen Apparatus: All the items necessary for operating a small kitchen can be found here.

Food Stuffs: Boxes, chests and cupboards hold enough good quality food for two people for roughly two weeks. Three small barrels hold good quality wine.

GM NOTES

The library and study are good places for you to seed clues as to Tuulitar's fate and recent doings.

Ruin of Bleak Hill: *Imatar Tiera was a wise woman steeped in the lore of magic and the heavens. Tuulitar Vihas has come into possession of a fragment of her diary in which Imatar speaks of hiding "star metal" in the "bleak dark". She hires the party to recover the "star metal" and any other writing they can find in the ruin of Imager's home. Design this adventure yourself, or refer to Ruin of Bleak Hill for a ready-made Dungeon Backdrop.*

GM NOTES

If Reima is behind his mistress's descent into madness, the characters should find proof of this in his room—perhaps a carefully hidden diary detailing what he plans or vials of poison destined for Tuulitar's wine.

The characters will likely find Tuulitar in her quarters. Doing so gives them a chance to uncover clues about what has happened before they meet the wizard. Thus, if they realise she is possessed or poisoned they will probably deal with her in a different fashion to the way they would deal with a stereotypical evil or mad wizard.

7: HALLWAY

This hallway doubles as a seating area.

Two chairs and a side table stand on this small landing. Tapestries decorate the area.

Tapestries: Four long, thin tapestries, obviously made for this space, decorate the walls. Each tapestry depicts a different well-known constellation.

8: REIMA'S QUARTERS

Herein dwells Tuulitar's scheming apprentice, Reima Itkonen.

This chamber is chaotic and disorganised; the bed is unmade, and wrinkled clothes and so on are scattered about.

Bedchamber: The normal accoutrements and furniture—a bed, several chests, a table, chair and so on—one would expect in a bedchamber are here. They are of good, if unremarkable, quality.

Hidden Treasures: Reima has hidden a pouch containing 74 gp and 132 sp under his mattress at the foot of the bed (a character searching the bed finds).

9: TUULITAR'S QUARTERS

Here dwells the astromancer, Tuulitar Vihas. Several powerful arcane protections ward this chamber.

Stout Wooden Door: Magical defences protect this iron-banded oak door. An *arcane lock* makes the door harder to force open and the lock harder to pick, while an exploding *glyph of warding* spell presents a threat to unwary thieves. Only Tuulitar has the key to this door.

A four-poster bed dominates this room. Chests, a wardrobe, and so stand about the walls. An iron-banded trapdoor pierces the ceiling.

Furniture: The furniture herein is uniformly of the highest quality. The chests, wardrobe and so on are all beautifully carved and richly stained; the bed and its fittings are of even higher quality.

Tapestries: Plush tapestries hang from the walls. Unlike the tapestries elsewhere in the tower, these tapestries are enchanted. Permanent illusions give the impression that the stars depicted thereon glimmer and shimmer. One tapestry depicts the changing phase of the moon while another shows constellations moving and changing—immense amounts of time distilled into mere hours. Each of these tapestries is worth at least 500 gp.

Trapdoor: An *arcane lock* protects this sturdy iron-banded oak trapdoor. The trapdoor leads to the roof. Tuulitar uses magic—*levitate*, *fly* and the like—to reach the trapdoor.

10: TOME VAULT

Here, Tuulitar keeps her spellbooks and a few other rare and valuable esoteric volumes.

Thick books, some in good condition and others little more than fragments of mouldering pages, fill the shelves of this small storage niche. Thin strips of blueish-white metal line the chamber's walls, floor and ceiling.

Stout Wooden Door: Magical defences protect this iron-banded oak door. An *arcane lock* makes the door harder to force open and the lock harder to pick, while an exploding *glyph of warding* spell presents a threat to unwary thieves. Only Tuulitar has the key to this door.

Lead-Lined: The walls, floor and ceiling of this vault are covered with a thin layer of lead to block magical detections.

Wooden Shelves: Wooden shelves line the back wall of this vault. The shelves are stout and of high quality.

11: TREASURE VAULT

This warded vault contains Tuulitar's mundane treasures—her gold, silver and gems—along with a few magic items she does not regularly carry about her person.

Two iron-bound chests almost completely fill this small storage vault. Thin strips of blueish-white metal line the chamber's walls, floor and ceiling.

Stout Wooden Door: Magical defences protect this iron-banded oak door. An *arcane lock* makes the door harder to force open and the lock harder to pick, while an exploding *glyph of warding* spell presents a threat to unwary thieves. Only Tuulitar has the key to this door.

Lead-Lined: The walls, floor and ceiling of this vault are covered with a thin layer of lead to block magical detections.

Iron-Bound Chests: Two locked iron-bound chests hold the astromancer's treasures. An *arcane lock* wards each chest. Only Tuulitar has keys to these chests.

12: OBSERVATORY

Atop her tower, Tuulitar observes the passage of stars and other bodies across the heavens.

Four stone pillars jut from the tower's flat roof.

Stone Pillars: Four stone pillars jut from the tower's roof. Each contains an extra-dimensional portal akin to a *bag of holding*. Within, Tuulitar stores her spyglasses, telescopes and so on. Each extra-dimensional space opens to a different command word—and each command word is the elven name of a different constellation.

GM NOTES

Arcane Defences: *The tower's roof, and specifically the trapdoor in the ceiling of Tuulitar's chamber along with the doors to her tome vault and treasure vault are excellent places for lethal magical traps. Here, Tuulitar does not have to worry about innocents setting off the traps.*

Modify the value of Tuulitar's treasure to suit your campaign.

AFTERMATH

Once the characters have resolved the events in *Cursed Tower of the Astromancer*, the location and its mistress need not fade from the campaign. Tuulitar Vihas is a powerful, wealthy wizard, and sometimes she needs adventurers to carry out certain tasks for her. Perhaps she wants them to get her certain book or recover something from some ruined tower or hold in the Mottled Spire. One such Dungeon Backdrop perfect for use with *Cursed Tower of the Astromancer* is *Ruin of Bleak Hill*.

