



SWISSRPG

ISSUE
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Adventure Awaits

CURSES, CULTISTS, DUNGEONS and MUSIC

COMMUNITY

START AN RPG SOCIAL

GM TOOLS

LEVEL UP YOUR GAME

TAROT AND MOLECULES

UNIQUE WAYS TO GENERATE IDEAS

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Editorial Note

We're having a wild mix of entries in this edition! Our local Call of Cthulhu (CoC) cultists have flooded this edition with spooky, creepy adventures and interesting ideas with which the humble game master can torture their players. But don't worry! If CoC is not your thing, perhaps trying to design dungeon layouts using molecules is more up your alley, or would you rather learn how to build your own social event nearby? Or how about a more hands-on approach: try the random tables or cut-out standees in your next game! Or throw your players into a good ol' dungeon crawl and see who survives. Either way, I am sure you'll find something in this zine!

And last but not least: I want to thank all the authors and collaborators of this zine: The delightful oddness of these entries, the surprising ideas, and the heart you put into it just make it a blast to read!

Have fun!
- Henston

How to start a RPG Social in your city

The best practices I learned while “revivifying” the RPG Social Lucerne

@HenrikAmalia

Getting acquainted with fellow TTRPG enthusiasts in your area can sometimes be a daunting task. An RPG Social can help bridge this gap and provides a space for players, game masters and interested dice rollers to talk about their favorite hobby. It's about meeting the humans behind the characters, swapping stories – and maybe finding new friends who understand why your dice superstition matters. All you need are a few people who love RPGs and a place to meet.

1. Find fellow organizers

Ask around for 2-3 people in your area who also want a regular event to chat about RPGs. You might find these people at game stores, on Discord or in your friend group. Having a reliable team makes everything easier – especially to split tasks.

2. Reach out and connect

Get in touch with local community leaders, similar organizations and people that have been around for a while. Sometimes cities used to have a social that died down or have a board game community with much overlap with your interests.

3. Get a venue on board

Look for a venue that is tied to the community or is a likely hub for exchange – a place with a friendly atmosphere where conversation flows easily. Not every city has a game café, but every city has a cute café with lovely owners. If possible, talk to the staff in advance. Make sure the place is accessible (stairs, neutral bathrooms, transportation) and affordable for everyone.

4. Meet before you launch

Before your first event, visit the venue with your organizer team. Check seating options, lighting, noise levels and how you'll welcome new arrivals.

5. Set a schedule

Pick a rhythm that works: once a month, every other month... you decide! But stick with it. Regularity builds trust. Announce it clearly so people can plan ahead. For example, we host our Lucerne social on every 4th Friday of the month.

6. Spread the word

Let people know it's happening! Maybe design a flyer for the first few times. Share the date or schedule on Discord, in local gaming groups and on community boards. Ask your local game store if they would advertise. A simple social media post can already reach the right crowd.

7. Host with care

Make sure that at least one organizer arrives early and is the first face people see. Maybe set up a sign or banner so that people can find you easily. Then as they arrive say hi, help everyone find a seat, maybe initiate the writing of name tags with pronouns or preferred language. Include isolated people, make sure that everyone can speak their mind and ask a new person what they are here for. End the evening by thanking everyone and saying goodbye. It sounds small, but it makes people feel seen.

8. Keep it social

Remember, it's not a game night. It's a social space to talk about RPGs, share stories, laugh about critical fails and maybe find new friends. Having RPG Books or Ice Breaker Questions can be great but is not always needed. Keep in mind that certain people, who need more time to warm up and feel comfortable, profit from clear structures and expectations.

Here are my favorite Ice Breaker Questions:

- ◆ Do you usually GM or play?
- ◆ What is your favorite fantastical setting / world / theme?
- ◆ Tell everyone about the first character you created. If you haven't created a character yet – make one up on the spot!
- ◆ Are you more of a planner or an improv player?
- ◆ Pick 3 monsters and play “eat, adopt, fight”

9. Think about community goals

How do you want to enrich and build your local community? Do you want to connect players with DMs that have space at their table? Do you want to open players' minds to other, more obscure rpg systems? Do you want to have an excuse to gush over your favorite character and tell the heartbreaking tale of how they got killed? Would you like to have more events within your city/region?

10. Highlight the events happening

During the Social take time to highlight the next events happening in the area. This way everyone can mark their calendars and might even try out something new they wouldn't have dared otherwise.

Final thoughts

Having a regular Social event in your city can feel really rewarding. Getting to know the regulars, the friendships that bloom and helping newbies find footing in the TTRPG community are just a few of the great things that come from a social. And who knows, maybe the train ride to the next big convention is travelled together. It's worth it either way!

Tabletop Role Playing Games for Social Change

@Slivvver

What if I Turn my Hobby Into my Master's Thesis?

This summer I was hip deep in the answer to this question as I completed the research and academic text portion of my thesis for my master's in design. As a younger member of the hobby who was raised by a pair of tabletop role playing veterans, I have had a fondness for this game genre for most of my life. So, when provoked to embark on a project involving my academic interests of experience design, game design, and social design, I thought what better way to approach it than with my favourite hobby! What could go wrong? What follows is a highly abridged summary of my research and what came out of it!

I would also like to give a huge shout out and thank you to the members of the SwissRPG community that contributed to my research.

My research thesis examined the potential of tabletop role playing games (TTRPGs) to be designed as more than only leisure activities. A combination of ethnographic observations, interviews, focus groups, and literature reviews was conducted to explore the research question: "To what extent can tabletop role playing games facilitate transformative player experiences to promote social change?". The outcome of this research was discovering that TTRPGs have the potential to explore challenging political or social topics, foster empathy, build communities, and be a spark for change. However, these games must carefully balance serious content (educational, therapeutic, political, or social subject matter) with fun and player well-being. On a larger level, to achieve wider social impact it is also crucial for these games to actively develop enriching communities and foster collaborations between members of gaming spheres and beyond.

Tabletop Role Playing Games and Serious Games

The act of role playing is universal, spanning vast spatial and temporal scales of human history. It is something we all do and have all done to navigate our lives. It is not something that is completely foreign to anyone. Sebastian Deterding and José Zagal, in their work titled *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*, identify how tabletop role playing games take the universal human practice of role play and turn it into a contemporary leisure genre by adding the structured form of a game(1: Zagal and Deterding 2018, *Role-Playing Game Studies*, 1.). Sarah Bowman et al., in their book *Transformative Role Playing Game Design*, also define role play as an age old human activity by which we create meaning through telling stories and enacting them together(2: Bowmann et al. 2025, *Transformative Role-Playing Game Design*, 19.). The act of play, on its own, allows one to experiment and explore without serious consequences. Play is voluntary, intrinsically motivated, performed for its own sake, facilitated in relaxed or familiar surroundings, and poses no immediate threat or stress. Games, though described with many different definitions, are seen as the addition of rules and goals, and turn the attainment of such goals into challenges of various difficulty. The structure of a game is what differentiates role playing games from spontaneous children's make-believe or other forms of expression like improvised theatre. Tabletop role playing games also implement the structure of roles, which add patterns of behaviour and attitude that form social positions and relationships within a story(3: Zagal and Deterding 2018, *Role-Playing Game Studies*, 2, 4.).

Zagal and Deterding note that although TTRPGs can be seen as an “institutionalized and prolonged form of child’s play” and not to be used for “respectable” purposes, TTRPGs in reality can “afford artistic expression, education, or social activism”. They also observe the rise of independently designed and published TTRPGs, which generally emerged in response to existing games, from goals of filling aesthetic gaps or solving perceived problems within existing rules or fictional worlds(4: Zagal and Deterding 2018, *Role-Playing Game Studies*, 2, 4, 32.). It has been observed by many academic and scholarly practitioners that playing tabletop role playing games as a leisure activity can result in strengthening personal and interpersonal skills (including but not limited to: problem solving, identity exploration, self-awareness, empathy, critical and/or ethical reasoning, awareness of social issues, professional and social skills)(5: Bowmann et al. 2025, *Transformative Role-Playing Game Design*; White 2020, *Tabletop RPG Design in Theory and Practice at the Forge*; Zagal and Deterding 2018, *Role-Playing Game Studies*, 247, 251.). This is because the cognitive processing that occurs while engaging firsthand with fiction (such as through role playing a character in a TTRPG) mirrors the neurological processes of actually experiencing those situations and behaviour. Additionally, these cognitive effects are compounded by having the freedom and agency to act within the game’s story. Interactive narratives with consequences provide opportunities to see the results of certain actions in safe ways(6: Zagal and Deterding 2018, *Role-Playing Game Studies*, 248, 275.). However, beyond the unintended beneficial “side-effects” of playing TTRPGs, there are many cases of existing TTRPGs being intentionally used to facilitate educational or therapeutic experiences within players.

(Some notable examples if you are interested:)

- ◆ *Role-Playing Games in Psychotherapy* by Daniel Hand is a book designed for mental health professionals to use TTRPGs as part of their client work(7: Hand 2023, *Role-Playing Games in Psychotherapy*).
- ◆ *Therapeutically Applied Role Playing Games* by Elizabeth Kilmer et al. is a book documenting an approach to implementing TTRPGs for mental health practitioners(8: Kilmer et al. 2023, *Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Games*).
- ◆ *Dungeons & Dragons Learning Adventures* is an educational support resource provided by the Young Minds Inspired (YMI) educational outreach program(9: YMI Classroom, “Dungeons & Dragons Learning Adventures.”).

- ◆ *Three Dragons in a Trench Coat* by Tommy Nolan offers professional gaming facilitation for applied gaming sessions of *Dungeons & Dragons*(10: Nolan 2025, “Three Dragons in a Trench Coat.”)

Rather than applying existing games to new contexts, games can be also designed from the outset for beyond leisure activities. The term “serious games” has a long history of different uses and definitions, but the origin of how we use it today can be traced back to Clark Abt in his book *Serious Games*. Abt defines them as games that “have an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose and are not intended to be played primarily for amusement,”(11: Abt 1987, *Serious Games*.). The use of this term has since been contested from its easily misunderstood or sometimes ironic use of the word “serious”, with more recent game design practitioners calling them “applied games” in the sense that these are games created with the intention to apply them to situations or for purposes beyond only entertainment (this text uses both the term “serious” and “applied” when referencing these kinds of games, using the latter definition or to indicate educational, therapeutic, political, or socially themed subject matter).

The field of serious game development has made significant strides in terms of developing design frameworks and methodologies. One approach that applies directly to TTRPGs is the Transformative Game Design Model documented in the book *Transformative Role-Playing Game Design* edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, Elektra Diakolambrianou, and Simon Brind. This model defines a process of serious game design for TTRPGs that emphasize facilitating transformative experiences for its players. Therapeutic and educational applied games are more commonly discussed within literature (therapeutic being games applied within therapy or clinical psychology contexts, and educational being games applied in formal learning environments like schools); however, transformative leisure is also a distinctive form of applied game. These are games which are played as leisure activities (activities which are often intrinsically motivated, relaxed, and not related to work or tending to responsibilities) but can engage players in transformative experiences such as personal and social development(12: Bowmann et al. 2025, *Transformative Role-Playing Game Design*).

Social Design

(As my thesis is for a design master's, I also delved deeply into more academic aspects of design. As this is a zine more focused on fun TTRPG things, I shall keep this part very brief!) In his book *Designing for Social Change*, Andrew Shea describes his experience in the field of social design, where the goal is to achieve a degree of social change or transformation through design endeavours (13: Shea 2012, *Designing for Social Change*, 6.). In her book *Design, Ecology, and Politics: Toward the Ecocene*, Joanna Boehnert reminds her readers that “design is a practice that functions to mediate social relations” She states that design endeavours often aim to influence users or audiences in order to achieve a change in ideas or behaviour. As designers, we provoke change not by telling people what to do, but by creating new ways to communicate, new techniques, or new tools that enable people to see value in a different way of doing things (14: Boehnert 2021, *Design, Ecology, Politics*, 15.). Could TTRPGs offer a unique way to explore this kind of work? Could serious TTRPGs be developed for transformative leisure to provoke and support social change?

Primary Research

After the literature review, I directly engaged with people in the TTRPG community to hear about their thoughts and experiences with serious TTRPGs, as well as explore how TTRPG players experience or are impacted by these kinds of games. Through a combination of scouring reddit threads, interviewing TTRPG designers, and hosting several sessions of serious TTRPG games, I defined eight distinctive findings that summarize my many observations:

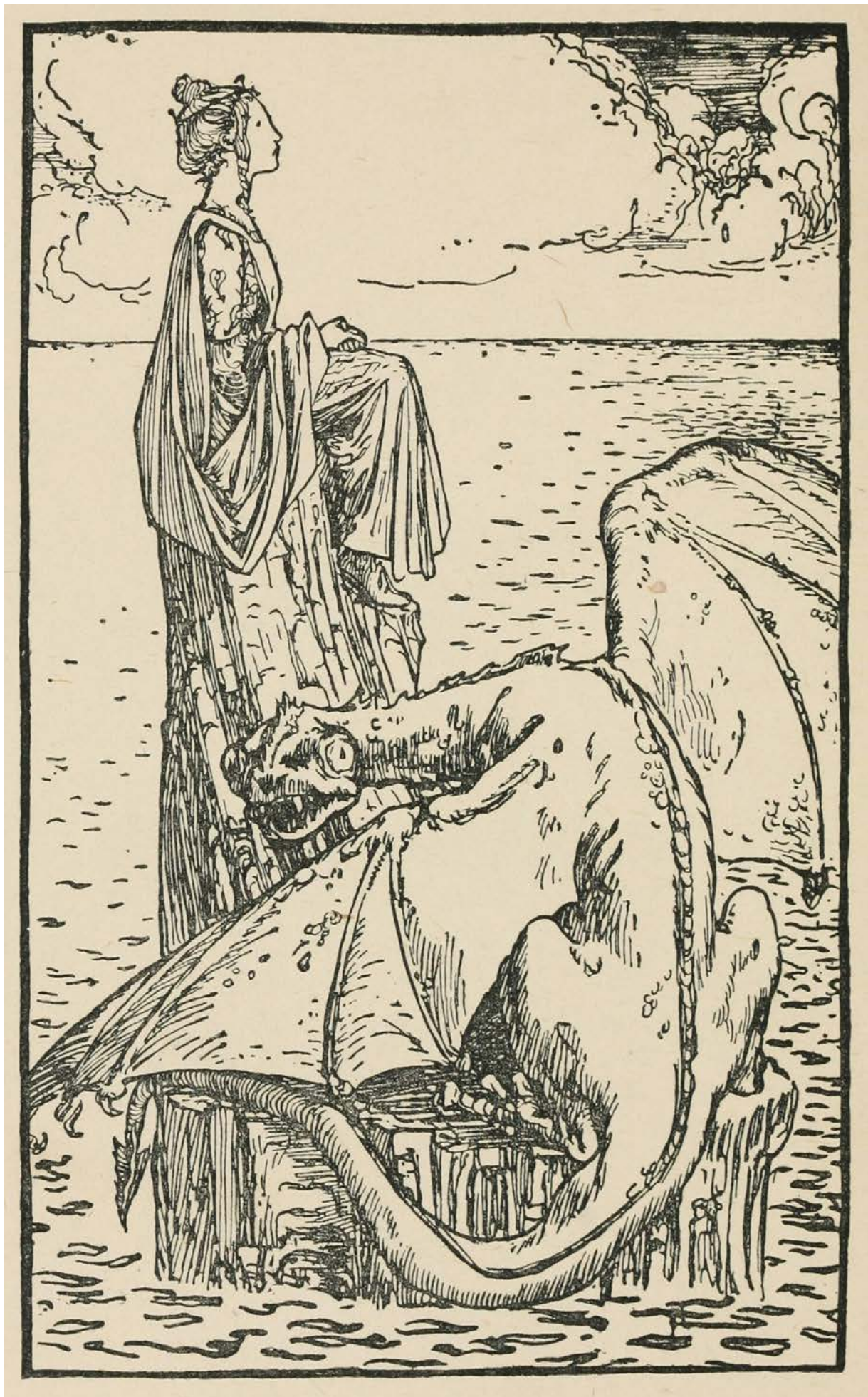
- ◆ There are different tabletop role playing game design approaches that lend better to different goals or starting points
- ◆ Tabletop role playing games can build communities and bring people together
- ◆ Tabletop role playing games can provoke reflection of current realities, imagine new futures, and be a spark for change
- ◆ Tabletop role playing games can be tools of expression, expose unheard realities, and foster empathy for foreign situations
- ◆ Serious tabletop role playing games must also balance fun and player well-being
- ◆ Serious tabletop role playing games will not appeal to wide, generic audiences

- ◆ The experience/s gained from playing tabletop role playing games is at the mercy of how the players engage with them
- ◆ There is a lack of collaboration between tabletop role playing game designers and external partners

Let's Wrap it All Up (For Now)

The primary research findings articulate the many ways that tabletop role playing games possess qualities that enable them to be designed as tools for exploring serious topics and facilitate transformative player experiences. The literature review also documents ways that TTRPGs are being both applied and developed within therapeutic, educational, and transformative leisure contexts. However, this potential comes with challenges to overcome and significant considerations to make to create serious TTRPGs that both effectively achieve their goals and provide a satisfying player experience. Because of this, serious TTRPGs are not something with universal application, nor are they something that can be created to reach wide audiences. Their potential strength is in targeting specific demographic segments and developing deep, quality, transformative game experiences rather than surface level explorations intended for mass appeal.