ABOUT RUIN OF BLEAK HILL

The Mottled Spire's wild, rugged uplands lie beyond the Selka River. Crumbling ruins and abandoned mines—the leavings of civilisation's ebbing tide—dot the hills. One such place is the isolated wind-blasted ruin of Bleak Hill Manor. Here once dwelled the wizard-sage Ilmatar Tiera before her untimely death at unknown hands. The centuried ruin—decayed and crumbled—has alternately lain abandoned or served as the lair of marauders, bandits and worse. Now, however, events conspire to focus certain interested parties upon the ruin, and all such folk are in need of adventurers brave enough to dare the terrors of the Mottled Spire.

RESOLVING ADVENTURE HOOKS

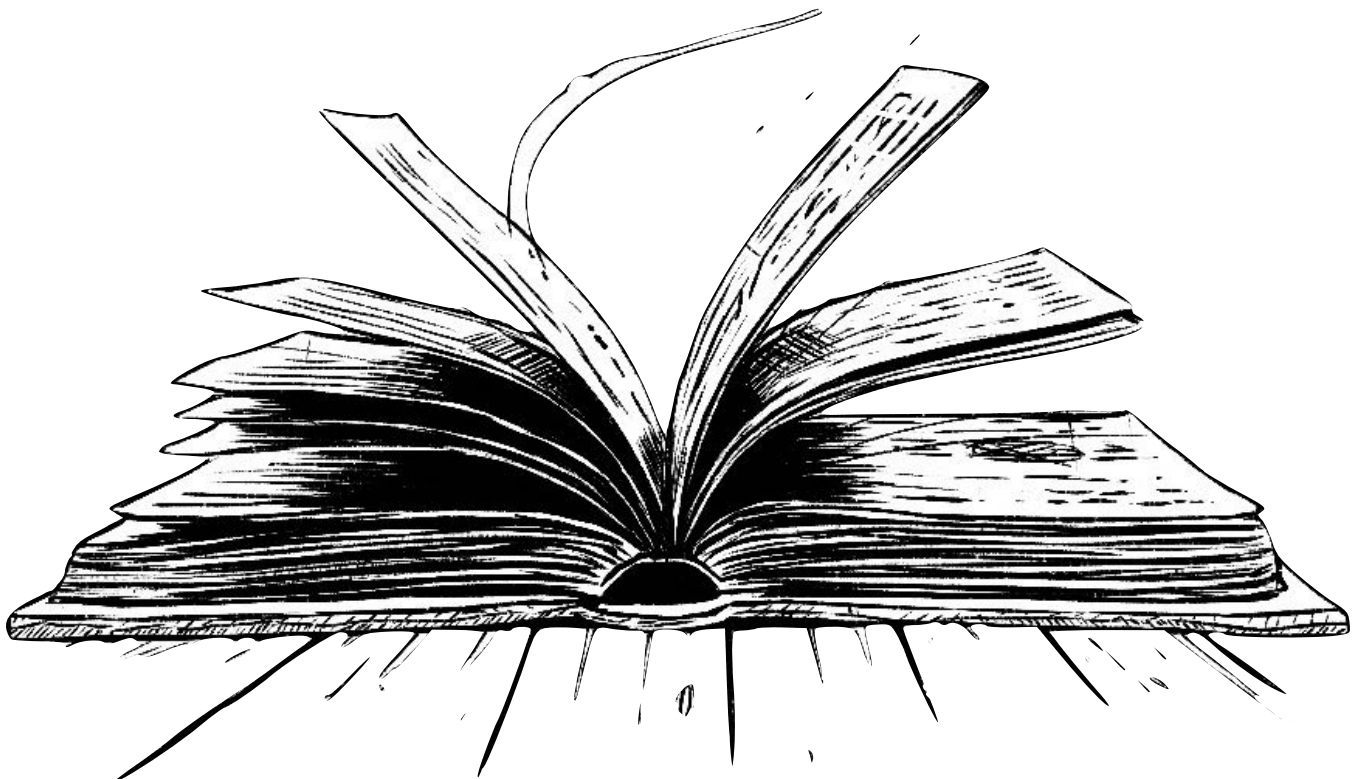
If you used any of the hooks presented in “The Adventure Begins”, use these notes to resolve the adventure’s aftermath:

- **Mind-Bending Vile Star:** If Tuulitar’s mind is being warped by the remains of a vile star, finding and removing the remains will enable the astromancer and her apprentice to recover their wits.
- **Reima’s Machinations:** Defeating Reima is enough to end his machinations. Once he stops poisoning his mistress, her mind slowly heals itself. This process could be hastened by *neutralise poison* or a similar spell.
- **The Thing From Beyond the Stars:** Driving forth the alien creature from Tuulitar’s mind instantly restores the astromancer’s sanity. However, this could be the start of a new adventure! If the characters do not act quickly, the alien intelligence flees to possess someone else. Trapped in the world, it jumps from body to body, leaving nothing but chaos, confusion and heartbreak in its wake.

Tuulitar will be grateful to her rescuers and could prove to be a valuable, if slightly distracted by her studies, ally if the characters decide to stay in Dunstone.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Tuulitar could be a useful ally or patron for the characters if they choose to stay in Dunstone. The rugged uplands of the Mottled Spire to the north are riddled with opportunities for adventure. Lost mines, crumbling ruins and tribes of savage orcs all await the characters beyond the Selka River. The astromancer is a powerful wizard steeped in astronomical lore—it is always wise to stay on the good side of such folk.



DROWNED FANE — OF THE — ELDER GOD

Bitter black ichor sprays your face as your axe blade bites into blubber, severing yet another tentacle. As the bloody appendage flops helplessly in the water, the others release their grasp on your companions to slither back towards the beach, offering you a brief respite. Between ragged breaths, you come to realise the full horror of your predicament: there is no way back. With the monster blocking your escape and the waters around you slowly rising, you are faced with a choice: withdraw deeper into the primaeval fane and face its mind-bending horrors with fire and sword, or drown and sink softly into oblivion's deep, dark embrace. What troubles you most, however, is that the latter option seems to be the most reasonable one by far...



DUNGEON BACKGROUND

Far in the distant past, before the gods came into existence, there was a timeless aeon when the sun was but a dim star glowering over the black, primordial oceans of a neonate planet and the alien aboleth held dominion over a drowned world.

With science and sorcery stolen from the breathless void between distant stars, the aboleth created a servitor race of amphibious humanoids—skum—to carve out their vast subterranean empire. The aboleth ruled for millennia, thinking their hegemony would last forever. But forever never lasts.

Eventually, the skum cast off the shackles of their slavery in a revolt that sparked a great civil war, fragmenting the aboleth empire and causing its alien overlords to retreat into the deep, dark corners of the world. For long ages, the skum lingered on, building vast cities and temples along coasts and rivers, all close to the life-sustaining water yet far enough removed from the influence of their hidden former masters.

The sanctum, later known as the Drowned Fane of the Elder God, began as one such temple. Yet whereas most skum had been drawn to worship Dagon, the Shadow under the Sea, this splinter sect revered an entity even more ancient than the demon lord of deformity; a timeless being hailing from the void beyond the aboleth home world. Its name—never to be spoken aloud—was Hastur, the old one, the shepherd of black stars, embodied as the inscrutable Xanthous Emperor. While Hastur's name and nature have been lost in the fog of time, the shepherd's powers were insufficient to protect its flock, as the skum were all but wiped out by a great host of invading troglodytes. Before long, however, the eldritch powers lingering in the Drowned Fane led the invaders to abandon it.

When humans first settled the land that would become the Duchy of Ashlar, they were ignorant of the Drowned Fane's history. All they knew was an ancient and unknowable evil from forgotten aeons lurked therein. The Elves called it "Yesikir Juma'alan Kulleidh", which roughly translates as "the Dead God's Water-Temple". In time, humans came to call it the Drowned Fane of the Elder God.

Despite its ominous moniker—or perhaps because of it—the Drowned Fane has attracted its fair share of bandits, creatures, cultists, and other ne'er-do-wells to its rune-scarred halls. Whether lured by the safety offered by a secluded lair or the promise of forbidden knowledge, all who come to reside therein eventually succumb to the influence of the primordial deity whose malicious presence lingers amid the cyclopean stones.

Haudan Ryostaja, an itinerant wizard of ill repute, was the last person to explore the prehistoric fane. Although his motives and actions remain unclear, Haudan, too, fell prey to Hastur's maddening influence. What's even worse is that the wizard roused some primaeval horror from the depths—a timeless guardian whose sudden resurgence may herald the imminent return of the Xanthous Emperor itself...

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The characters can stumble on the Drowned Fane of the Elder God by happenstance and decide to explore the locale on a whim. Alternatively, use one of the hooks below to lure the characters to its sanity-shattering halls:

- **Earth Shall be Riven:** "The Order of the Watch Eternal humbly requests your aid," croaks Joonas Mattila (LG old male human cleric [Darlen]). In a wheezing voice, he explains the Order believes a wizard called Haudan Ryostaja has come into possession of the dangerous grimoire *Earth Shall be Riven*. "Rumour has it," Joonas continues, "Haudan made his lair in what Dunstonians call the Drowned Fane of the Elder God. Go there, bring back the book, and the Order will be in your debt."
- **Quest for the Doom Star:** With one fell swoop of his fallow arms, Vieno Rekola (N old male human wizard) clears the characters' drinks off the tavern table, replacing them with a jumble of maps, star-charts and texts written in a spidery hand. From what they can gather from his fifteen-minute ramble, Vieno wants them to retrieve a precious stone—the Doom Star—from a half-sunken cavern complex by the Selka River. The mention of gold being involved, however, is what really catches their attention...
- **Dreams and Portents:** The sudden, mysterious illness of Roosa Lajunen (CG female gnome illusionist) is the talk of the town. Felled by fever for the past four days, her delirious ravings mention a terrible "Yellow Man" who will soon come from "the dark between the stars". As Roosa is known for having prophetic dreams, this does not bode well... Perhaps the answer is to be found in the Drowned Fane of the Elder God—a location she keeps mentioning during her increasingly rare lucid moments?

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A character can use Diplomacy to gather information about the Drowned Fane of the Elder God. This takes 1d4 hours and costs 1d4 gp. A character gains one additional rumour for every 1d4 hours and 1d4 gp they spend. Use this list to determine what the character learns:

1. If you speak someone's name seven times in Dead Echo Cave, that person will die within a year. (False rumour.)
2. You'll either need a dinghy or a guide to make it to the Drowned Fane—the overland route's all marshland.
3. That wizard, Haudan Ryostaja, went there a few months ago. Seemed to be on the run from someone... or something.
4. Fifty years ago, they found the Drowned Fane full of dead bandits. They had all killed themselves...and they all had their eyes gouged out.
5. Strange stars in the sky, my friend. Black stars. We can't see them but sense their pull on the river and the tides.
6. Tell me, have you seen it, too? That sign scrawled on people's doors in yellow paint? Who does such a thing?

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

The ancient ruins of the Drowned Fane of the Elder God languish in a lonely, sunken cove by the Selka River, surrounded by marshland. Reaching the Drowned Fane necessitates using a dinghy or flat-bottomed skiff—any boat capable of navigating shallow water while also being light enough to carry across stretches of dry land. Without such a vessel, the journey time quadruples.