This situation presents two potential directions to explore within practical project explorations of the next phases of my thesis. Firstly, creating games themselves, and diving deeper into how these games are developed, how to test them, and how to distribute them to their target demographics. Secondly, developing a strategy for larger community reach and engagement beyond single games and filling the collaboration gaps within this field of both academic and creative attention. On a larger level, the aim of this research thesis was to explore the potential that TTRPGs have for promoting social change. As demonstrated by the literature review, social change and social design projects take immense amounts of collaboration, coordination, and long term community support. TTRPGs offer unique approaches to community building and collective organization that, if approached intentionally, could support communities of action that reach farther than only the games themselves.



Robert Anning Bell, "Grimm's house tales", 1912

Rise of the Blood Dragon

@Astovidas

Introduction

Overview of the Adventure

In the small town of Triboar several people have gone missing over the past few weeks. The towns guard have not been able to find the missing people, and they aren't armed or equipped enough to go out of town to look for them either. Recently a young couple was abducted right from their home at the edge of town. This was the mayor's daughter and her newlywed spouse. The mayor is now looking for adventurers to find and rescue the missing people and has offered a hefty sum. The adventurers will find a cult hideout that is guarded by Kobolds. The Kobolds have been abducting travellers and villagers on orders of the Cult of the Blood Dragon who want to transform a Red Drake they caught into a fearsome Blood Dragon. The Kobolds do this out of fear of the cultists and because they revere dragons and hope they will be in good standing with this newly created blood dragon. The cultists now have enough victims to start their foul ritual where they need to sacrifice several people, using their blood to fuel their magic. Will the Party arrive just in the nick of time to stop the ritual, or will they be too late after all....?

Getting the Adventure started

The characters have heard of this town in need and decided to travel there to help out. No matter where they go to, they will hear about the missing townspeople (from someone at the tavern, a notice at the job board, or directly from a towns guard). You can use this opportunity to have them roleplay a bit.

Let them talk to the innkeeper, the leader of the town's guards, the mayor, etc..

The Party can then either investigate the house of the latest victims or head out into the surrounding forest to look for tracks.

House of the Victims

The party can investigate the house and will find signs of a break in and a fight inside the house. The window in the back was smashed in from the outside (glass splinters inside the house) and they can find muddy tracks near the window. There are signs of a struggle (things lying on the floor, shattered glassware, blood splatters) and drag marks that lead to the window. If the party investigates the house further, they might find a small unlocked box with jewellery under the bed (a sign that the intruders were not interested in valuables) and they can figure out that the blood they find here is not as much as a lethal wound would have caused.

Way to the Hideout

If the Party investigates the house or the forest surrounding forest, they can find the tracks leading to the Hideout of the cult. Let them make a **Wisdom survival Check DC 13**. If they succeed, they find tracks that leads to the Hideout. If they don't succeed and don't come up with any other idea, they might encounter a random Kobold patrol. The party can either follow them to the hideout or kill them all and find a crude map that will lead them there too.

The Cult's Hideout

General Features

The rooms in the hideout are lit up by torches, but the caves are dark. Characters without darkvision are **blinded** unless they have their own light sources. The ceiling is about 10ft high and the caves are rather narrow since they were built by and for **Kobolds**. The rooms have higher ceilings reaching up to 20 feet in the centre.

1. Entrance

You approach a steep cliffside in the forest. As you come closer you can smell smoke from a campfire mixed into the fresh air of the woods. Soon afterwards you see the fire with two small scaly creatures sitting beside it and you recognize them as Kobolds. They have not noticed your approach yet but seem to be guarding the entrance to a cave behind them.

The Kobolds are supposed to be guarding the entrance, but they aren't really paying attention (their **Passive Perception is 8**). The characters should be able to sneak up to them and surprise them if they act smart.

Note: These Flying Kobolds can be added if the fight is too easy or if you feel like the PCs need a challenge.

With a successful **Perception Check: DC 15** they can spot the small outcropping about 50ft. above ground where two **Winged Kobolds** are sitting (Marked with "2" on the map). If the players attack the guards on the ground the **Winged Kobolds** will join the fray in the first round of combat.

3. Kobold's Quarters

As you enter you feel the damp air of this cave system. The passage you entered splits after only a few feet. To your right the cave ends in a red curtain that hangs from the ceiling. To your left you see a hallway that winds itself deeper into the mountain and ends after two turns in a crude wooden door with a crumbling mound of rubble partially obscuring the passage.

Trap. The dusty plaster and rubble in front of the door leading to area 3 conceals a copper tripwire connected to linchpins hidden in the ruined ceiling. Spotting the tripwire requires a **passive Wisdom (Perception)** score of at least **15**, or a successful **DC 10 Wisdom**

(Perception) check if characters are actively searching for traps in the area. Once spotted, the tripwire is easily avoided and disarmed (no ability check required). Any creature that walks over or through the rubble without avoiding the tripwire triggers a cave-in of wooden beams and heavy stones. Any creature in the three squares before the door when the trap triggers must succeed on a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or take 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the falling rubble (half as much damage on a successful save). The noise of the collapse puts the monsters in area 3 on alert. As soon as the Kobolds inside the room 3 hear that the trap has been triggered, they will attack through the door and the sally port (see below).

Secret Doors. A red dot on a door on the map indicates the location of a secret door. Secret doors are made of stone and blend in with the surrounding walls. Spotting a secret door from a distance of no more than 10 feet without actively searching for it requires a **passive Wisdom (Perception)** score of **15** or higher, whereas a character who takes the time to search the wall can find the secret door with a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception)** check. The secret passage is used as a sally port to attack Adventurers who are standing at the door from the back.

If the characters bypass or disarm the trap they can hear the Kobolds in this room, because they are very loud and are chattering within. In the room it stinks of old wine or ale, rotten meat, and refuse.

4. Kobold Shrine

As you approach the red piece of cloth that hangs from the ceiling you hear muted chanting coming from the other side.

As you step through the curtain you enter a room that is brightly lit by about 50 candles. They are all over the room in candleholders, candelabras, on the floor, and on a small altar on the other side of the small shrine. All walls are covered in similar cloth as the curtain you just passed. It looks like the Kobolds used any red piece of cloth they could find to decorate this room. Behind the altar is the only real tapestry in this room and it depicts a wingless dragon emerging from a pool of red liquid. Between the altar and the tapestry stands a kobold with a stick in one hand and a book in the other. Attached to his back are crudely made dragon wings out of sticks and leather pieces. In front of the altar kneel two Kobolds that were listening to the chanting of the one in front of them.

The cloth on the wall covers the exit out of this room. As soon as any character investigates the tapestry or looks behind the cloth he can see the hallways without any checks. Otherwise, a successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)** check is needed to find the cave that goes further into the hideout.

5. Antechamber

You enter a roughly square natural cavern, its floor and ceiling dotted with scattered stalagmites and stalactites. To your left stands a massive double stone door, set into a clearly artificial tunnel that leads deeper into the complex. The doors are engraved with the image of a great dragon perched atop a mountain, its head reared back and jaws wide open as if frozen mid-roar. Above the carving, a smaller inscription reads;

**“Only a Dragon’s Breath of Death
will grant you access.”**

The inscription is a riddle and refers to fire. If the players bring any open flame or magical fire close to the door, the mechanism activates and the doors open. No roll is required—just proximity.

As you bring the flame near the dragon’s carved mouth, the fire suddenly bends toward the stone, then gets pulled inside with a soft whooshing sound.

The entire engraving shimmers to life, glowing with shifting hues. It almost appears as if the dragon’s wings ripple and its chest expands with a fiery breath.

With a deep rumble, hidden mechanisms grind into motion, and the massive double doors slowly part, revealing the darkness beyond.

6. Ritual Chamber

As you enter the next room you stare directly into the maw of a huge dragon head. It takes you a second to realize it is made of stone. The room before you is a large round natural cavern. It has a broad walkway around it and a bottomless pit in the centre. Out of this pit rise three statues of dragons’ heads and between them are staircases that lead to a round platform in the centre of this chamber. It is held above the pit by these three stairs and by large metal chains attached to the back of the dragons’ heads. On the platform is a stone altar with

three robed cultists standing around it. One of them is wearing ornate robes and has an evil looking dagger in her hand. On the altar you can barely make out a large lizard-like creature. It looks similar to a young dragon but does not have any wings. At the bottom of each of the three stairs stands another cultist while a last one is carrying a bound young woman towards the altar.

On the other side of the room, you can see another four prisoners lying on the ground who are trying vigorously to escape their bindings.

The **Guard Drake** on the altar is held here against its will and if it manages to escape its shackles (either on its own or with the help of the Characters) it will try to get away as quickly as possible and will attack anyone and anything standing in its way (including the cultists).

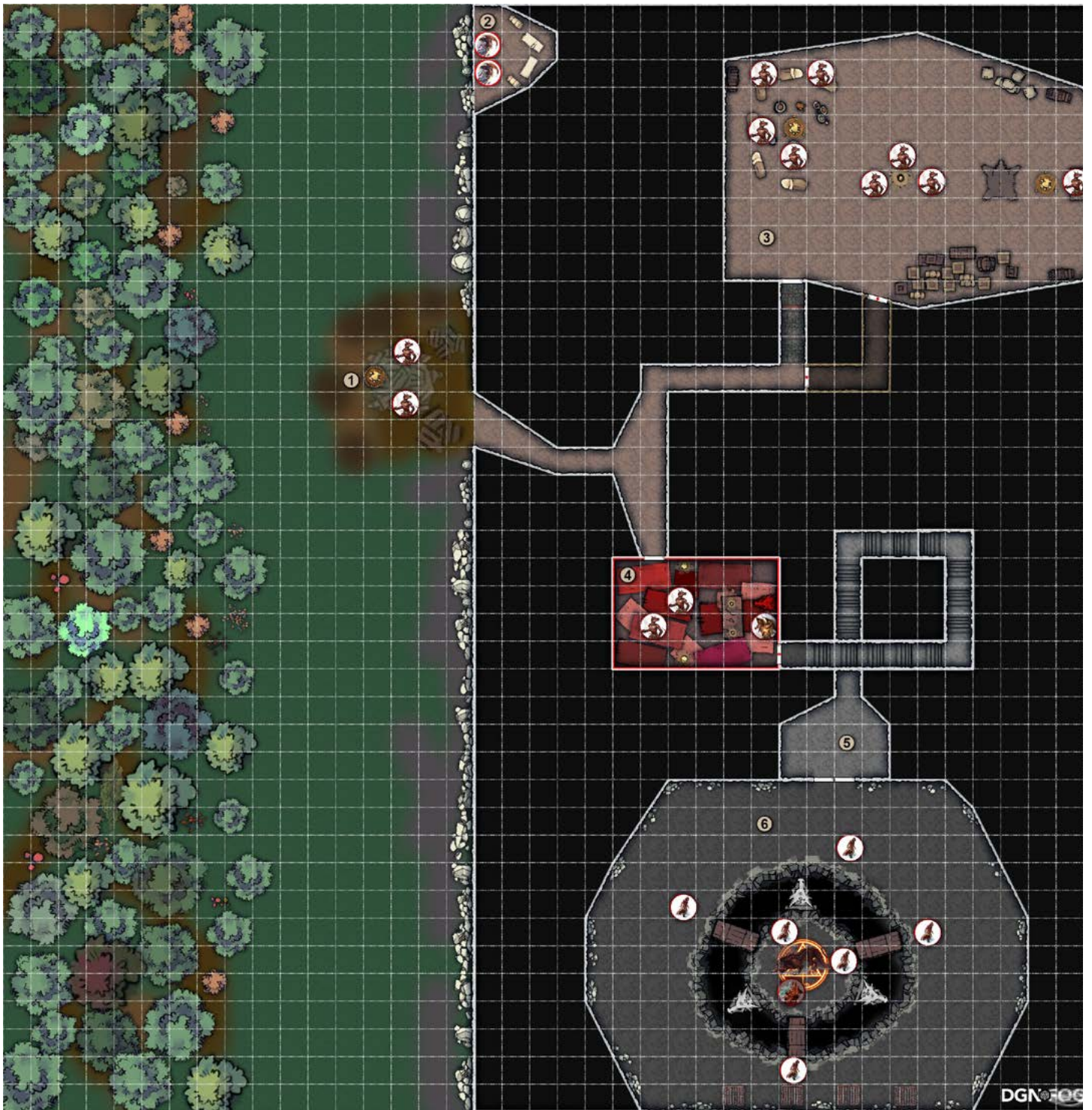
The Pit in this room can be used in combat to push a creature into it and it will fall to its death. If the players don’t realize that this is an option a **Cultist** might use this against a character. However, it is advisable to use this sparingly and give the players a chance to react/stop this from happening (e.g. the Cultist pushes a character that is 10ft. away from the ledge 5ft. closer to it. This gives the character time to realize what might happen and react to it accordingly).

Shoving another creature is a special kind of attack action and is resolved by a **Strength (Athletics)** from the attacker check contested with either a **Strength (Athletics)** or **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** Check from the defender.

The **Cult Fanatic** will mostly concentrate on the ritual at the start of the combat and try to sacrifice as many villagers as possible. Every time he successfully sacrifices a villager one of the dragon head statues breathes fire (though not enough to hurt anyone) and its maw and eyes start glowing. If the cultists manage to complete the ritual, you can either have them summon a **Red Dragon Wyrmling** with a breath attack that deals 4d6 poison damage and 3d6 psychic damage instead of its **Fire Breath** ability. This will most likely spell the end of the characters and their adventure. Alternatively, you can add additional steps that the cultists need to undertake before the ritual is fully complete.

Concluding The Adventure

When the characters defeat the cultists they can free the hostages who have survived the combat. Additionally, they can free the Guard Drake from its predicament. It will most likely dash out of this cave system as fast as possible. With some effort they might be able



to soothe the creature and calm it down. If they have proven themselves as friendly towards the creature (by not hurting it, freeing it, and reassuring it with some decent Animal Handling checks), they might find a friend in this Drake that might reappear later again in the party's adventures.

When the party returns to the town they are greeted depending on how they are returning. If some of the hostages survive they are greeted as heroes and saviours. The Mayor will organize a feast in their honour

and gladly pay the fee they agreed upon. If all missing villagers died the party will be received much more solemnly. However, the mayor is a man of his word and will pay them their reward and thank the characters for stopping the nefarious plans of the cultists.

The Crescent Monastery

@jajamyeon6563

An adventure, compatible with Old-School-Essentials for 4-6 characters of fourth level.

In a remote, arid valley to the south lie the ruins of the Crescent Monastery. Once famous for its preparation of a moonflower oil that possessed supreme healing powers, a tragedy has transformed the monastery into a haunted ruin. The monks have been turned into mindless undead, being endlessly tormented by their worst memories. Wild animals have also made their home in the monastery. But among the dangers, treasures also lie...

Content notes

This adventure features discrimination based on sexual orientation and suicide. Talk to your players to see if they are fine with these topics and stop the game if necessary.

Text references

All page references are referencing the following text: OSE Classic Fantasy Rules Tome v1.4, © Necrotic Gnome 2019

Background Information

100 years ago. . . Two orphans were delivered to the Crescent Monastery to be raised by the monks. Named Caelius and Felix, the two boys were instructed in the ways of the faith and prospered under the care of the abbot Rufus. As the two boys turned into men, they fell in love with each other.

75 years ago. . . The love between the two men was discovered. Caelius was exiled from the monastery as punishment by the abbot and Felix stayed behind, his bitterness growing. He appealed to the gods to punish

the monks and curse them with eternal torment. That year the petals of the flowers in the garden of the monastery took on a slightly purple hue. Slowly the scent of the moonshade flower oil erased all the happy memories of the monks, driving them to madness. They tried to end their life, but the curse kept their bodies in a state of undeath. In his final living moments, Felix cursed the heavens and lightning struck the abbey's bell tower and collapsed part of the roof.

Through the decades. . . As the terrible curse came to be known in the surrounding lands, travelers shunned the Crescent Monastery. The monastery grounds became home to strange creatures and terrible undead haunts.

Yesterday. . . The goblin sorceress Elaine and her companion Johan entered the monastery and found the visitor's registry in the entrance hall (1). They are convinced it is a spell book and are trying to decipher it in the Archive (3).

Now. . . The characters approach the valley from the west and discover a path that leads east to the entrance hall of the monastery (1).