As the characters travel along the river and across the marshes towards the Drowned Fane, they are soon confronted with evidence of recent flooding caused by unusually heavy rains several weeks ago. Where the water has since retreated, it left behind morbid relics of the past, scattered amid the driftwood and debris jutting from the mud.

Use the lists below to breathe life and detail into the characters' trek to the Drowned Fane and instil in the players a growing sense of wrongness, foreshadowing the harrowing events awaiting them in the cyclopean ruins.

WILDERNESS DRESSING

Use this list to add life and detail to the dungeon's surrounds:

1. Slimy strands of reeking brown kelp flank a pair of muddy, webbed footprints leading to the nearest body of water.
2. A wrecked boat's worn timbers jut from the sand, resembling the ribcage of some gargantuan beast's carcass.
3. Birds feast upon the rotting flesh of a corpse lying in the shoreline mud. Inspection reveals the body has no face; its skull being naught but a featureless bone sphere.
4. A swarm of pale, eyeless froglets infest a shallow marsh the characters must wade through. When back on dry land, each character discovers 2d6 froglets attached to their flesh, feeding on their warm blood like leeches.
5. A sudden squall blows from the north, howling in a chorus of unintelligible screams. A sharp-eared character makes out the word "fthagn" occurring repeatedly.
6. A grumble of maggots surrounds a squat, black monolith protruding from the earth. Investigation reveals the stone reaches down far beyond the characters' capacity for digging.
7. Troops of sickly purple mushroom stalks stick from the soil like a dead man's fingers desperately reaching skyward.
8. A misty mirage forms on the distant horizon, resembling a vast cyclopean city glowing with ghostly green radiance. After twenty minutes, the phantom city fades away.
9. A colossal slate-grey cloud appears overhead, casting out foggy tendrils with which it seems to drag itself across the sky against the prevailing wind.
10. Moss and weed cloak an old cabin built from beachrock, now half-sunken into the mud. Inside, worm-eaten books surround the mould-encrusted skeleton of a deformed man whose skull is no more than a featureless bone sphere.

THINGS TO FIND

Use this list to determine what the characters discover if they search the dungeon's surrounds. Modify the value of items found to suit your campaign.

1. A bent lead amulet resembling a warped, five-pointed star with a burning eye at the centre.
2. A splintered oar with a broken blade covered in bite marks.
3. A giant freshwater mussel juts from the glistening mud. A character opening it discovers a green ovoid pearl worth 1d6 x 50 gp.
4. A fossilised skull belonging to a long-dead marine monster. With only a few minor adjustments, it can be worn as a helmet.
5. A tangled fishing net containing 1d6 unidentifiable blobs of gelatinous flesh.
6. A mud-encrusted whalebone carving of a long-necked bird surrounded by a mass of squirming tentacles, accompanied by the phrase "OMNIA MELIORA TENACULIS" written in the language of demons. Characters who can read Abyssal translate this as "Everything is better with tentacles".
7. A wax-sealed bottle contains a letter penned by the crew of the *Widow*—a ship reputed to be cursed to forever sail the Bitter Sea.
8. A beached cask of fine fortified wine worth five times its weight in gold.
9. A thin string tied to a stake leads to a submerged eel buck containing enough live eels to feed the party for a day.
10. A coil of strong hemp rope, 100 feet long and swollen with moisture. Until properly dried, the rope weighs twice as much as normal.

RISING WATERS

When the characters arrive at the Drowned Fane of the Elder God, take a d8 and place it on the table with the number 1 showing. This die is called the Flood Die, and it represents the slowly rising water. Every 10 minutes of game time, roll 1d8. If the result is greater than the number showing on the Flood Die, increase the Flood Die score by one. Otherwise, it remains the same.

Each location in this Dungeon Backdrop has a Flood Point listed in the description, allowing its water level to be calculated as follows:

$$(\text{Flood Die} - \text{Flood Point}) \times 2 = \text{height of water level, in feet}$$

For example, Area 4 (Dead Echo Cave) has a listed Flood Point of 2. If the Flood Die sits at 5, the water level in Dead Echo Cave is 6 feet high $([5 - 2] \times 2)$.

The effects of different water levels are listed under "Generic Dungeon Features".

NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

The Drowned Fane has several notable locations:

1. **Dark Waters [FP: special]:** An ancient horror lurks in these dark depths.
2. **Drowned Shoals [FP 1]:** A trapped dog bears an eldritch parasite.
3. **Slimy Ayre [FP 2]:** Reeking mucus covers every inch of this shingle beach.
4. **Dead Echo Cave [FP 2]:** Arcane acoustics muffle all sounds in this cave.
5. **Rune-Scarred Cavern [FP 3]:** The engravings here were never meant for mortal minds to comprehend.
6. **Lost Library of Haudan [FP 4]:** Rotted volumes of forbidden lore languish in this chamber.
7. **Star-Dome Chamber [FP 4]:** A *permanent illusion* causes this room to appear larger than it is.
8. **Oathspeaker's Sanctum [FP 5]:** Here, a dark oath sworn to nameless gods may spare the characters' lives.
9. **Shrine of the Xanthous Emperor [FP 5]:** The statue in this room isn't waterproof...
10. **Haudan's Study [FP 6]:** A blasphemous book of forbidden lore awaits the brave and foolhardy here.

GENERIC DUNGEON FEATURES

Unless specified otherwise, all locations in the Drowned Fane of the Elder God share the following features:

Planar Anomaly: The Drowned Fane lies in a planar anomaly, which prevents all forms of planar travel or teleportation.

He Who Must Not Be Named: Each time a character speaks the name "Hastur" aloud, they draw the ire of a certain align power and may suffer damage as a result.

Illumination: Bioluminescent bacteria live inside the hairline cracks of beach shingles and cavern walls, basking the drowned fane in a spectral jade glow.

Ceilings: Strange spiral carvings decorate the 15-foot-high ceilings.