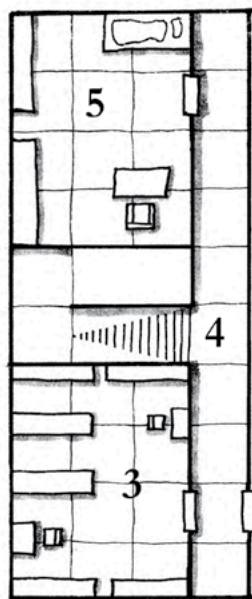
Player hooks

- ♦ A local trade guild is willing to pay a vast sum of money (8000 GP) to retrieve the recipe for extracting and refining the moonshade oil from flowers of the same name. [neutral]
- ♦ An unknown plague has ravaged the lands and the king's physicians are at their wits end. As a last resort a band of adventurers has been sent to the monastery to retrieve the ancient refinement techniques to produce a cure. [lawful]
- ♦ Rumors speak of a hidden treasure, buried by the monks somewhere in the monastery, that is worth a fortune. [chaotic]

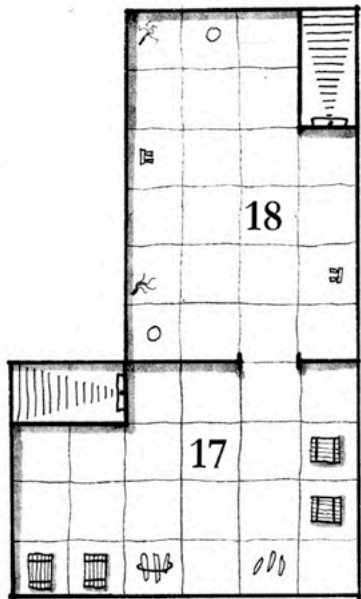
Random Encounters

Random encounters are rolled every two turns with a d6 if not otherwise noted. On a 1 an encounter occurs. Roll a d8 and consult the result on the table below:

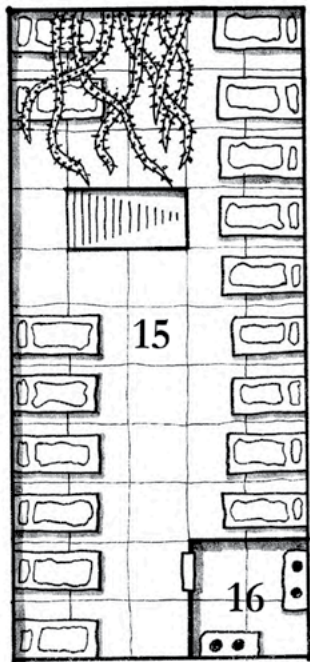
d6	Encounter
1	2d4 Zombie Monks (Use Zombie, Rules Tome, p. 215)
2	2d4 Zombie Monks (Use Zombie, Rules Tome, p. 215). and 1d2 Tormented monks (Use Ghoul, Rules Tome, p. 174).
3	2d4 Zombie Monks (Use Zombie, Rules Tome, p. 215). and 1d4 Tormented monks (Use Ghoul, Rules Tome, p. 174).
4	1d6 Spitting Cobras (Rules Tome, p. 202).
5	1d2 Giant Spiders, Tarantella (Rules Tome, p. 204).
6	Grey Ooze (Rules Tome, p. 178). This encounter only occurs once per adventure. Roll again or choose another if already rolled.
7	1d2 Shadows (Rules Tome, p. 200). This encounter only occurs once per adventure. Roll again or choose another if already rolled.
8	1d3 Acolytes (Rules Tome, p. 152). See also Herb Garden.



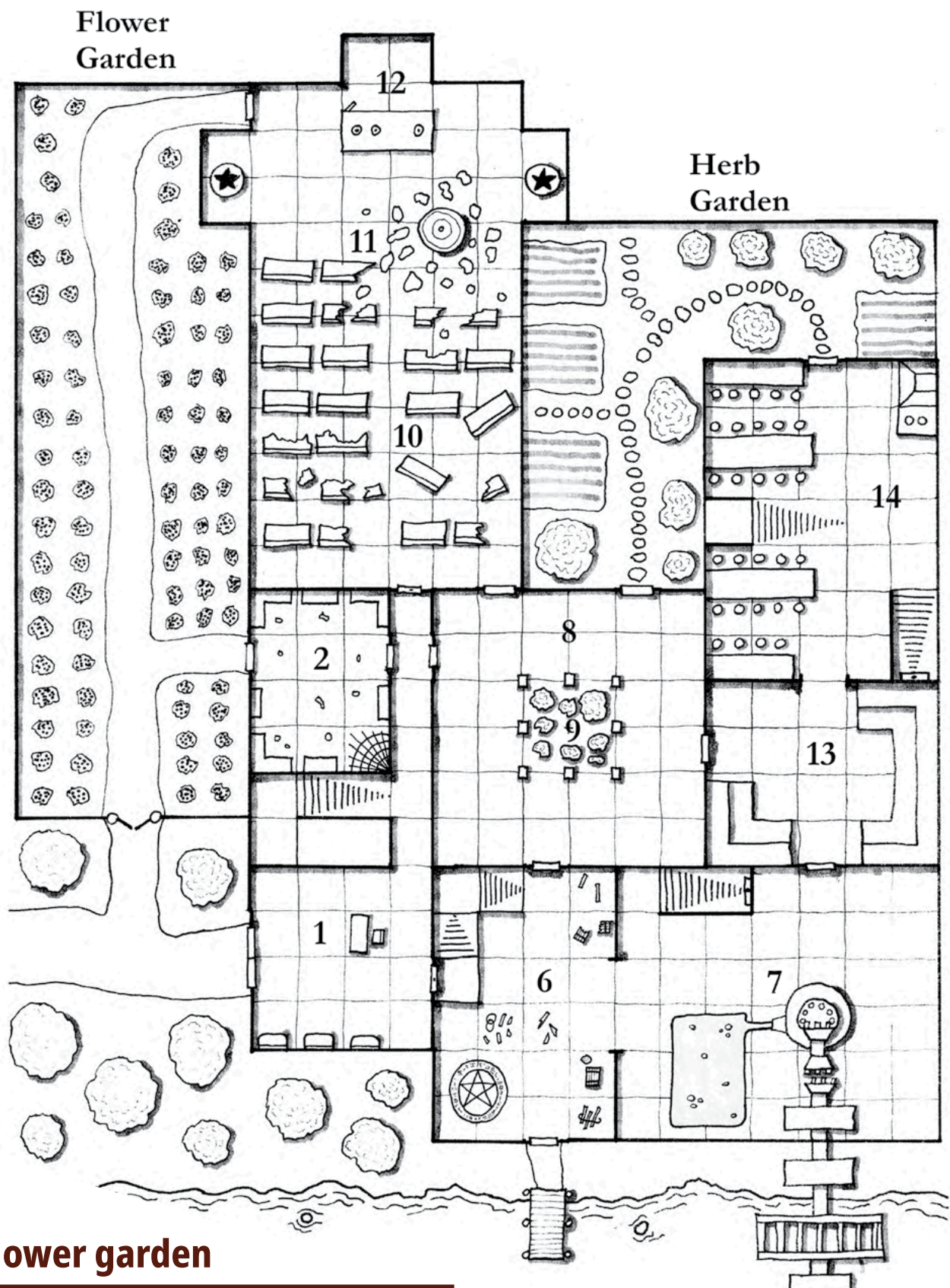
Abbot's office
(upper)



Cellar



Living
Quarters
(upper)



Flower garden

The flower garden is surrounded by a waist-high stone wall that has crumbled in places. A sickly-sweet odour fills the air. Rows of cursed purple flower bushes grow in the garden. For the effects of their raw or processed oil, see Cursed Moonflowers and their oil. Neither shadows nor grey oozes can be encountered here. Entrances Two doors lead into the monastery from the flower garden: One to the pantry (2) and one to the ruined abbey (10). Both are unlocked.

Abbots' office

The path through the valley ends at the double door of this building. The door is unlocked, but heavy to move. Upon the archway is inscribed: From the earth we take to heal. Visitors were received here and the abbot's

office (5), as well as the archive (3) are located on the upper floor. Movement can be seen in the archive windows if the upper floor is observed for a turn.

1 Entrance hall

A reception desk stands in the middle of the room, its wood eaten away by time and vermin. The smell of dust and rot hangs in the air. The south wall is lined with two wooden benches, originally for visitors waiting to be admitted into the monastery. A locked door leads into the lower level of the workshop (6). A corridor leads to the locked door to the abbey (10) to the north and the cloister (8). It is eerily quiet.

Reception desk. Behind the reception desk are the keys to the abbey (10) and the workshop (6).

Footprints. In the dust there are two sets of footprints leading up the stairs to the upper floor. They belong to Elaine and Johan.

2 Pantry

This room is covered in spiderwebs. Jars of rotten food and broken kitchenware are present on wooden shelves. A door leads to the flower garden.

Giant spiders. Giant spiders have built a nest in the south-east corner of the room. If the nest is disturbed or characters try to open the door to the garden, 1d2 Spider, Tarantella (Rules Tome, p. 204) appear.

Potion. Among the jars and vials stands a Potion of Healing (Rules Tome, p. 248)

3 Archive

Monks used to transcribe holy texts in this room. The walls are lined with bookshelves filled with mouldy books and scrolls made of leather. In both the northeast and south-west corner are writing desks and chairs.

Goblins. The goblin sorceress Elaine and her companion Johan found the visitor's registry in the reception. They are convinced it is a spell book and are trying to decipher it. Both are illiterate. Elaine can cast Read Magic (Rules Tome, p. 90). Use the stats for goblins (Rules Tome, p. 176) for Johan. Elaine is a 3rd level magic user.

Secret alcove. A careful search reveals a hidden alcove that can be opened by twisting a stone in the southern wall. It contains a scroll of Remove Curse (Rules Tome, p. 81).

History of the monastery. Entries into the history of the monastery stop about 75 years ago. One of the last entries details the exile of a young monk named Caelius for impure thoughts and actions.

4 Upper corridor

The footsteps of Elaine and Johan continue in the dust from the stairs and can be seen leading to the door of the archive (3). Windows on the east side over-see the roof of the cloister walk and the cloister garden (9). A turn observing the garden identifies slithering movements between the plants.

5 Abbots' office

The former office of the abbot Rufus. The door is locked. A dark wooden desk and chair dominate the room. There is a simple bed frame on the north side of the room. There are several bookshelves with old tomes. The room smells faintly of mouldy paper.

Signs of office. A silver mace (+1) is mounted on a wooden stand on the northern wall.

Abbot's journal. On the desk lies an old journal, that details the notes and daily thoughts of the abbot, before he transformed into an undead monstrosity. The players can discover a version of Felix and Caelius' story from the notes. Later entries seem to be written in a much more erratic handwriting than previous ones.

Desk drawer. There is a hidden compartment in the drawer of the desk, containing a scroll of Striking (Rules Tome, p. 81). The drawer is trapped with a poison needle (Save against poison or die within 1d10 hours).

Workshop

This large building is connected to a water mill that is still turning in the river. A smaller door leads from the blessing chamber (6) inside to a small wooden pier

6 Blessing chamber

In this two-story high chamber the pressed moonflower oil was blessed with a magic chant. The floor shines in rainbow colours from the spilled oil and smashed oil barrels are scattered all over the chamber. Wooden stairs lead to the second story of the Abbot's office. A door on the south side leads to a path to the river.

Oil spill. The floor is oil-slick and characters passing through will leave oily footprints. In this manner invisible characters can be detected.

Ritual circle. A stone circle of holy runes is etched into the floor. If a barrel of uncursed moonflower oil is placed in the circle and the chant found on Felix body (Penitent chamber, 18) is spoken, the oil will be blessed to possess supreme healing powers

7 Oil mill

In this two-story high large hall stand the millstones that were used to press the moonflower oil by the monks. A strong flower smell permeates this room. Stairs lead down to the oil cellar (17).

The Mill. Between two large millstones the moonflower seeds were pressed and the oil collected in a pool beside the millstones. The millstone can be connected by a lever to the water mill powered by the river. The cursed flowers growing in the flower garden can be ground to produce about 200 liters of oil (see Cursed Moonflowers and their oil for details of its effect).

Pool of oil. What appears to be a pool of oil is actually an Ochre Jelly (Rules Tome, p. 193). It will lie in wait, until disturbed by touch or an object thrown in the pool, at which point it will attack.

Stairs to the cellar. The doors to the oil cellar (17) are made of heavy wood and iron bandings. Breaking them down will take two turns and trigger a random encounter.

Cloister

This walkway made all buildings accessible to the monks without being exposed to rain or snow, due to the roof. A cool air flow is felt near the roof opening of the cloister garden, rustling the leaves of the bushes there.

8 Cloister walk

The walls of the cloister are painted with frescos depicting monks doing their daily work and various religious scenes of saints performing miracles. The paint is old and peeling off the walls.

Loose stone. Behind a loose stone in the north wall is Caelius' last message to Felix. It reads: The aching of my heart as I leave for an uncertain future / can never be greater than the joys we had / And so the sun at dusk and the dew in the morning / are still illuminated by your smile / Yours forever / Caelius

9 Cloister garden

In the middle of the cloister there is a roofless section containing a garden. Framed by simple columns, it is overgrown with bushes and vines.

Snake nest. Inside the garden lives a Giant Rattler (Rules Tome, p. 202). The snake will try to scare intruders away with its rattle at first. If the characters linger, it will attack.

Buried treasure. The monks buried a treasure

hoard 5' deep in the garden after an attempted night raid by bandits. The hoard contains a holy reliquary (3000 GP), a magical ring mail (+1) and three randomly determined scrolls with cleric spells of level 3.

Ruined Abbey

Built from large stones, this simple abbey was the place of daily prayers for the monks. When viewed from the side, the ruined remains of the abbey form a crescent shape. The stained glass windows are mostly broken. When listening from the outside, muttering voices can be heard coming from inside, faintly.

10 Abbey

There are rows of wooden pews, some of them smashed apart. Figures with pale skin and wispy white hair are sitting far apart from each other on the pews. The smell of rot is present everywhere. A locked door to the south leads to the abbot's office (1) and another to the cloister (8).

A congregation. On the pews sit 1d6+4 Zombie monks (Use Zombie, Rules Tome, p. 215). They stay seated and mumble their laments until the characters approach the altar or try to harm them, in which case they attack.

11 Crossing

Part of the roof collapsed here. Stones and roof tiles are strewn about the wooden pews. A bell is standing upright in the middle of the crossing. If the characters approach the bell a faint moaning can be heard from within.

Statues. In the alcoves to the west and east of the crossing are two statues of saints, carved out of white marble. A cleric may spend a turn praying to restore one of his already cast spells to a spell slot.

The bell. As the bell tower collapsed, the bell fell into the crossing. The abbot Rufus has been trapped under the bell. Affected by the curse, the decades have transformed him into a hateful husk of himself. Use the stats for Ghoul (Rules Tome, p. 174). He is carrying the keys to the abbot's office (5) and the cellar (17 & 18).

12 Sanctuary

The stone of the altar is blackened and appears to have partially melted. This is the result of the lightning strike caused by Felix's curse upon the monastery. The stained-glass windows above the altar are smashed and blackened. A door leads out to the flower garden.

Empty compartment Behind the altar is a small compartment, its insides painted with golden paint. It once contained the holy reliquary now buried in the cloister garden (9).

Silver candle holders. Upon the altar stand three ornate silver candle holders, each worth 300 GP.

Living Quarters

This two-story building's facade is overgrown with vines. Insects can be seen buzzing around the open windows.

13 Chapter Hall

This small room is lined with wooden stepped benches. It was the only place the monks were allowed to speak, as they took a vow of silence. Their laments after being cursed have transformed into echoes, endlessly reflecting from the walls of this chamber.

Living screams. The screams can only be heard inside this chamber and can therefore not be detected by listening at the doors. Every turn, characters in this chamber must make a saving throw against Paralysis. On a failure the character is treated as being under the effect of the spell Feeblemind (Rules Tome, p. 103) for 1d4 rounds, in which the character does not have to make saves.

14 Refectory

This hall is filled with rotten wooden tables and chairs. There is a kitchen full of old wooden kitchenware and pans. Stairs on the western side lead up to the dormitory (15). Stairs on the south-east lead down to the penitent chamber (18). Otherwise, the room is empty.

Stairs to the cellar. The doors to the cellar are made of heavy wood and iron bandings. Breaking them down will take two turns and trigger a random encounter.

15 Dormitory

The dormitory contains about 30 bedframes in various states of disrepair. The north windows are broken open and vines have crept into the rooms over the centuries, covering the floor and walls. A swarm of killer hornets has built several nests hidden beneath the vines.

Killer hornet.s Use Insect swarm with 4HD (Rules Tome, p. 182).

Hidden treasure. Searching the moldy mattresses will reveal the personal treasure of one of the monks: An intricate silver holy symbol worth 500GP

16 Latrine

This is where the monks did their earthly business. The door is stuck.

Corpse. A monk's dead body is leaning against the wall, wearing a Ring of Spell Turning (Rules Tome, p. 252). Unknowingly, he turned Felix's curse against him, suffering a heart attack out of surprise when the ring activated.

The cellar

The doors to the cellar are made of heavy wood and iron bandings. Breaking them down will take two turns and trigger a random encounter. The air in the cellar is dank and musty. No random encounters are rolled in the cellar.

17 Oil cellar

The blessed barrels of oil were stored in this dank cellar. Wailing from Felix's ghost can be heard from the penitent chamber (18) in this room.

Silver plaque. A silver plaque is hung on the wall, inscribed with the monastery's former teaching: From the earth we take to heal. A collector will pay 500 GP for it.

Blessed barrels. There are four small barrels (30 L) with blessed moonflower oil produced before the curse remaining. Each is worth 600 GP. 200 mL of oil can be rubbed over a patient's body to restore 1d6 HP per full day of rest or have a 75% chance to cure a disease.

18 Penitent chamber

This sparse cellar was used by the monks to repent and whip themselves after having doubts about the religious teachings of the monastery. A few simple wooden stools still remain. There are two whips hanging on the wall. The floor is coloured by old blood residues.

The Ghost of Felix. Felix's ghost has been lingering beside his corpse for decades, wallowing in his misery. Use the stats for Wight (Rules Tome, p. 214). If he is shown Caelius' letter from the Cloister Walk (9) or a Remove Curse spell is cast upon him, he will be released from his torment and fade from existence.

Chant of Blessing. The corpse of Felix is holding a leather scroll case. Inside is a parchment with the chant necessary to bless the pressed moonflower oil. It can be deciphered with the spell Read Magic (Rules Tome, p. 90).

Herb garden

The herb garden is surrounded by a waist-high stone wall and completely overgrown. A couple of apple trees cast their shadows. Halflings may spot some herbs suitable for cooking. There are several old garden tools laying around. Neither shadows nor grey oozes can be encountered here.

Brooms of flying. (Rules Tome, p. 241) The broom lying among the tools is rotten and there is a 10% chance that the broom breaks and drops its rider for every turn spent flying. If two people are flying on the broom, that chance increases to 50% each turn.

Pilgrims. A group of six chaotic acolytes (Rules Tome, p. 152) has taken up camp in the herb garden. They regard tragic places as holy and are drawn to the sadness of the monastery. If the characters interfere with the undead, by turning or destroying them, the acolytes will regard this as an act of sacrilege. They are led by a chaotic cleric of third level.

Cursed Moonflowers and their oil

The purple flowers growing in the garden are cursed. If the raw flowers are ingested, the character has to make a saving throw against poison. On a failure, the character is afflicted with a mysterious illness that makes them lethargic and brooding. They receive -2 to attack rolls until cured. The flowers can be pressed for their oil in the oil mill (6) and further refined. The flowers growing in the flower garden can be ground to produce about 200 liters of oil. If the oil is ingested or rubbed in large quantities on the skin, it causes insanity by removing all happy memories of that person within 3d4 days.

List of names

The referee may use the following monks names if they are needed during the adventure:

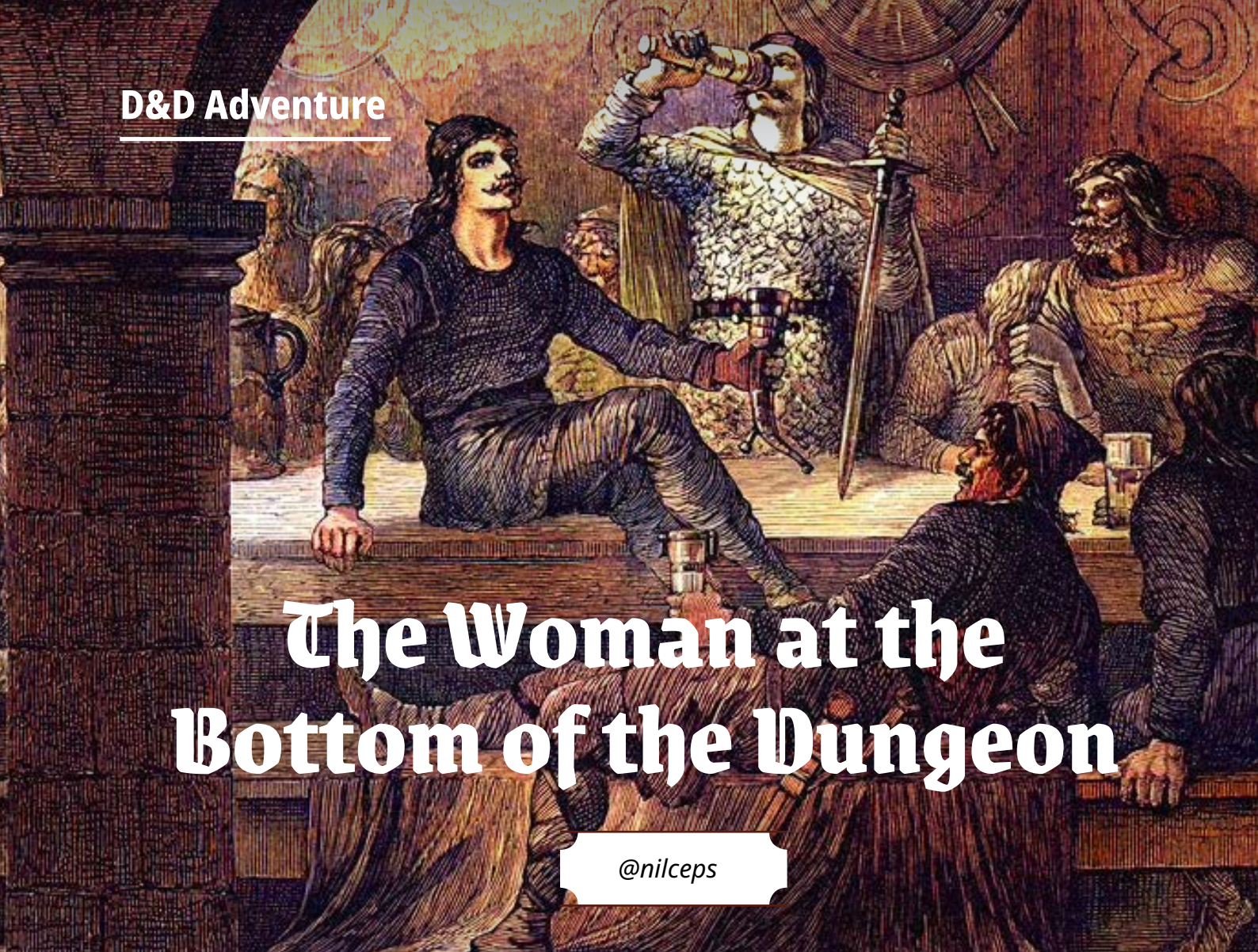
Aquila, Balbus, Domitianus, Fabius, Gallus, Horatius, Juventinus, Longinus, Lepidus, Marcus, Nerva, Petronius, Regulus, Silvanus, Titus, Ursus, Vitus

June

Pl. 28



Iris



The Woman at the Bottom of the Dungeon

@nilceps

Bild (Public Domain): <https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/wassail-bout/>

A D&D 5e adventure for 4th level characters

Last night, Marcus got ABSOLUTELY PLASTERED at the local tavern and loudly declared that he would descend down into the tomb of the long-dead wizard Normyx and get “CURSED TO BE A HOT-ASS WOMAN”. The next day he woke up hungover, barefoot, his adventuring gear gone and no sword. With only a crumpled map he asks our intrepid adventurers for help.

Now it's up to the PCs to escort him through a labyrinth filled with terrible magic traps, long-dead monsters and more. With immeasurable treasures waiting for them down at the Bottom of the Dungeon.

22 First things first though keep Marcus hydrated.
SwissRPG Zine #2 - 2026

Content notes

This adventure contains voluntary gender transition.

Adventure Synopsis

This dungeon is a D&D 5e adventure suitable for four 4th level characters while having enough empty room to scale it easily up or down. The PCs must take on the tomb of a miserable wizard and reach the innermost room which contains his sarcophagi. This adventure should be able to be completed in 2 sessions.

The Vault of Normyx

Normyx was an archmage and treasure collector. Therefore, he designed his tomb with the psychology

of a non-wizard in mind. To him the tomb was an exercise in showing off his magical prowess, breaking people's wills with his powerful Illusion and Transmutation magic. Those he could not break, he'd use the many traps and monsters he placed.

However, time has passed and several adventuring groups have conquered the dungeon since then. While still somewhat dangerous, it is much easier to manage and some adventuring groups have come back to make sure that this dungeon now can serve as a training ground for others.

Marcus, the Hungover Quest-Giver

Marcus is a human commoner, as the DM you should have him wander towards traps, touching suspicious objects and require some supervision if the PCs are too timid. He's surprisingly lucky, he met our heroes after all, so consider giving him advantage on saving throws and on death saving throws.

Gathering Information:

PCs can find additional information in a nearby town. Spending an evening in town means they already have heard one rumor. For every 4 additional hours the group spends in town they can find out another rumor. If they spend money (10+ gp), the time is reduced to 1 hour.

Rumors (Roll 1d6)

1 - Normyx was so arrogant, he bound his entire household staff to serve him in death. The halls are haunted by the ghosts of his servants. (True)

2 - Don't listen to stories of curses or monsters. The real danger in that tomb is to your mind. Normyx's magic still lingers, and it whispers lies to you intending to break your spirit. (True)

3 - It's a pretty popular adventuring spot where lots of people have gone down before so you won't find any old magic stuff down there but Lavenska did come back and plant some goodies around the place. (True)

4 - Ruz and her group went to that tomb and took everything of value, you'll be lucky to find a single copper piece. (Partially True)

5 - Watch out for the Black Pool in that place. It doesn't

just burn your skin, it burns your spirit. A friend of a friend went in, a swaggering sellsword, and came out a shivering wreck. Said the water leached his courage right out of him. (Partially True)

6 - The curse isn't just a simple switch, it's far worse. It replaces you. It pulls your essence into the sarcophagus and spits out a doppelganger version of you. Your original self is trapped in the dark forever.

First Ring - The Entryway (Rooms 1-7)

The Rooms and corridors of the first ring are defined by grandiose and deceptive architecture. The walls are made of polished grey stone that gleams like a mirror with ceilings that are much higher than they should (20ft) with adorned columns running along the walls.

1 The Entrance

Towering iron doors etched with glowing runes stand sealed. Three round depressions in their centers can be seen.

The Entrydoors are impenetrably sturdy. There is absolutely no way to pass through these doors without inserting three round objects, it was originally Normyx meant for anyone that challenges this dungeon to insert 3 gemstones (worth at least 100gp each), but three eggs, cannonballs or even shaped dirt will work. Passive Perception DC 13 to spot remains of eggshells swept to the side of the entrance.

2 The Hall of Eyes

The doors groan open to a hall, its walls and floor reflecting like a grey mirror. An old, silent apparition appears ahead, watching the adventurers while holding onto an obsidian staff. A small alcove contains a marble podium holding an ornate guest registry book still open to a recent page.

Any PC with Passive Perception 13+ will have a strong sensation of being watched. Close examination of the well-polished walls reveals hundreds of eyes shifting in and out of view. Anyone who studies the walls must

make a DC 15 Wisdom save or be affected by **Hypnotic Pattern**. They can make a new save every minute. Closing the eyes doesn't help, but moving to another room ends the spell.

The guest registry contains signatures from various adventuring parties, with increasingly sarcastic comments. Recent entries include "Ruz's Ravagers - Thanks for the workout!" and "The Maintenance Crew - Broke the stupid mirror trap. You're welcome."

3 The Skeletons and the Mace

A life-sized statue of a woman grips a real iron mace. Pink and Blue painted bones litter the edges of the room.

Any PC touching the statue or trying to get the **Berserker Mace** out of the statue's hand will awaken the 2 Giant Skeletons (use **Minotaur Skeleton** stats) guarding this room.

4 A formerly secret Room

Up a narrow stairway, you enter a hidden chamber with empty shelves, chests, and armor stands. The room feels quiet and safe. On a nearby table sits a leather bag.

This secret room used to house some of Normyx's treasures but is now empty. Adventurer Ruz's group left supplies for future delvers: a bag containing 4 Potions of Healing, silk rope (50 feet), bandages, healing salves, and a note reading "Good luck! - Ruz."

5 The Announcing Antechamber

You step into a perfect acoustic chamber. A mosaic of an open mouth decorates the floor's center. A moaning voice from the Hall of Eyes swells, whispering, "State your names and purpose, that Archwizard Normyx may know his mourners."

If the party speaks their names and a purpose (Anything related to mourning Normyx), the voice says "You are acknowledged," and the doors to the two rooms unlock. If they remain silent or fail to give 'the right purpose' after a minute, a **Silence** spell is cast on the room and 2 **Specters** materialize to attack.

6 The Gallery of Triumphs

You step into a room hall filled with glowing crystal cases showcasing Normyx's trophies. Magical illusions on the walls proudly replay his triumphs — mostly him outsmarting foes

One "trophy" is a Mimic disguised as a big ornate wizard hat, sitting on a trophy stand. It will pretend to be an intelligent item promising great knowledge and power if it thinks it'll need to trick the PCs.

7 Hall of Portraits

You step into a chamber lined with portraits of Normyx through the ages, apprentice, archmage, elder, most defaced and slashed. The dusty marble floor is littered with armor pieces.

This portrait gallery chronicles Normyx's life and growing arrogance. The earliest portraits show a humble, eager young man, while later ones depict increasingly elaborate robes and haughty expressions. Adventurer graffiti includes "What a tool!" and "Bad hair choices throughout history." Broken armor pieces scattered on the floor suggest this room once had animated guardian suits.

Second Ring - The Workshops (Rooms 8 - 15)

This Ring feels more like the private domain of a wizard, with walls of warm, sturdy brickwork and rich oak paneling. The flagstone floors are worn smooth from years of pacing, and the air is filled with the faint, lingering scent of old paper, rare reagents, and woodsmoke.

8 The Alchemical Laboratory

The air smells of ozone and strange chemicals. Workbenches overflow with alchemical tools, jars of preserved parts, minerals, and viscous fluids. One beaker bears the curious label: "Genderfluid."

This fully functional alchemical laboratory contains decades worth of experiments, components, and equipment. Most apparatus still function, though many

experiments have gone stagnant or dangerous over time. The “Genderfluid” beaker contains a swirling, color-shifting liquid that seems to change hue based on the self-identified gender of who is looking at it.

Hazard: Random containers have a 25% chance of being unstable when handled roughly. Triggering an explosion dealing 1d6 acid, fire, or cold damage to everyone within 10 feet. Characters with Alchemist’s Supplies proficiency can identify dangerous containers automatically.

Crafting: A character proficient with Alchemist’s Supplies can spend 1 hour and 25 gp worth of components to create 2 **Potions of Healing**. With 2 hours and 100 gp in components, they can brew 1 **Potion of Greater Healing**.

Secret Door: DC 15 Investigation reveals a hidden door to area 13, concealed behind a rotating bookshelf of alchemical formulae.

Treasure: 3 **Potions of Healing**, 1 **Potion of Fire Resistance**, Alchemist’s Supplies, 75 gp worth of rare components, and the mysterious Genderfluid (functions as a **Potion of Polymorph** but only changes set of sexual characteristics of your choice, duration 1 hour).

9 Normyx’s Study

A large oak desk and high-backed chair sit beneath a painted celestial map. Bookshelves crowd the walls. The air smells faintly of old paper and lingering pipe smoke.

This was Normyx’s primary research space, containing his most valued books and personal workspace. The desk shows stains, scattered papers, and a half-finished letter that breaks off mid-sentence. The star charts show unusual constellations not visible from this world, suggesting Normyx’s interests in planar magic.

Characters spending 1 hour studying the books can learn useful information about the deeper tomb levels, granting advantage on three **Intelligence** or **Wisdom-based checks** in areas 16-23. The star charts reveal the date of Normyx’s death and hint at a planned ritual he never completed.

The hidden drawer (DC 15 Investigation) contains 50 gp, a **Spell Scroll** of Detect Magic, and a **Spell Scroll** of Fireball. A **Crystal Ball** sits prominently on the desk but has been cracked and no longer functions magically—worth 100 gp as curiosity.

10 The Scullery

This appears to be a simple kitchen scullery, with a large stone sink, washing basins, and racks for drying dishes. A faint enchantment hangs in the air, and the room is unnaturally clean.

Encounter: Upon entering, 6 animated cleaning implements attack—2 brooms, 2 mops, 1 scrub brush, and 1 feather duster. They use **Awakened Shrub** statistics but deal no damage, instead attempting to grapple targets and “clean” them vigorously. They can be destroyed, reasoned with (Persuasion DC 12), or simply endured. If left alone for 10 minutes, they return to passive cleaning duties.

11 The Grand Dining Hall

A magnificent oak table set for twelve dominates this hall. A skeleton slumps in the nearest chair, a dagger beside its skull. Ghostly figures occasionally flicker around the table, reenacting what appears to be Normyx’s final dinner party — including the dramatic murder that ended it. The ghostly scene plays out every few minutes: elegant dinner guests fade into view, conversation becomes audible as whispers, then a woman approaches the man in the skeleton’s position and stabs him. Other guests react in horror before the scene resets.

The skeleton sits on a pressure plate that triggers when additional weight is added. Examining the skeleton or retrieving the dagger activates wall-mounted spear launchers. Anyone within 10 feet suffers 1d3 spear attacks (+4 to hit, 1d6+2 piercing damage each). The trap resets after 1 minute.

Treasure: The dagger is a silver dagger. The table settings are worth 150 gp total if carefully collected.