Walls: Shallow spiral carvings decorate the fane's ancient yet smooth masonry walls.

Floors: The flagstone floors have been worn smooth by the passing of countless aeons.

Doors: Wrought of black basalt and carved with disturbing bas-reliefs depicting tentacled monsters, these heavy stone doors require effort to open.

Water Levels: The effects of a location's water level are relative to a character's height:

- **Knee-high:** Movement costs are doubled; acrobatics and stealth are a bit harder than normal.
- **Waist-high:** Movement costs are quadrupled, but swimming is possible). Characters enjoy cover, but acrobatics and stealth are much harder than normal.

- **Submerged:** Characters must swim, benefit from improved cover, and stealth is much harder than normal; acrobatics are impossible.

DUNGEON DRESSING

Use this list to breathe life and detail into the dungeon:

1. A large hermit crab scuttles across the floor, bearing an eyeless human skull on its back.
2. Ominous whispers echo from the walls. A character listening closely hears the words "Say not its name" repeated over and over again.
3. A pale yellow haze appears in the air and follows the characters around, observing their every move.
4. Nine eyeless skulls lie neatly stacked in a corner. The first character to interact with them discovers their first name written across the top skull's forehead.
5. A crunchy, crawling carpet of tiny ochre crabs covers the floor. When stepped on, they bleed a deep, dark red.
6. One character sees the strange hieroglyphs on the wall twist and warp, melting into a single lambent rune, which they instinctively recognise as the name "HASTUR".
7. A four-inch, sharp-toothed tadpole lies squirming in a puddle of pinkish slime. The slime trail leads to a large dead rat whose body has exploded from the inside.
8. A screeching horde of soaking wet rats skitters past, attempting to escape the rising waters.
9. A dead jellyfish bobs on the water, occupying a 5-foot square. Adjacent characters must dodge the corpse to avoid being stung and developing an itchy rash.
10. A severed tentacle the size of a human leg flops around helplessly, its ichor dyeing the water a cloudy blue-black.

THINGS TO FIND

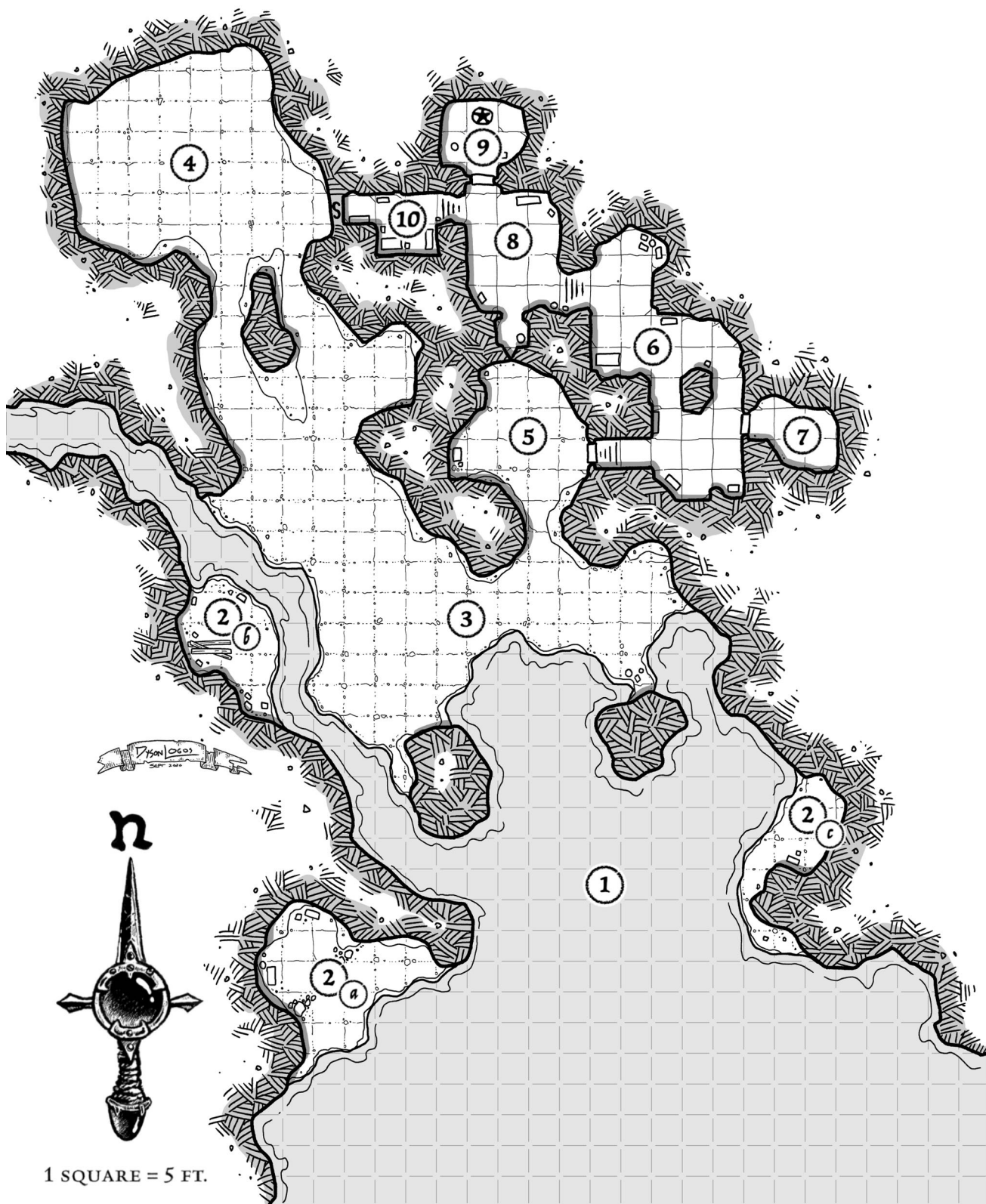
Use this list to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party finds if they search a dungeon location. Modify the value of items found to suit your campaign.

1. A worn agate cameo (worth 1d6 x 5 gp) depicts a portly woman with great, bulbous eyes.
2. A defaced silver amulet (worth 2d6 gp) bears the scarred image of a one-eyed octopus.
3. A worn greatsword wrought from the bill of a giant sawfish. A critical hit inflicts triple damage, but a natural 1 shatters the bone blade.
4. A stoppered green glass vial contains a viscous ooze. The liquid is preserved aboleth slime.
5. An ancient conch shell horn, graven with eldritch runes. Once per day, its horn blast can be used to cast a *fear* spell.
6. A broken harpoon with an eight-foot-long heavy chain still attached.
7. A curious jade statuette depicting a squat, octopus-headed monstrosity worth 150 gp. Characters carrying the statuette are more easily targeted by mind-affecting spells and effects.

8. A long, straight spiral tusk, broken from the jaws of a sea creature. Although it is worthless, a shrewd character may be able to sell it off as a precious unicorn's horn.

9. A partially rotted oilskin made from seal leather. In a pinch, it can be used as a flotation device.

10. A small hoard of 3d6 gold coins encrusted with blood.



Tagged and untagged copies of this map can be downloaded at ragingswanpress.com

GM NOTES

Tentacled Horror: Calculate the tentacled horror's attack and damage scores based on the average party level before play starts, and make a note of them here to save time.

Whining Dog: Surely no-one calling themselves a hero can ignore the pitiful cries of a wounded dog trapped by the rising water? Yank those heart strings of your players as hard you need to ensure they save the poor pooch!

1: DARK WATERS

An ancient horror lurks in these dark depths.

Flood Point: Special

Deep crimson clouds surround a sheep's carcass floating upon the dark waters. Ominous shadows ripple beneath the surface, urging you towards the rough shore.

Water Level: When the characters arrive at the Drowned Fane, the water is 20 feet deep. As the water level rises, determine the new water depth of this area as follows:

(Flood Die x 2) + 18 = water depth, in feet

Sheep Carcass: Close inspection of the carcass reveals a great gash in the animal's abdomen. A detailed inspection however, suggests the sheep was crushed to death before the wound was inflicted.

Ominous Ripples: The strange ripples beneath the characters' boat are caused by the writhing tentacles of the Drowned Fane's monstrous guardian.

WHEN THE FLOOD DIE REACHES 3, OR WHEN THE CHARACTERS TRY TO OPEN THE STONE DOOR TO AREA 6, READ THE FOLLOWING:

The black waters boil and foam like a witch's cauldron, disgorging a mass of flailing tentacles. With a deafening roar, the great, slimy tendrils crash down upon the beach and begin their search for living prey.

Tentacled Horror: From now on, until it is defeated, the tentacled horror occupies this area. Although the creature itself cannot leave this area, its slimy tentacles can reach into any location under at least four feet of water. Refer to the sidebar on this page for more information on running the tentacled horror.

2: DROWNED SHOALS (A, B, C)

A trapped dog bears an eldritch parasite.

Flood Point: 1

The pitiful howls of an injured dog trapped on one of the gravel bars surrounding the rocky beach echo through the air.

(2a) Whining Dog: A typical Dunstone sheepherding dog, this young white dog got separated from its master chasing a runaway sheep and got trapped on one of the shoals. The dog's abdominal injury was inflicted by the tentacled horror and infected the dog with an eldritch parasite (see "Aftermath" for details).

If rescued, the dog accompanies the characters on their adventure (treat it as a mastiff with 5 hp left). Being infected already, the dog is never targeted by the tentacled horror, although other enemies may choose to do so. When the dog is slain or the adventure concludes (whichever occurs first), refer to "Aftermath" to determine what happens.

3: SLIMY AYRE

Reeking mucus covers every inch of this shingle beach.

Flood Point: 2

Translucent yellow ooze glistens upon the jagged grey shingles covering the beach like sickly stars upon a shattered night sky. An amorphous blob of pale mucus plays the part of the moon.

Slimy Shingles: The mucus-covered gravel is difficult terrain. A character wise in nature's ways knows the slime was not secreted by any known naturally occurring plant or creature.

Amorphous Blob: This formless mass of gelatine is the decomposed body of a skum—an amphibious humanoid rumoured to dwell in Ashlar's darkest watery depths. A thorough search of the remains yields a strange trinket (roll on "Things to Find") to determine when the character discovers.

4: DEAD ECHO CAVE

Arcane acoustics muffle all sounds in this cave.

Flood Point: 2

Ragged, wet curtains of moss shroud both entrances to this vast cavern whose lofty ceiling lies hidden in the shadows above.

Dead Echoes: The cave's acoustic properties muffle all sound.

Shadowed Ceiling: The cave's ceiling is 30 feet high.

Secret Passage: A curtain of moss conceals a crack in the east wall at a height of eight feet. The crack is difficult to spot from this side. With some effort, enough stones can be removed for a Medium creature to squeeze through the gap into area 10.

5: RUNE-SCARRED CAVERN

The engravings here were never meant for mortal minds to comprehend.

Flood Point: 3

Strange and terrible carvings deck the walls of this dark, dismal cavern. A mere glance at the hieroglyphs causes the hair on the back of your neck to stand up.

Horrifying Hieroglyphs: A character examining the strange hieroglyphs inscribed upon the cavern walls might be affected by their malign influence. Those failing to resist suffer a profound sense of uneasiness as if some terrible secret has just barely eluded them. Those who do resist, however, experience a brief, terrifying epiphany, allowing them to understand the runes' true meaning, as well as their own cosmic insignificance. Roll 1d6 on the list below to determine how the character's mind reacts:

1-2: Affected by a *fear* spell.