12 The Library of Lies

This library is in chaos. Books are torn from shelves, pages are ripped out, and scrolls are unrolled on the floor. A single book on the floor is simply titled ‘Advanced Ogre Etiquette’.

This room contains books that are filled with all manner of false and farcical information

13 Evil Fucking Spellbook

The secret door grinds open, revealing a chamber that stands in stark contrast to the chaos of the Library of Lies. This circular room is immaculate, its polished obsidian floor and stone walls absorbing all light and sound, creating an unnerving stillness. There are no shelves, no scrolls, no clutter. In the exact center of the room, floating at chest height and rotating slowly, is a massive tome. It is bound in glistening black dragon scales, and a single dragon eye is set into its cover watching the adventurers. The pristine floor is marred in one spot. Scrawled hastily in what looks like dried blood are the words: EVIL FUCKING SPELLBOOK. Beneath it, in a different, more frantic script, someone has added: SERIOUSLY FUCK THIS BOOK DON'T LISTEN TO IT.

If the PCs decide to get close a voice emanates from the book and says.

“So, another set of little minds comes to read from my pages. Come closer. I hold the secrets you crave. The spell to grant you your wish. The name of the one who betrayed you. The power to make them all kneel. Just open me. Just... read.”

This **Evil Fucking Spellbook** is an intelligent, malevolent item. If taken from this place, it will betray and constantly work against the party from continuously trying to mind control party members to contacting forces from beyond the material plane. It considers itself superior and will attempt to dominate the mind of whoever touches it (DC 15 Charisma save). New saves can be made every hour. If the dominated person is knocked out and separated from the book, the effect ends.

A character with Arcana proficiency can spend 10 minutes carefully copying spells, retrieving two 2nd-level **spell scrolls** (Crown of Madness, Misty Step).

14 Cloakroom

A small, cedar-lined room with several empty hooks on the wall. A thick layer of dust covers everything except for one peg, from which hangs a simple, dark blue woolen cloak.

The cloak is a **Cloak of Billowing** (cosmetic magic item that makes the cloak billow dramatically on com-

mand). However, 1d4-1 **Pixies** have taken residence in its folds. They're invisible and will play pranks (tying shoelaces, changing colors, whispering jokes) until discovered or the party leaves if attacked they will defend themselves.

15 The Scrying Chamber

A cold, silent chamber. In its center, a wide basin holds black, lightless liquid. The air is cold, smells acerbic and swallows every sound.

Anyone staring into the pool for more than a few seconds must make a DC 13 Wisdom save. On failure, they feel compelled to touch the pool. Inside lurks a **Black Pudding** that will react if anyone disturbs the pool.

Third Ring - The Inner Sanctum

Here, the dungeon sheds all pretense of comfort for raw, magical power. The walls are constructed from black basalt, braced with thick Cyrite (Arcane Steel) bands. Arcane runes are carved directly into the stone, glowing with a soft, blue and purple light that provides the only illumination. The air is cold and smells of ozone.

16 Lesser Armory

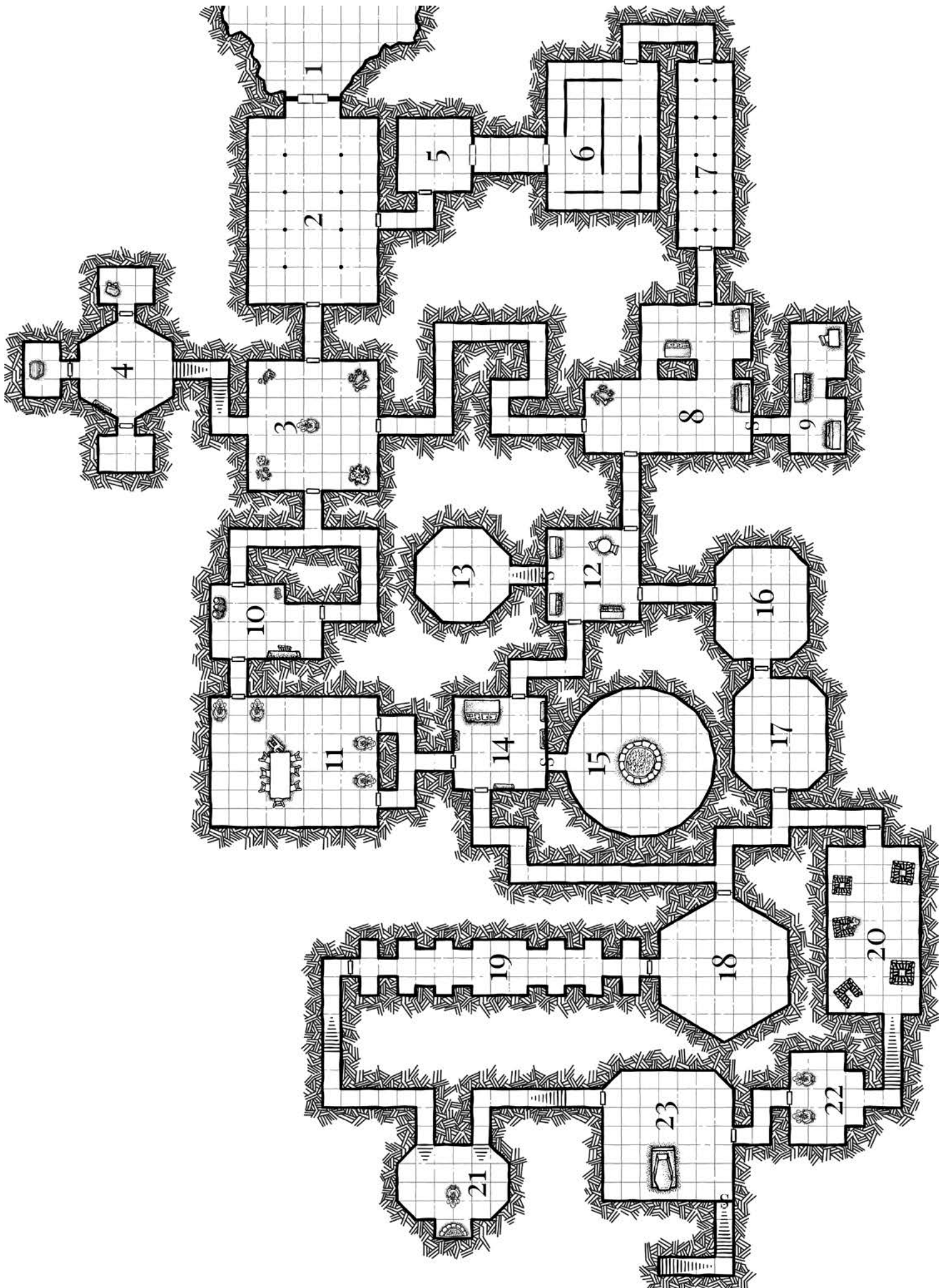
Racks of serviceable but plain swords, spears, and shields line the walls of this room with a few pieces already gone. In the center of the room stand four suits of polished steel plate armor, posed as if on guard.

The **Animated Armor** (4 suits) become aggressive if anyone takes weapons/shields from the racks or messes with the suits themselves.

The weapon racks contain serviceable but mundane equipment: 6 longswords, 4 crossbows with 40 bolts, 8 spears, 12 shields, and 2 sets of chain mail. Hidden beneath the floor (DC 14 Investigation) is a cache containing silver lockets (25 gp each), a set of masterwork dice (50 gp) and a **Potion of Heroism**.

17 The Golem Forge

This room is lined with a silvery-white metal adorned with runes purple and blue torches



lighting the room. A massive, dormant forge dominates the chamber, surrounded by molds for humanoid limbs and torsos. Arcane runes are carved into the floor, some clearly defaced. In the center of the room lies a Clay Golem, missing one arm and its head with graffiti and decorations on its lifeless body.

There is nothing of value in this room. However the metal cladding in this room is made of Cyrite, a metal that is commonly referred to as Arcane Steel since it registers as magic when detect magic is cast.

18 Mirror Room

This hexagonal chamber used to have its walls, ceiling, and floor completely covered in flawless mirrors; however most of the mirrors have either been smashed in or covered in paint.

Normyx designed this room as a complex illusion puzzle involving multiple reflections, false images, and dimensional tricks. Rather than solve the intricate riddle, previous adventurers applied the direct approach of systematic destruction. Broken mirror shards crunch underfoot, while paint covers the few remaining intact sections. Walking carelessly through the shattered glass requires DC 10 Dexterity saving throws. Failure deals 1d4 piercing damage from glass cuts. The few remaining mirrors still hold fragments of the original illusion magic, occasionally showing glimpses of other places or times.

Fourth Ring - The Tomb

The rough basalt gives way to smooth, white marble veined with gold. The walls are covered in intricate reliefs depicting celestial charts, funereal processions, and weeping figures. The architecture employs sacred geometry for its ceilings making use of arches and circular chambers. The halls here are unnaturally silent due to a sound dampening enchantment.

19 The Wailing Hall

A long stone corridor stretches ahead. Magical sobs and whispers echo throughout. The sounds intensify deeper in. Sections of the wall have been smashed.

Characters walking this hall must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or become overwhelmed with sadness for 10 minutes, suffering disadvantage on **attack rolls and saving throws**. The effect can be overcome by encouragement from allies (**Help action** grants advantage on the save).

Smashed magical components along the walls tell the story of how previous adventurers dealt with more lethal versions of these traps. A message scratched into the marble reads "The real trap was the friends we made along the way - just kidding, it was the fear magic. -Ruz"

20 The Menagerie

A vast chamber of iron cages and shimmering stasis fields, where beasts like an owlbear and displacer beast hang frozen in mid-attack. A shattered cage lies empty beside a broken minotaur statue, face locked in fury.

The magic of some cages has failed. A **Minotaur** and **Basilisk** have escaped, with the basilisk now considering the room its lair and hiding in ambush.

21 Chamber of Sorrows

This room is a quiet, solemn shrine. In the center stands a life-sized marble statue of a Normyx, a single tear carved on his cheek. The air is heavy with a magical melancholy. Soft, sad music plays from an unseen source.

The room emanates an aura of sadness. Characters must make a **DC 12 Wisdom** save or be affected by a mild calm emotions effect, becoming melancholy but not hostile.

22 The Dual Threshold

Before the chamber stand two big stone warrior statues. Carved in the lintel above them is a riddle: "I can be created, but never seen. I can be broken, but have no form. Some seek me for comfort, others to their harm. What am I?" Beneath it someone wrote 'Silence' a second person writing 'Trap disarmed just walk on through you are on the homestretch'.

The trap has indeed been disarmed. Speaking the word "Silence" would have originally opened the way, while wrong answers triggered the guardian statues

to animate as **Stone Golems**. The trap mechanism has indeed been disabled, with obvious tool marks on the statues' bases and severed magical conduits.

23 Sarcophagus Chamber

A single, masterfully carved marble sarcophagus rests on a dais in the center of this room, humming with a potent, transformative magic. Additional Runes have been chiseled into the base.

This is the culmination of the entire complex. Normyx's final resting place and the source of the transformation magic that brought the party here. The lid is heavy but can be moved with effort (**DC 12 Strength check**, or automatic with two people working together). Any creature that opens the sarcophagus and looks upon Normyx's remains is immediately affected by powerful magic equivalent to true polymorph, their biology instantly transforms to take on a set of gender characteristics of their choice, changing their appearance and physiology accordingly. A **DC 15 Arcana** will reveal that the newer runes have turned the spell cast on the sarcophagus from a Curse of Reverse Gender to a spell of Sex Shift.

The transformation can only be reversed by undergoing the process again (opening the sarcophagus while already transformed) or through wish magic. Many visitors have used this property intentionally, making pilgrimage to Normyx's tomb for personal reasons.

If Marcus survives to this point, he eagerly volunteers to open the sarcophagus first, finally achieving his drunken boast. The transformation fulfills his stated desire.

Secret Door: DC 15 Investigation reveals a hidden door leading upwards and out of the Tomb.



Doré, Gustave, "Roland's Descent", 1832-1883

Wilting Lavender

@Warblade

In 1980, Ōhira Kimitaka procured a copy of the Sutra of Pale Leaves, and founded an organisation to bring the King in Yellow to our world. His plans will come to fruition in 1988, and the investigators that rise to stop him may or may not succeed; however, he is not the only one with a copy of this cognitohazard, or the only one to innovate with it. In 1982, right on the cusp of the Golden Age of Idols and the rock Band Boom, a young musician inherits her grandfather's war papers, and spreads the good word of the Prince of Pale Leaves... through a sick-ass guitar ballad!

The Setup

This scenario is set in Japan in the 1980s, a time period with overt and frequent instances of racism, sexism, queerphobia, and other forms of bigotry. I encourage the Keeper and players to have a conversation about which elements they feel comfortable exploring and to not allow acting in a bigoted manner at the table. This scenario itself will not include elements of racism or sexism, and was written with the closeted lesbian and trans experience in mind. It has explicit mentions of suicide, self-harm, ear injury, and deadnaming.

We start this adventure on the 31st of March, 1982, in Fukuoka City. Your old friend, Yamamoto Kenta, has invited all of you to join him on the saddest day of his life: the closing down of a live house?! Over the phone and in person, he's talked your collective ears off about the booming music scene in Fukuoka, the incredible ambience of the 80s FACTORY, all the local rock bands that started out here, and the fact that they're throwing their final concert... tonight!

Yamamoto Kenta is a sacrificial lamb, and will not survive the night; he exists to give the PCs a reason to investigate. Establish what connection each party member has with him, and try to come up with one anecdote for each connection. (If a player gets stuck, ask them to pick a skill as their shared interest, and go from there!) The only details set in stone are: Kenta lives in Fukuoka (perhaps as a student at Seinan Gakuin University, or a salaryman in one of the city's booming businesses), and is a rock enthusiast—and that he's invited all the PCs to come along to what he promises will be the concert of a lifetime.

Ask each character if they accept Kenta's invite and attend the concert. (If they don't attend, ask them what alternate plans they've made with Kenta on the 1st of April. They don't want to be a bad friend, do they?) Characters who don't attend skip right to the Morning After, and do not get Exposed.

The 80's Final

- ◆ Location: 80s FACTORY, Fukuoka
- ◆ Leads In: The Setup
- ◆ Leads Out: The Morning After
- ◆ Purpose: The investigators experience the strange performance of Haiyore! and set up an opportunity for the Keeper to later introduce NPCs. Keep this scene short.

Those of you who agree to Kenta's invitation soon find yourself crammed into the live house. It feels like every rocker in Fukuoka has shown up, as well as a few from across the country; the 80s FACTORY is full to bursting. All the better; there's a sadness in the air that everyone is raging against, and you can hear it—in the silliness of the Happy Birthday everyone sings for the Mods' lead singer, and in the fierce joy of the opening song Counter Action. An era is ending, if only a short one; and so we remember the good times.

80s FACTORY is a real location in Chuo-ku, Fukuoka; the events of this night are inspired by the events of the real 80s Final, as documented by Motonaga Naoto of the Fukuoka Rock Research Institute. It was indeed a live house—a style of live music club growing in popularity in the early 1970s, hosting local artists and providing them a platform to draw the eye of record labels—and acted as a launchpad for Fukuoka rock during the Band Boom period. The version used here takes artistic liberties, but you can find images of the live house on their website, as well as recordings of performances on YouTube!

This fictional version of 80s FACTORY has a large ground floor space designed to host 200 people; it was originally designed to have seats in front of the stage, but has since been converted to standing room only. The floor above houses equipment and offices, and the second floor has the 80s FACTORY bar and restaurant. An external staircase down the front goes up to the second floor; behind the stage, a second staircase leads up to the storage room and down to a dressing room, as well as further down into the basement. The front face of the building is composed entirely of glass doors and large windows, providing a great view onto the street.

Quickly play out the course of the 80s Final. Four bands are scheduled to perform for an hour each; don't spend too much time here, but use the chance to flesh out the PCs a bit more (do they like rock? are they drinking? are they dancing? do they chat up the artists?) as it gets later into the night. Meanwhile, events are progressing in the background. As the last band, Full Noise, finishes their performance, a fifth band takes the stage.

Enemy Action

Haiyore!¹ is a visual kei rock band with a very striking ensemble: Yoshino Akemi, the lead singer and guitarist, is in a gothic lolita getup, the bass guitarist, 'Ken', is in a maid cosplay with her face hidden by a mask, and the keyboardist and drummer are completely hidden behind their oversized black-and-yellow hoods.²

¹ Translated as 'Crawl Up!'

² It's worth noting that the lolita style really only takes off in the 1990s, and animegao kigurumi (masked cosplay) only in the 2000s. If the players catch these anachronisms, just smile mysteriously and continue.

The black-and-yellow is a recurring motif, as their equipment also has the same scheme, and their props are covered by symbols of the Onyx Medallion (Sutra of Pale Leaves: Twin Suns Rising (2025), pg. 32) and/or the Yellow Sign.