3-4: Affected by a *stunning* spell.

5-6: The character is unconscious for 1d4x10 minutes as vistas from the distant past assault their senses. Upon recovery, they have learned all the information in "Dungeon Background".

GM NOTES

Shadowed Ceiling: The shadowed ceiling in area 4 is a perfect hiding spot for cloaklers, darkmantles, slimes and oozes!

GM NOTES

Lost Library: At your option, a handful of books found in area 6 may yet be salvageable. In this case, *20 Things #42: Archives & Libraries* offers inspiration for any surviving volumes and their contents.

Doom Star: Consider making the Doom Star found in area 7 an ioun stone, as there are many variants you can choose to suit the level of your campaign.

Sacrificial Bowl: By offering a blood sacrifice in area 8, a character essentially seals a pact with an otherworldly entity, which is never a good thing... Refer to "Aftermath" for suggestions on how to weave the consequences of such an event into your own campaign.

6: LOST LIBRARY OF HAUDAN

Rotted volumes of forbidden lore languish in this chamber.

Flood Point: 4

Toadstools thrive upon the mouldy vellum pages of a hundred blasphemous tomes rotting on the stone shelves lining this chamber's walls.

Lost Library: *Daemonolatreia*, *Secrets of the Worm*, and *Scarlet Rites* are just a few of the rare and precious titles found here. Unfortunately, mucus, moisture and mould have ruined the entire collection, rendering the books' contents illegible and thus completely worthless...

7: STAR-DOME CHAMBER

A permanent illusion makes this room appear larger than it is.

Flood Point: 4

A vast, star-studded void looms beyond the stone door; the cold and desolate majesty of infinity stretches boundlessly in all directions.

Starry Void: The star-studded void is a permanent illusion. A character wise in celestial matters recognises a handful of constellations but concludes the stars occupy positions they held countless millennia ago. In addition, the star Suraja—heart of the Gorgon constellation and omen of doom—appears much closer than it should...

Doom Star: The reason this "star" appears so close is because it is a real gem, magically suspended in the air in this room. Its value and magical properties—if any—are left to you to decide.

8: OATHSPEAKER'S SANCTUM

Here, a dark oath sworn to nameless gods may spare the characters' lives.

Flood Point: 5

Graven images depicting a tentacled monstrosity decorate the stone walls. Wan light shines through the window of an alcove in the east wall, illuminating a sacrificial bowl set on a pedestal.

Graven Images: Inspection reveals the engravings depict the Drowned Fane. They show the tentacled horror recoiling from a robed figure standing in front of the sacrificial bowl before slinking back into the depths.

Windowed Alcove: The narrow window is scarcely a foot wide, offering a view of areas 5, 3, and 1.

Sacrificial Bowl: Dire runes and twisted spirals cover this ancient obsidian bowl; the bowl's rim is razor-sharp.

A character approaching the bowl faintly hears a chorus of disembodied voices repeatedly chanting the words "IÄ HASTUR". If the tentacled horror has risen in area 1, it raises several tentacles to sway in rhythm with the chant.

If at least one willing creature makes a blood sacrifice of 8 or more hit points into the bowl, the tentacled horror retreats back into the depths.

9: SHRINE OF THE XANTHOU EMPEROR

The statue in this room isn't waterproof...

Flood Point: 5

Wisps of amber smoke ooze from the pores of a brimstone effigy depicting a faceless man wrapped in a tattered cloak.

IF THE FLOOD DIE IS 6 OR HIGHER, READ THE FOLLOWING INSTEAD:

Acrid yellow fumes boil up from the waters surrounding the brimstone effigy of a faceless man wrapped in a tattered cloak, now quickly being dissolved by the rising water.

Brimstone Effigy: A character wise in religious matters identifies the sulphur statue as the Xanthous Emperor—an obscure supernatural entity said to dwell on a nightmare world orbiting the distant star Suraja.

The wisps of amber smoke oozing from the statue are unpleasant but harmless. Should the statue come into direct contact with the rising waters, however, it begins to dissolve, producing clouds of acrid yellow smoke in the process.

Acrid Fumes: When the statue begins dissolving, it takes five minutes for the fumes to fill this area and another five minutes to fill areas 8, 7, and 6. Living, breathing creatures exposed to the acrid smoke are affected as if by a terrible, cloying stench of supernatural proportions. The fumes last for 15 minutes before dissipating.

10: HAUDAN'S STUDY

A blasphemous book of forbidden lore awaits the brave and foolhardy here.

Flood Point: 6

Stretched across the cover of a black book laid upon a bone lectern is the flayed face of a dead man; his horrid grimace frozen in a scowl of perpetual malice and endless agony.

Lectern: The lectern is carved from the bones of an ancient sea monster and protected by powerful eldritch magic. A creature who lifts the book from the lectern gains the attention of a powerful being from the Outer Planes. It invades the character's mind, compelling them to reveal their true name to the entity (a character with an iron will may manage to lie). Then, regardless of the outcome, the entity breaks contact—for now.

Black Book: The dark, leather-bound tome displaying a flayed human face on the cover is an original copy of *Earth Shall be Riven*—the first of a series of nine nefarious volumes called the *Nine Books of Hodhek*.

Secret Passage: A cold draught draws attention to a crack in the west wall. With some effort, enough stones can be removed from the wall for a Medium creature to squeeze through the gap into area 4, some eight feet above the ground. As soon as all surviving characters exit area 10, the tentacled horror (if it's still around) mysteriously retreats back into the depths.

GM NOTES

Brimstone Effigy: If you are feeling generous, consider hiding a treasure inside the brimstone statue in area 9. As the sulphur dissolves, the item gradually emerges.

Lectern: The identity of the otherworldly being attempting to contact characters lifting the book in area 10 is left up to you. By default, however, this entity is either Hastur or its avatar, the Xanthous Emperor.