Gothic lolita goes very hard. Yoshino Akemi is dressed rather like this, but has very strong themes of yellow on black. Copyright: Small Giant, shared under the Unsplash Licence



The bassist, 'Ken', is in a costume much like this, complete with mask and maid outfit. Not an inch of skin is showing. Copyright: Ellell Ishida, shared under CC-BY-3.0

Haiyore! was not scheduled to perform at the 80s Final; they're not even the right genre. But while the party was taking in Full Noise's blazing finale, Akemi had strong-armed the stage manager into squeezing in a last few songs. Read or paraphrase the following text:

Haiyore!'s first song, Phantom and Devil, is eerie and depressive, and leaves the crowd mostly confused and uncomfortable. Their second song, Traveller, makes up for it somewhat, with its kawaii-rock chorus (Tabibito! Tabibito!); the drunker patrons are singing along, but the crowd is still beginning to disperse as they launch into their third and final song: Dark Birth, Shining Death.

There is something uncanny about Anshou Mushi. Its first chords silence the room. It's... difficult... to capture the experience of listening to this song; it feels like the gentle whisper of a lover in your ear, if that lover were also reaching through your ribcage and clutching your heart. As the song hits its bridge, the mascot stops playing, and starts throwing flyers with this strange golden symbol out at the audience; they're just bits of paper, but... maybe it's just the alcohol, but you feel incredibly nauseous, seeing flash after flash of yellow.

The next thing you know, the song is over, and the stage is clear. You see the artists making their way out, through a silent and awestruck crowd.

At this point, the party has been exposed to a fraction of the Sutra of Pale Leaves, condensed into a few minutes of beautiful, haunting pop. Have the party make a Sanity check; on a failure, they're Exposed. Mark down 1 EP; what this means for you is that you can create visual and audio hallucinations for Exposed PCs (Sutra of Pale Leaves: Twin Suns Rising (2025), pg. 24). They also lose 1d4 SAN, and gain the additional mania: "Tell everyone about Haiyore!" The rest of the crowd is affected by this mania, and people calmly but deliberately leave 80s FACTORY after Anshou Mushi is performed.

Finally, note to the PCs that as the crowd disperses, they've lost sight of their friend Kenta.

The Morning After

- ◆ Location: Outside Kenta's apartment, Fukuoka
- ◆ Leads In: 80s Final
- ◆ Leads Out: Returning to 80s FACTORY, Joining the Investigation
- ◆ Purpose: The investigators establish that Kenta is missing, consider the events of last night in retrospect, and decide what leads to pursue.

In the morning, the investigators converge in front of Kenta's apartment; none of them have heard from him since last night, and he hasn't picked up his phone.

At this point, as the investigators reconsider the events of last night, ask them to make Spot Hidden checks. Among other things, they may recall:

- ◆ **seeing the stage manager, Sekino Asa, having a tense conversation with the lead singer of Haiyore! before their performance.** They can track Ms. Sekino's number down with Credit Rating, Library Use, or Art/Craft (Music); she tells them that only four bands were scheduled to perform, and she was as surprised as anyone when a random musician showed up and asked her if they could perform. She's even more surprised when she remembers she said yes. For her, the rest of the night is a haze, and she's horrified when she remembers she hasn't locked up.
- ◆ **seeing a white Mitsubishi van speed into the back alley behind 80s FACTORY, where the musicians load/unload their equipment.** On a hard success, they remember noting that the licence plate was registered to Taitō Ward in Tokyo. On an extreme success, they even remember the licence plate number. (This of course requires the viewer to have been outside sometime before the performance; perhaps they were taking a smoke break...?)
- ◆ **getting a closer look at the drummer and keyboardist while they pushed past.** Both of them wear full robes, and the overwhelming smell of lavender covers up a stench of death and decay. Those faces are eerily inhuman, and those teeth are uncannily sharp. (Make a Sanity check for 0/1 SAN loss.)
- ◆ **similarly, getting a closer look at the guitarists during the performance.** The lead guitarist's outfit is beautiful but otherwise unhelpful; the bass guitarist's masked anime maid costume is even more anonymising, covering every inch of skin. Psychology or Art/Craft (Music) makes you think; these two are really the core of the band, and it's almost as if they're performing for each other. The keyboardist and drummer are comparatively me-

diocre, but the unearthly trembling of the bass and the charming voice of the lead steal the show.

- ♦ **seeing how people responded to Haiyore!'s performance.** (Save this one for any investigator who's not Exposed.) The crowd seemed spellbound by Anshou Mushi, and once that spell was broken, everyone began heading out—quite naturally; they said goodbye to their friends and finished their drinks, but they calmly and inevitably left. A few people seemed unaffected, and confused by how quickly the party ended; a few people seemed to take it worse, pushing their way out or singing loudly as they made their way out.

As far as concrete leads go, the investigators have two options: they can report their missing friend to the police, and they can return to 80s FACTORY and see if they can pick up any new information. They can pursue other avenues as well; the Keeper's goal in this and the next sections is to convey enough information that the investigators and/or the police can learn of Yoshino Akemi's address in Ueno, Tokyo.



*They don't make them like they used to.
Copyright: Tennen-Gas, shared under CC-BY-SA 3.0.*

Returning to 80s FACTORY

- ♦ Location: 80s FACTORY
- ♦ Leads In: The Morning After
- ♦ Leads Out: Joining the Investigation
- ♦ Purpose: The investigators return to the 'crime scene', and learn what they can about Haiyore!

Returning to 80s FACTORY, you find the live house a pale shadow of yesterday's glory. The door is closed, but not even locked (unless the party have spoken to Sekino Asa, in which case she arrives while the party is inside... or before the party can enter, if they're delayed) and in the daylight, the abandoned bottles of beer and glasses on the bar only give it a grimy, unloved quality. The main hall with the stage and

the open floor area still has plenty of Haiyore! flyers lying around, as well as many unfinished drinks—and, in some cases, even abandoned wallets and bags. The investigators can make a tidy profit with the loot here, if they know how to fence it and can find the time.

The investigators can also spend time examining the flyers, at which point they realise all of these are painted (with yellow paint) on old newspapers, magazine pages, and scrap paper. Each has been made with painstaking care, but they haven't been as thorough about covering up the text beneath; investigators who dedicate the time will notice several addresses in Tokyo, a letterhead of the University of Tokyo, and the names Yoshino Akemi and Asamatsu Ken. (This task takes time, so feel free to keep it as a last resort for if the investigators need more clues.)

Turning to the stage, a professional video camera, microphone, and video tape recorder have also been left behind, set to record performances and then apparently left unattended. Reviewing the footage without destroying the tapes takes a little bit of skill, requiring an Art/Craft (Photography), Electronics, or just plain Luck; on a success, the party gets a chance to review the events of last night. If they watch the performance of Haiyore! again, they get Exposed again; however, they also note that as the hall clears after the performance, one of the waitresses stays behind to clean up. Every time she passes through the view of the camera, she seems more agitated, tapping and humming loudly—after about fifteen minutes, she doesn't show up again.

Searching through the rooftop restaurant yields nothing of interest (and the investigators may have to break in, as the restaurant is locked up properly), but looking through the offices gives the investigators rather the opposite result. The offices are full of paperwork, letters, ledgers and invoices, only some of which have been filed away; searching through these takes a Library Use or hard Spot Hidden check. The accounts indicate that 80s FACTORY was shutting down for perfectly mundane reasons; however, the investigators do find, in the wastebasket, a crumpled up piece of scrap paper with the following notes:

Haiyore - coming from Tokyo?? big fans
Asamatsu Ken
check for free spot on last night
03 5454 6014

If the investigators call the number, they end up phoning Jin Yu-Ran or her cousin (see **The Band Apartment**). They're confused and more than a little wary, but perk up at the mention of Haiyore!; it seems they have an arrangement to share the phone with the nice lady upstairs, Yoshino Akemi, but she's currently not home. The number can be traced back to an address in Ueno district, Tokyo, either with the help of the police or with a private reverse phone lookup service.

If the party heads backstage, they find the usual clutter; two backstage and equipment rooms have been used to house five different bands, and the mess is as you might expect. One thing does catch the eye, however: one of the chairs is broken, almost as if someone was thrown into it with a little too much force. At this point, investigators might think to contact the other bands that played on the night; this takes a hard Credit Rating check, a hard Art/Craft (Music) check, or some help from the police, but if they succeed, they'll manage to get in touch with Mr. Moriyama (of the Mods).

Yeah, I remember them. We were all a bit shocked when another band showed up; there was hardly enough room for our equipment as it was. I was just asking who they were, if Asa-san had put them on the roster, then the girl with the mask got in my face and shoved me back. She looks dainty, but has the strength of a gorilla, she put me through the chair! Shu and the others were ready to break some noses after that, but then the other girl apologised, and it was alright.

You know, I could swear I'd heard the lead before. Beautiful voice. That band had a different look, but they've played in Hakata before. They were a bit... you know... that time, too.

Finally, if the investigators head into the basement, they find a disturbing scene. In a dark corner of the basement (not far from the water mains), a young woman—the waitress caught on camera—lies dead. Blood drips from her ears, and her hands are slick with it. Successful Spot Hidden or Medicine checks explain the tragedy: she appears to have dug her fingers into her ears, so violently as to injure them; afterwards, she's repeatedly struck her head against the wall (as evidenced from the blood splatter) before passing out and dying of blunt force trauma.

All the injuries seem self-inflicted. Searching her reveals very little of interest; she can be IDed as Kanagi Aoba, a waitress at 80s FACTORY.³

At this point, the investigators may call the police, or Ms. Asa arrives and calls the police for them.

Joining the Investigation

- ◆ Location: Hakata Police Station
- ◆ Leads In: Returning to 80s Factory, The Morning After
- ◆ Leads Out: The Band Apartment
- ◆ Purpose: The investigators get the assistance of the PSIA, find their friend, and are tasked to go to Tokyo to investigate Haiyore!'s residence.

There are two main ways in which the party can arrive at Hakata Police Station. First, they may be called by the police (if one of them has a mobile phone) to identify a body found floating near the pier; second, they may arrive at the police station themselves (or be picked up as persons of interest) after Ms. Asa reports the death at 80s FACTORY.

In either case, once they're at the station (and have the presence of mind to ask about their friend Yamamoto Kenta), they're brought to the morgue and presented with Kenta's body. It is undeniably him, though he has been changed by the night he spent in the harbour; hit the PCs with a Sanity check for 0/1 SAN loss. Examining the body or talking to the coroner, they learn that Kenta has self-inflicted ear injuries that match Sekino Asa's; in his pocket, the police also found a crumpled up Haiyore! flyer, with the Onyx Medallion on it. (A lot of the paint has come off with the water, revealing it to be a clipping from a page of handwritten sheet music.)

Unfortunately, the police appear to be treating this as a suicide. Even if the investigators report Sekino Asa's death, the cops at Hakata Police Station have little interest in following through on injuries at a concert gone wrong, and even less interest in involving a group of civilians. Happily for the civilians in question, an agent of the PSIA (the Public Security Intelligence Agency; players may recognise the American counterpart, the FBI) has commandeered an office at Hakata Police Station, and has taken a keen interest in the case and the investigators.

³ Exposed investigators may hear whispers calling them down to the basement, Kanagi Aoba's dying moans, or they may even see a robed figure looking down at her and shaking his head sadly as they approach. Have fun with it.



*A Shinkansen train running down the Tōkaidō Line, connecting Tokyo and Osaka (from where the San'yō connects to Hakata).
Copyright: Shellparakeet, shared under CC0 1.0.*

Mizutani Shogo (*Sutra of Pale Leaves: Twin Suns Rising* (2025), pg. 45) approaches the investigators and asks if they would be willing to assist him in an investigation. He explains that several missing persons reports have been made this morning; while the local police are refusing to follow through before 24 hours have passed, he believes there is a greater urgency to the situation. He has been investigating the activities of a strange religious organisation called the Association of Pale Leaves, and finds the symbol on the Haiyore! flyers alarmingly familiar. While he himself has little to say about the band or its capabilities, he can help investigators connect the dots; he can also access databases and make inquiries that the investigators could not.

Ultimately, between Agent Mizutani and the characters' investigations⁴ where Haiyore!'s members reside. The question is: how much time have they lost here?

⁴ and helpful hallucinations from the *Prince of Pale Leaves*; after all, he wants to help.

The Band Apartment

- ◆ Location: Ueno, Taitō Ward, Tokyo
- ◆ Leads In: Joining the Investigation
- ◆ Leads Out: Yellow Goblins
- ◆ Purpose: The investigators break into Haiyore!'s apartment, brave the horrors within, and learn the awful truth of their plans.

Once they know to head to Tokyo, getting there is easy enough. The Shinkansen connects Hakata to Osaka and Osaka to Tokyo; the Hakata-Tokyo Shinkansen Super Express has even been running for a few years now. As long as the investigators leave by 11 AM, they can arrive in Tokyo by 6 PM, giving them an hour or two to search through the apartment before they crash the second concert of this adventure.

Once in Tokyo, the address in Ueno District is not hard to find; the investigators soon find themselves standing in front of a rather run-down 6 story building. There are a few names on the postboxes (not all of the units seem occupied, or at least some of them have no names and others are overflowing with advertisements), but one stands out: a postbox with the name Asamatsu Ken taped onto it, corresponding to the unit on the first floor.

Cautious investigators may think to visit the neighbours first; as it turns out, the ground floor tenants are home. Jin Yu-Ran, a middle-aged Korean woman, answers the door (investigators who phoned the apartment will recognise her voice); she lives at home with her cousin (also a 'single' woman) and her baby, and they have the only landline phone in the building. She's helpful enough, and will talk quite a bit about the tenants upstairs over tea (a Charm roll is best). There's six of them, all students, crammed into an apartment hardly large enough for four; it's been a while since she's seen most of them, but she knows that someone is definitely up there, as she can hear the movement. These days, though, she usually only sees Akemi; the girl is very nice, and seems to be the responsible one of the group. The others she speaks to very rarely; the few times she's seen them, she remembers a horrible stink.

They can be a bit difficult to live with. They practice up there, you know? It gets loud, and you know, with the baby... it can be a bit difficult. If I go up there and ask, they always stop... and then, the next night, they're playing past 10 pm again. Akemi always apologises, and it's fine. I think the other tenants complained to the landlord, though; he came by a week ago. We haven't heard anything since, though, so I guess they must have worked things out.

Unhealthy Living Conditions

Heading up to the first floor apartment, the investigators find the door locked; if they knock, no one responds... though they can clearly hear movement behind it. The door can be forced open with Locksmith, or a hard Strength roll (or careful application of a weapon). When they do so, they're confronted with a pair of ghosts (Call of Cthulhu Keeper Rulebook (2016), pg. 294); these repulsive, flesh-eating creatures are strangely docile for a moment, but react with fear and rage once they realise those forcing their way in are strangers.

Once the ghosts are dead, the party has an opportunity to investigate the apartment. As Yu-Ran said, it's clear that six people live here, with one queen-sized bed, three single beds, and one couch. The place is in poor condition, and dirt and bloodstains mark the floor just out of sight of the doorway. It's also clearly in regular use, especially the kitchen; the fridge is particularly interesting, containing a mix of vegetables, tofu, and the remaining limbs of the landlord (0/1d6 SAN loss).

The queen-sized bed clearly belongs to Yoshino Akemi; the area around it is strewn with handwritten music sheets and handwritten notes. Under the bed sits a box full of old WWII propaganda magazines and posters; on the backsides of these papers and in any free space available, someone has written a lot of Chinese text. Closer examination—with an EDU check, though give them a bonus die if one of them has Language (Chinese) above 50%—clarifies that this is kanbun writing, a literary and archaic style of Japanese, and that the work recorded itself is an intricate one, with several different interpretations depending on how it is read.⁵ The closet next to the bed contains a mixture of men's and women's clothes, and some of the notes have different handwriting, suggesting that Akamatsu Ken may have shared it with her.



A magazine cover from 1937, depicting the Imperial Japanese Army marching into Beijing. Copyright: Public domain.

⁵ For the Keeper, this is a distorted copy of the Sutra of Pale Leaves; it takes the same 15 weeks to study, but only has half the spells. Players don't get exposed until they devote time to studying it; see next footnote.)

03.01 - Got the last of Grandpa's old papers. More wartime stuff, at least no pinups in this box. I'd throw it out but it's not like there's anyone else left to take them. Dying old and all alone must fucking suck.

15.01 - Ken's really taken an interest in Grandpa's notes. Says they're some sort of old epic about the Buddha. Also they're some sort of puzzle, he's going on and on about the patterns and the ciphers layered over each other in a page. He's cute when he's nerding out like this, gives him something to think about.

28.01 - Not the Buddha. The Prince. Some of the stories are quite silly. He's just travelling up and down the countryside, trying to help people, but he doesn't always get it. A fox tricks him into letting it into the coop, and then he has to catch it before it hurts the chickens. A girl tells him about her crush and he convinces a horse to kidnap them both. Could write a song about that. Traveller, O Traveller...

There's something serious about it too. The last survivor of a great people, fighting to protect humanity from the powers of the Great Beyond. He's all alone. And sometimes the people he saves appreciate who he is and what he does, but most of them don't get it. It's just him and the voices inside his head.