THE NINE BOOKS OF HODHEK

Legend holds these nine blasphemous tomes were written in a single night by Hodhek the Soulless; a monk possessed by Braal, the god of hatred and malice. While the books' pages contain a chaotic jumble of esoteric drawings, obscure symbols, and plain gibberish, they are also said to harbour a terrifying mystery. If one were to decipher the secret code hidden in the nine volumes, it would reveal the location of a mystical portal leading to Braal's black throne. Cultists, madmen, and careless scholars alike are desperate to obtain all nine tomes. Their titles are:

- I. *Earth Shall be Riven*
- II. *Revan Chants*
- III. *The Woeful City*
- IV. *Dwellers in Shadow*
- V. *Ethics of Danakil*
- VI. *Testament of Ruin*
- VII. *Dirge of Reason*
- VIII. *Black Solstice*
- IX. *Throne of Wrath*

Supposedly, all existing copies were destroyed by Darlen's Order of the Watch Eternal. The characters' discovery of *Earth Shall be Riven*, however, suggests their purge was not as thorough as hoped.

AFTERMATH

As the characters retreat from the Drowned Fane, the water recedes, taking with it the remains of the twisted horrors they faced inside the fane's cyclopean stone halls. And yet, the characters' adventures—as well as their troubles—are far from over! Use the suggestions below to build upon events from the Drowned Fane of the Elder God and develop the characters' further adventures.

RESOLVING ADVENTURE HOOKS

If you used any of the hooks presented in “The Adventure Begins”, use these notes to resolve the adventure's aftermath:

- **Earth Shall be Riven:** If the characters return *Earth Shall be Riven* to Joonas Mattila, he consigns the evil tome to a blessed fire. Inhuman howls fill the air as azure flames consume the pages. His wizened hands still trembling with anxiety, Joonas produces a white clay pipe from his raiment, stuffing it with strong tobacco before speaking. “More copies exist,” he wheezes, “More than we know. And it's no secret the Order's knights aren't up to the task of finding them. Old men and drunken louts, the lot of them!” he scoffs. If the characters agree to seek and destroy any remaining copies of the *Nine Books of Hodhek*, Joonas promises to make it worth their while. To reward the party's efforts in retrieving *Earth Shall be Riven*, Joonas grants them a minor wondrous item.
- **Quest for the Doom Star:** “The what?” Vieno Rekola absent-mindedly calls out when the characters bring the Doom Star to Rekola Manor. “Right, the Doom Star!” He exclaims, finally looking up from the jumble of scrolls littering his desk. Nervously rubbing his pince-nez glasses on the sleeve of his frayed robe, Vieno explains he's a bit short on funds at the moment. “But the good news is I've got another job for you,” he stutters. “Payment in full, all but guaranteed! What do you say?”
- **Dreams and Portents:** Not long after the characters return from the Drowned Fane, Roosa fully recovers. “I saw you in my dreams,” she says. “You fought the monster. And you met the Yellow Man. He knows you now. He knows your names.” Roosa has another strange dream several days later, prompting her to seek out the characters again. “The Yellow Man is calling you,” she sobs. “Calling you to a dark place...” She then describes a lonely location near Dunstone where she claims to have seen the characters in her dream, with the Yellow Man waiting for them there.

Note: All three aftermath resolutions provide you with the freedom to choose almost any follow-up adventure you like. For your convenience, however, they have also been designed to transition smoothly into *Dungeon Backdrop: The House of Yspher*. If your group hasn't played *Raging Swan Press's* unique take on a fantasy haunted house yet, it may well be worth checking out next!

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Regardless of the adventure hook you selected, the characters' actions in the Drowned Fane of the Elder God are likely to have profound implications, as well as far-reaching (and terrible) consequences:

- **Terror From the Deep:** While the tentacled horror has retreated to the depths, it has most certainly not been slain. Is there a chance the monster might return? And what caused it to rise from the deep in the first place? Was the beast raised in a dark ritual by Haudan Ryostaja? Or is its existence linked to the imminent return of Hastur and the Xanthous Emperor?
- **What is that Thing?!** If the characters rescued the dog from area 2a they eventually discover the poor animal was infected with an eldritch parasite (either at the end of the adventure if the dog survived, or minutes after its demise if it did not). In any event, the eldritch parasite—which resembles a ten-inch tadpole with a maw full of razor teeth—bursts from the infected carcass and attempts to scurry away. You should determine its stats, as well as the sort of monster it eventually matures into. Additionally, if any characters were infected, they soon develop telltale signs of intestinal discomfort...how long do they have before the same fate awaits them, and what can be done to kill the parasite before it emerges in a fountain of gore?
- **Pact with the Elder God:** If a character made the sacrifice in area 8: Oathspeaker's Sanctum, they have entered into a dark pact with the god of the Drowned Fane. The exact details of this pact are left up to you to design. Consider allowing the character to enjoy some small supernatural benefit right away (they find a gold coin under their pillow every morning, or can cast a new cantrip but only at night and so on), as this only builds a sense of dread regarding the nature of their obligations.
- **A Little Light Reading:** If the characters recovered *Earth Shall be Riven* from the Drowned Fane, any scholar worth his salt can confirm its authenticity. Vieno Rekola and Joonas Mattila (see “Adventure Hooks”) are both keen to obtain the book for their own reasons, as are many less savoury characters. Regardless of whether the characters choose to keep or destroy the book, they will likely gain unwanted attention from the cult of Braal.
- **The Xanthous Emperor Cometh:** Who or what is the Xanthous Emperor? If anyone can answer such a question, they are the Sagacious Masters of the Eldritch Nexus, who reside in the Black Tower. If the characters travel to visit the Sagacious Masters, the Xanthous Emperor is revealed as the embodiment of Hastur, a forgotten deity from Ashlar's primordial past. Hastur's terrible return was prophesied aeons ago. And now, the stars are right...

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