~~xx.xx~~ - Something up with Ken. She's (yeah) gone all pale, doesn't talk so much. Took her to the doctor but nothing seems wrong, she seems fitter than ever. Just wants to lie in bed and listen to stories. have to cancel performance.

fingers are too long

02.03 - Never felt more inspired. Threw out most of our old songs and wrote up some new ones. Mostly about the Prince, but they're all also love songs hehe. It's love when you want them to take you apart and remake you to their liking, right? At least Ken says so

We don't talk much anymore. Don't need to. We understand each other. And we understand the Prince. He is coming with gifts. Ken has already felt them. She is perfect and free. And we shall all be.

We have even heard his songs. on the margins, encoded chants, so beautiful you want to just listen forever. Kaede said something about wanting to quit the band. she stopped complaining after she heard them.

22.03 - haven't heard back from Ms. Asa. she didn't like us very much the last time either. It's fine. The Prince has given us the tools we need, and grandfather kept them safe for us. We will test the songs, and then we will use them. We will not need anyone's approval anymore.

Will miss playing rock. Not sure I like playing these jazz pieces as much as Matsuo did. But it's all about the audience, and Takanaka has reach no indie rock band has. They will serve the Prince well.

I wonder what it will be like to be a man.

Looking at the musical sheets and notes, it becomes clear that Akemi and Ken have spent the last few months headfirst in these old papers, and have taken great inspiration from them for Haiyore!'s songs. The following notes also jump out at the investigators.⁶ Assorted journal entries and notes from Akemi's bedroom, all with matching handwriting. These notes are bundled together with song drafts, strange drawings of various figures, and designs that resemble the Onyx Medallion.

The party can also quickly identify Kaede's and Matsuo's bedrooms. Matsuo's is particularly notable, as he seems to have had an old vinyl player, and a respectable collection of vinyls; most of these are of jazz/pop icon Masayoshi Takanaka, including a beautiful case of one of his recent albums, the *Rainbow Goblins*. He also has signed merchandise, and posters—including a poster of his upcoming performance at Hibiya Open Air Concert Hall, later today.

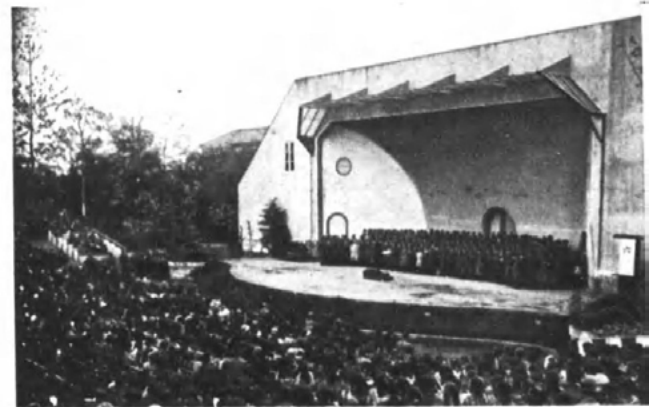
Yellow Goblins

- ◆ Location: Hibiya Open Air Concert Hall, Tokyo
- ◆ Leads In: The Band Apartment
- ◆ Purpose: The investigators stop Akemi from swapping into Takanaka's body, or arrive too late and must kill him.

Hibiya Open Air Concert Hall is an outdoor music venue in Hibiya Park; situated in the heart of Tokyo, it has operated in some way, shape or form since 1923. Today, it's (only fictionally) hosting Takanaka's concert, and people have been queueing for seats since 3 PM. By the time the concert starts at 7 PM, a whopping 14,000 people will have shown up to a venue designed to accommodate 3,000; if things go according to Haiyore!'s plan, these 14,000 people will make unsuspecting victims for the Prince of Pale Leaves.

The investigators may have thought to contact Mr. Mizutani and mobilise the Tokyo Metropolitan Police by this point. Unfortunately for them, while Mizutani can reach out to the local police, they're unwilling to

⁶ If the investigators insist on examining the notes, the designs, and the Sutra, despite understanding that they don't have the time and that the Sutra is dangerous to the mind, offer them a spell or two. At the very least, the Sutra will have the Sign of the Ancients, which functions like an Elder Sign but does not work on the Prince or his Adherents; it doesn't work on the ghosts, but it will at least confuse Ken. If they learn a spell from the Sutra, they gain 1D10 Exposure.).



New Music Hall in Hibiya Park

堂樂音新園公谷比日

A picture of the concert hall from 1937, before the Second World War and the concert hall's reconstruction in 1954.

cooperate with the PSIA, and don't appreciate their ability to guard Masayoshi Takanaka being questioned. Mizutani can, at the very least, pass on Yoshino Akemi's description (and the investigators should know by now that regular police officers can do little to stop her); he can also obtain the name of the officer in charge on the scene, Nakamura Ichiko.

Climax and Endings

Without accounting for the investigators' interference, Haiyore! arrives in their van at around 6:30 PM, while the staff at the concert hall are doing final checks and Takayama and his performers are preparing in their dressing room. Yoshino Akemi can talk her way past the officers on the scene, and Ken and the ghosts she travels with can force their way past the stage manager Okane Kenjiro. Once they're in Takayama's dressing room, Ken and the ghosts hold the door, while Akemi uses Mind Transfer to swap her mind into Takanaka's body. 'Takanaka' then goes onto stage to perform, opening with Akemi's 'cover' of *Saudade*, then puts the crowd through *Dark Birth*; *Shining Death*, replicating on a massive scale the events of the 80s Final. By the next day, hundreds of people have committed suicide, and thousands more have gone on to see visions of the Prince of Pale Leaves, creating fertile ground for the Association of Pale Leaves' missionaries.

If the investigators are careful and efficient, they arrive just as Haiyore! is breaking into the dressing rooms behind the stage; if the investigators tarry (by making a Sign of the Ancients, for example), they may arrive to find Takanaka performing with the rest of Haiyore! and have to subsequently put him down. In both cases, they find that the drummer and keyboardist of Haiyore! are ghosts (like the ones in the apartment), but 'Asamatsu Ken' is something else. Much like the Sutra gives a lonely Akemi the power to influence others, the Prince of Pale Leaves has given 'Ken' the opportunity to transcend the limitations of her flesh.

As such, while she retains a mostly human shape, she has become something much closer to a Servitor of the Outer Gods (Call of Cthulhu Keeper Rulebook (2016), pg. 304). She uses her Music of Madness if she's on-stage, and knows 6 spells (including Mindblast, Summon Hastur, and Implant Fear). She is also invulnerable to nonmagical weapons, and so the investigators cannot kill her.⁷

She does, however, care (in some strangely romantic way) for her coperformer, and if Akemi is captured, she can be used to lead 'Ken' out of Tokyo.

If the investigators manage to save Takanaka (and keep him mostly sane), he's very grateful to the party; while he doesn't know much about eldritch horrors, he understands when he's just gotten out of a terrible situation. The Japanese jazz and city pop scene flourishes, and so does the nation (until the bubble economy collapses, anyway). If the investigators are forced to kill Takanaka—especially on stage, in a public setting—they're made fugitives and are forced to go into hiding, though Mizutani may have further use for them. If the investigators leave 'Takanaka' alive after Akemi has taken over, they rapidly accelerate the events of the Sutra of Pale Leaves, and 'Takanaka' is soon contacted by Ōhira Kimitaka and the APL.

You can find statblocks for this adventure on the next page.

⁷ Some investigators may be unhappy with this reality. If it better suits your party, the Prince of Pale Leaves may choose to help the most Exposed investigator, appearing as a beautiful man in golden robes. He teaches them the spell Enchant Knife, and helps them enchant a weapon while bypassing the 1 hour casting time. The investigator pays the POW cost of the spell; depending on the table, the investigator may also have to kill the animal sacrifice themselves. Save this for after the investigators have tried to kill 'Ken' with a shotgun (or something equally certain), and failed.)

Yoshino Akemi, age 22, musician and composer

STR 55	CON 45	SIZ 55	DEX 70	INT 75
APP 80	POW 85	EDU 70	SAN 00	HP 10
DB 0	Build 0	Move 8	MP -	
Combat Brawl 25% (12/5), damage 1D3 Dodge 25% (12/5)				
Skills Art/Craft (Costumery) 65%, Art/Craft (Dance) 55%, Art/Craft (Music) 80%, Charm 70%, Credit Rating 35%, Cthulhu Mythos 20%, Fast Talk 45%, Language (Japanese) 75%, Language (Chinese) 50%, Listen 45%, Occult 55%, Persuade 60%, Psychology 45%.				
Spells Mind Transfer, Words of Power, Mental Suggestion, Dominate, Create Ghast (functions like Create Zombie). She also has one Sign of the Twin Moons (Sutra of Pale Leaves: Twin Suns Rising (2025), pg. 31).				

Masayoshi Takanaka, age 29, jazz musician extraordinaire

STR 55	CON 60	SIZ 55	DEX 70	INT 75
APP 75	POW 65	EDU 70	SAN 65	HP 11
DB 0	Build 0	Move 8	MP -	
Combat Brawl 25% (12/5), damage 1D3 Dodge 55% (27/11)				
Skills Art/Craft (Dance) 55%, Art/Craft (Music) 90%, Charm 70%, Credit Rating 45%, Language (Japanese) 75%, Language (Chinese) 50%, Listen 75%, Psychology 40%.				

Nakamura Ichiko, age 35, police officer

STR 50	CON 60	SIZ 55	DEX 60	INT 50
APP 50	POW 50	EDU 50	SAN 50	HP 11
DB 0	Build 0	Move 8	MP -	
Combat Brawl 50% (25/10), damage 1D3 New Nambu M60 revolver 60% (30/12), damage 1D10 Dodge 40% (20/8)				
Skills Drive Auto 40%, Intimidate 55%, Law 30%, Listen 50%, Persuade 40%, Psychology 40%, Spot Hidden 60%.				



@baffes

The Girl Who Followed The Fairy Lights

@versrii

I wrote the following song after a particularly delightful DnD session a few years ago, inspired by both the session and the song “Die Wilde Jagd” by the German band Faun. The lyrics I wrote are written to be sung with that melody.

In this campaign I played a half-elven bard by the name of Riel Astridsdottir. She and her party - a tabaxi rouge-warlock who had lost his voice after running afoul of a gang, a dragonborn barbarian who vaguely remembered having started life as an ordinary snake, a halfling healer (celestial warlock) running away to adventure instead of working for her family's rather extortionist hospital business, and a human artificer who had fled his home when it was conquered by orcs - spotted a village child wandering into the woods on All Hallow's Eve. Concerned, they left the harvest celebration to follow her and ended up rescuing her from fairies that had lured her in to perform a sacrifice.

After the party saved the girl and made it back to the village with her, Riel composed this song to be a warning for the villagers to never follow fairy lights. We never did find out which villager had bargained with the Fae for the village's safety, thus prompting the kidnapping, but we did eventually slay the dragon that was terrorizing the countryside and lifted a necrotic curse that haunted an abandoned village nearby.

The Girl Who Followed The Fairy Lights

By Riel Astridsdottir

The harvest moon was bright that night
As the girl looked in the woods
And beheld a most bewitching sight
Of lanterns on the move!

They swayed and danced, entrancing her
And so she followed them
Straight through the fell Feywild's door
Into a fairy glen!

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

And in that sinister fairy glen
They grabbed and bound her tight!
They put her on an altar high!
It was a frightful sight!

They began an ancient ritual
Of human sacrifice
And planned to slit her throat straight through,
For that was safety's price!

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

Fear suffused her limbs and heart,
For help seemed far away!
The fairies moved to do their part,
When she heard a new voice say:

"Halt! Whyever do you want
To kill this little girl?
Why did you try to kidnap her
And bring her to this world?"

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

The fairy answered haughtily
"They promised a human girl

And in return we promised them
To rid your land of peril!"

The other voice did then reply
"Is there not another way?
I do not think it wise to kill
This human girl today!"

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

The fairy screamed "They promised us!"
And then they did attack!
The other voice then called to her
"We've come to get you back!"

The newcomers did fight the fey,
With magic and with might!
They came and freed the girl of bonds
And then were hit with light!

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

The silence of a forest swamp,
A dusky, forest fen,
Greeted the weary wanderers
In their own world once again.

Lost, they wandered a day or two,
Before they found the track,
And with the girl they followed it,
And as promised, brought her back.

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

Run, girl, run home!
To what you've always known!
Remember now to never follow
Where fairy lights do roam!

Creator's Corner



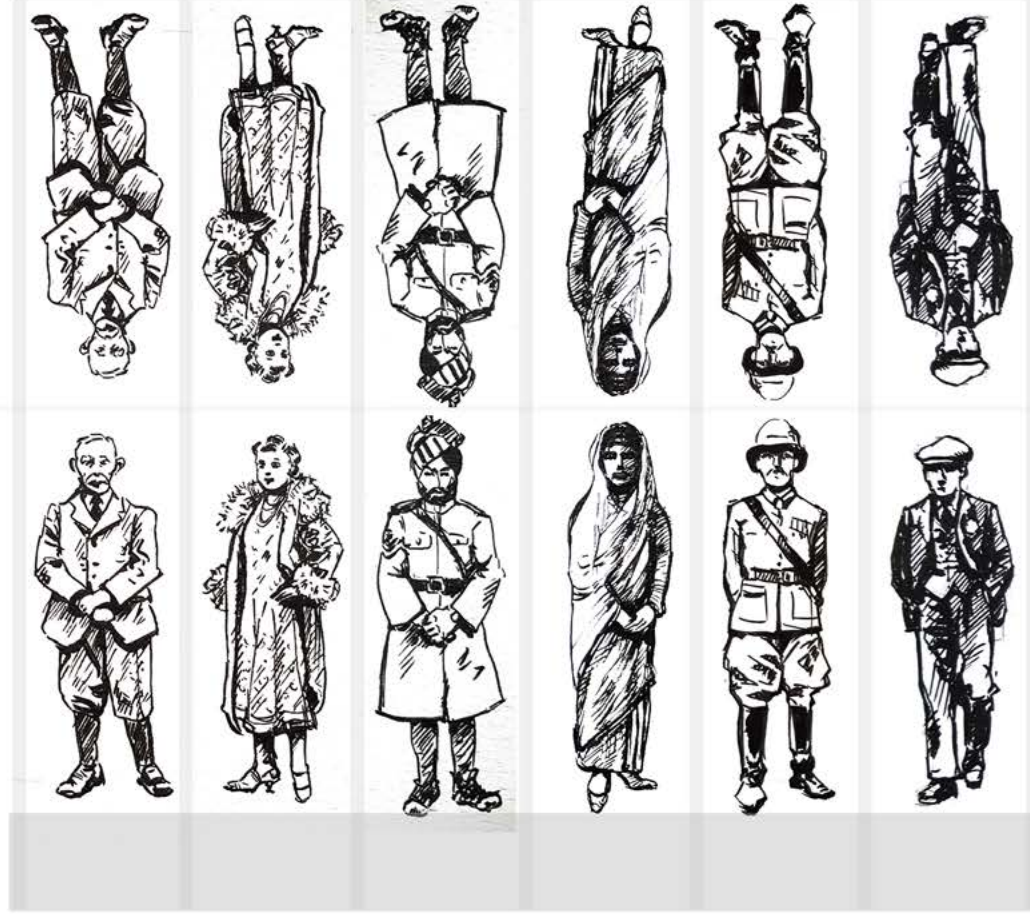
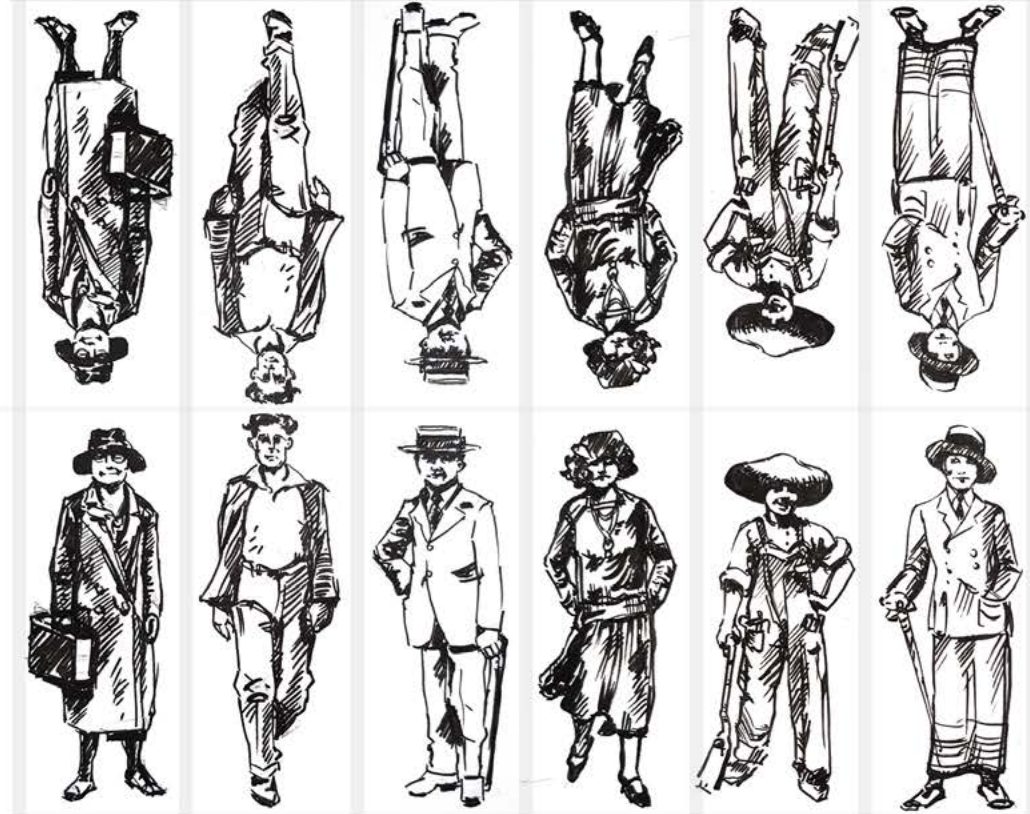
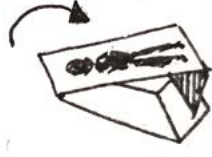
Both images by @vael_kyrie

There seem to be no CoC Classic miniatures on the market that represent normal investigators. Old school minis show investigators in fighting poses with guns that look more like gangsters and make little sense in a classic CoC scenario.

The CoC Gaslight spin-off Hudson & Brandt partially solved this by publishing gaslight era standees. But as

the fashion changed a lot from the 1880s to the 1920s, especially female fashion, they cannot be used for CoC Classic. After searching for several months, I started making a set of standees for CoC Classic, 1920s UK.

Copyright: Twig



Call of Cthulhu Classic (UK) Standees



Berakh's Origin Story

Part 2: Under the Sky

@Gecko97

You can read Part 1 in SwissRPG Zine Issue #1, p.50

The twelve apprentices strode out together, most with their formal robes in their packs and fully armed. For Berakh, this meant that he just had a cloak over his scale mail with his axe at his side – and a full pack on his back. Some of the others also bore axes, or hammers, and a few just a staff or dagger. One had a pair of bodyguards, his family not confident of his ability to protect himself “under the sky”.

They chatted as they walked together, with only one road leading from the gates of their clanhold to the nearest town, Mheranth. From there they would split up, each following their own path. They planned to have a meal at Berevan's Inn, having heard from traders that the ale was almost as good as their clan's.

As they approached the town they could see that it was surrounded by a pallisade of thick trunks. The pallisade looked like it had been built recently, probably in the last year, and there was an open gate which could be barred to block the road. Five guards were posted at the gate, three on the road itself and two in a small hut with an open door. One of them stepped forward to challenge the apprentices. She was comfortably taller than the dwarves, wearing the same hide armour, shortsword, dagger, and halberd as the other guards. “Stand and identify yourselves,” the guard ordered. “We are apprentices from Clan Flaresteel,” one of Berakh's cousins, Lherkan Lightfoot, replied, stepping forward. “We have been sent out to explore and experience the world, while helping the other nations recover from the Dark War.”

“Names, please,” the guard requested.

They gave their names, received a nod from the guard, and were allowed to enter.

Most people on the streets were human; the next largest group was half-elves, then halflings and gnomes, hill dwarves, and high elves. They had seen no other mountain dwarves so far. While there were few signs

of the war on the buildings, several people in sight bore visible scars. One of the half-elves was missing half of her arm, using what remained to balance a keg on her shoulder. The apprentices drew a few stares and curious glances on their way to the inn but nothing more.

There were plenty of tables, of various shapes and sizes, several of which were free. The cousins took a table near one corner, stacking their packs and staves in that corner before sitting. They swiftly ordered drinks and meals, of which Berevan's Inn had a wide variety. Berakh looked around and noticed an interesting pair at a table near the door: the tall, seated half-elf looked like a merchant, with a fully-armoured human swordsman behind her. Several people spoke to her in passing, a couple signing something in her ledger and receiving a coin in return. When the barmaid returned with their drinks, Berakh asked about the pair.

“That's Mejuris Silvertongue. She runs a caravan from here to Woodvale and back in a circuit. Takes about six weeks. She needs new guards each trip, usually as people decide the road's not for them.”

“Thank you,” Berakh replied with a smile, tossing a copper.

“You want to be a guard, and ride with a merchant?” one of his cousins scoffed. “Hardly world-shaking!”

“We're still learning, we're not going to shake the world yet,” Berakh shrugged. “This way I get paid to see a bit of the world, with companions, and then can choose something else.”

A few other apprentices nodded, but none stood with him as Berakh went over to Silvertongue.

Berakh spoke with the merchant and, describing his skills as both a smith and a wizard in addition to being able to fight, managed to talk her into a better rate of pay for the trip. Berakh signed the ledger, after checking the details were correct, and then took his two silver leaves for signing up.

2d10 Sword Seasonings

@toadheart

This random table is intended to give flavor to mundane swords and other bladed weapons players might find around the world. Roll a separate d10 for both columns and combine the result for one blade.

1d10	Condition	1d10	Special Feature
1	Might once have been a good blade, but it's so rusted the edges are worn away.	1	The name of a dead NPC is crudely scratched into the blade.
2	A sword forged by a master, but the blade is broken in half.	2	There is dried blood on the blade.
3	Bad quality steel and badly taken care of, but serviceable.	3	There is a prayer to your God carved into the fuller of the blade.
4	Dented and scratched, but maintained by a skilled hand.	4	The hilt is wrapped in the skin of the last beast you've slain.
5	Sharp and clearly of good quality, but unused.	5	The pommel has the sigil of a noble house you're familiar with.
6	Made from a precious metal and studded with gemstones. Clearly ceremonial and useless in a fight.	6	It's of a make not common where you are, either from far away or long ago.
7	Looks well made, but it's so badly balanced it feels terrible to use.	7	The blade has one long and deep scratch, as if it was hit by a stronger blade, or the claw of a large beast.
8	The blade is of decent quality but bent, as if it was used to hit something much harder.	8	The pommel can be screwed off and reveals a hidden compartment containing a letter to an NPC.
9	A cheap sword of poor quality, but made to look like an expensive ceremonial sword. The gold is brass, the gemstones glass.	9	Scenes from a well-known folk tale are lovingly carved into the handle.
10	Gaudily decorated with gold and decorative etchings by someone with bad taste, but well-balanced and razor-sharp.	10	You have a feeling you've seen this blade somewhere before...

Characters as Arrows

@najahiri

Discussions often revolve around character backgrounds and how to build them in a way that allows players to better tie in with the story being told or with the other characters/players at the table.

Specifically, a frequent pitfall is to build a character without any motivations to go into an adventure or to get involved with a story. A local folk hero who decides to go adventuring through the world might sound interesting on paper, but unless we understand what made him leave his home and his family, we run the risk of lacking a clear character motivation to help us push forward and embody the character themselves when the first decision has to be made.

At the same time, as a Game Master, it might sound simple enough to put things along the path the players are headed down to and hope they will just engage with them. Attempting to do that will result, more often than not, in your players ignoring your hooks and your quests, getting interested instead in the details you did not think of. While this makes for excellent roleplay, it might disrupt any structure you might have had in mind for a plot.

This is often addressed by suggesting the creation of characters with goals and expectations, and while this is a good idea in principle, I find it hard to conceptualize in general. I prefer a different simplification of this idea, which is to think of characters I create for myself or find at tables I run as arrows.

An arrow can be described simply as a line with a direction from point A to point B. It inspires a sense of direction, of motion; it's dynamic, not static. To think of characters as arrows means thinking of them as coming from a fixed original situation, and looking for an experience. A character in this sense will have an

arrow's origin, a small detail in the background, an idea of who they were before getting into the adventure, and they will have an arrow's direction, intended as the goal they start the adventure with. Notice that this will not describe who they are in the moment directly, but that will emerge organically from the two points.

Going back to our local folk hero, we could now think of their arrow's origin as, for example, them being the village's bread maker, and their arrow's direction as finding their lost son in the big city. This already gives a lot of fuel to the player, who will be empowered to take decisions led by the origin or driven by the direction. As such, we have a character who is in motion in the beginning of the session, and not static.

Remember, as a Game Master, it is very hard to deal with static characters, as the motion must be provided by the Game Master themselves. On the other hand, having to lead a moving character (and maybe finding the direction together) is way easier. Think of kicking a static point into motion versus guiding an arrow in a new direction.

Additionally, as a Game Master, you might want to help new players find these two points for their characters. Especially in a one-shot, spending a couple of minutes helping the players find the answers to these two questions can be very helpful to start your session rolling.

So the next time you create a character, try to define their origin and their direction. And if you are a Game Master, see if visualizing this motion helps you run a more dynamic session!

Know Thy Foe

@Vegas2121

“Knowledge is the keenest blade, preparation the greatest armor.”
- Vegas, who got a papercut writing this, 2025

The Unicorn Rests in a Garden (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495–1505

Myths and legends, pop culture and classic literature all tell stories of monsters and those who defeat them. Very rarely, however, are these tales about swinging a sword 15 times until the Gorgon dies, or firebolting the great Cormorant until he falls over. In fiction, monsters are often vanquished by understanding their nature, abilities, and weaknesses, and then using that knowledge to overcome them. Perseus avoids Medusa’s petrifying gaze with his mirrored shield, the queen learns Rumpelstiltskin’s name, Harker and Morris must stake and behead Dracula. Understanding one’s foe is the first and greatest step to overcoming them.

Some of these aspects are reflected in the 5th Edition Dungeons and Dragons rules. For example: Vampires (SRD 5.2.1 pg.335) have several classic weaknesses clearly defined in the text; similarly, silver overcomes a Werewolf’s damage resistance (SRD CC 5.1 pg. 329, although only in 2014 5th edition). More often than not classic monster weaknesses have been relegated to flavor text, or even removed completely (for example, silvered weapons are not mentioned in 2024 5th Edition). This levels the playing field and makes balance easier for a GM to achieve. But what if you don’t want balance? What if you want to support a playstyle that focuses on learning about foes to take advantage of their weaknesses and defend against their abilities?

In the following article I present three homebrew rules I use, listed in order of their ease of implementation:

- 1) a subsystem for players to learn the abilities, traits, and weaknesses of their foes,
- 2) thoughts on making monster weaknesses more than just damage buffs,
- 3) a replacement for damage resistance and/or vulnerabilities to make them more common and less “all or nothing.”

Thanks to LootNinja, Nilceps, and Warby for their discussions & Verloren for proofreading.

Actionable Lore

The monster hunter’s eyes dart around the room while her friend trades blows with the creature. Serpent scales, chicken feathers, that beak, wait...THOSE WEREN’T STATUES! “Get back, ranged only!” she screams. “It’s a blasted Cockatrice, it can petrify you!.”

The fantasy of being a hunter with a grimoire full of your guild’s teachings, or a wizard who studied the planes, or a bard who’s heard all the folk songs and uses this knowledge to save their friends’ lives or slay the foe is a palpable one. While the mechanics of Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition certainly don’t prevent you from integrating such things into your play, there is certainly room for improvement and advice. Inspired by Pathfinder 2e (GM Core pg. 54), I have

found it useful to create a clearer, yet simpler, system to incentivize my players to leverage their characters' knowledge to thwart their foes.

Recall Knowledge

(replaces a portion of the Study Action in 2024 5th Edition)

As an Action or Bonus Action, you can make an Intelligence-based skill check to Recall Knowledge on a creature, provided you are proficient in the appropriate skill- asking a number of questions about it depending on the rarity and power of the creature.

GMs should always use their best judgement to select the skill, referring to the tables for general advice. The DC of the check is variable, equal to 8 + the Monster's Proficiency Bonus (MPB) allowing additional questions with a higher roll. A roll on a specific monster may be attempted only once per character per level. It is at the GM's discretion when a player has seen enough to make the check. A check may be made after hearing enough witness testimony, seeing tracks/ evidence, or perhaps only when encountered face-to-face. GMs may choose to increase the DC even further for particularly rare monsters.

While some information on Humanoid creatures may be gleaned, the sheer diversity within even a single humanoid ancestry means that only basic information on tactics or shared techniques from specific cultures can be guessed at (example: The Theros Phalanx fight with pike and shield defending one another, when separated they lose this ability).

Skill	Creature Type
Arcana	Aberrations, Constructs, Dragons, Elementals, Monstrosities, Oozes
History	Giants, Humanoids, Local Legends
Nature	Beasts, Dragons, Elementals, Fey, Monstrosities, Oozes, Plants
Religion	Celestials, Fiends, Undead

Knowledge Recalled	DC
Basic Lore & 1 question (other than Weakness)	8 + Monster's Proficiency Bonus (MPB)
2 total questions	(8 + MPB) + 3
3 total questions	(8 + MPB) + 6
4 total questions	(8 + MPB) + 9
5 total questions	(8 + MPB) + 12

Types of questions (inspired from the Find the Path podcast (<https://find-path.com/>)) you can ask the GM include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Attacks
- ◆ Qualities
- ◆ Senses, Abilities, Spellcasting*, etc.

**Although which specific spells it has may be an additional question*

- ◆ Defenses
- ◆ Damage Resistance/Reduction, Immunities*

**Although what overcomes a special defense may be an additional question*

- ◆ Weaknesses
- ◆ Specific Vulnerabilities or Weaknesses a creature may have, if none exist perhaps GMs can share their weakest saving throw

Examples: Cauterize Hydra's head stump, attack an Ankheg from below, etc.

- ◆ Tactics & Modus Operandi
- ◆ Uses traps, poison, hit and run, ambush, collect treasure, impersonate, etc.

Ruminations on Weaknesses

The horrid creature grunts as its arm falls wriggling. Her mind races as the monster hunter watches a new limb begin to emerge from the stump. Now the scribbling in the margin of her grimoire finally makes sense, the rhyme- "Beneath the bridge lay a Troll, reach to your pocket pay the toll. If to the blade you wish to turn, then find a torch and make it burn."

First I'd like to highly recommend the excellent supplements which helped inspire me when making my own weaknesses. The three Monster Weaknesses books found on DMsGuild were instrumental in getting me thinking about this, and I highly recommend checking them out for inspiration. Daniel Kahn and his team did a stellar job giving 100s of examples of varied weaknesses and they are fantastic starting points for your own creations.

At its core, a monster's weakness emerges from the creature's place in the story and references its biology, mythos, history, and physicality. A creature with excellent hearing may be susceptible to a deafeningly loud sound, a prideful creature may be unable to deny a challenge, a creature of flames may see its abilities reduced if it is cooled. Folklore and pop culture are full of such weaknesses. The hard part is making a weakness that both fits the creature and doesn't instantly end the encounter if it is used.

The Troll (SRD 5.2.1 pg.333) has the most well known weakness in 5th edition: only with fire or acid can you prevent its health regeneration and immortality. The 2014 Anhkeg (SRD CC 5.1 pg. 264) is a great example of a “gain an advantage” weakness. Simple, to the point, actionable. If prone (imagine flipped on its back) its AC is reduced by 2, because its hard carapace is now beneath it, rather than above it.

Weaknesses emerge from the narrative and the creature’s place in it. The weakness may be a way to help overcome a foe or may be a way to bring it to the negotiating table. Weaknesses often remove a creature’s advantages or help gain an advantage against it. Knowing a creature’s weaknesses can help you to distract it (challenging a sphinx to a riddle or throwing meat to a Ghoul), to remove/reduce their ability (casting Slow on the gears of a Clockwork Golem or grounding a Lightning Elemental), or to navigate dealings with them (questioning a Planar who cannot tell lies, or persuading a Haregon who can’t deny a dare). Most monsters in your campaign will have no weakness, especially if they are mooks or commonly fought foes. However low-to-mid tier bosses or larger set piece encounters (monster hunts) are excellent places for weaknesses and allow higher CR challenges to be thrown at the party. Ultimately this is much less a full system as it is a way of adding actionable flavor to your world and creatures.

Beyond Resistance & Vulnerabilities

She drops her bow and draws a dull iron knife, steeling herself as the red hatted creature laughs, pulling an arrow from its torso. Gripping the hilt, she recalls her mentor’s words when he first handed the blade to her: “Faerie you say? Hard place to work. Fey are tricky, chaotic. Best always have something pure in its mundanity, from our earth, untouched by forge.”

The current system of damage immunities, resistances, and vulnerabilities used in D&D 5th edition is a simple system intended to encourage players to shake up their plans mid-fight and to tailor their decisions to the creatures encountered. However, in practice the black and white nature of a halving of damage (Resistance) or a doubling of damage (Vulnerability) has such high magnitudes that it basically translates to a) if resistant don’t use that damage type at all and b) if vulnerable focus everything on this to immediately end the fight. Wizards of the Coast seems to agree, which is why <5% of the 2024 Monsters have a vulnerability.

Previous editions of DnD (as well as Pathfinder) have a more variable system of damage reduction and weaknesses which are flat and apply on each hit. For example: a creature with Damage Reduction (DR) - Fire 5 subtracts 5 each time it takes fire damage, and vice versa for Damage Weakness (DW)- Fire 5 (taking an additional 5 damage instead). This incremental system means that it can be applied more liberally. Because you can tailor the exact number for the foe, you can use lower values to make combats a bit more puzzle-like, allowing interested players to find ways to circumvent or take advantage of these qualities. This supports PCs learning about foes, without making the entire combat about it.

This system will not work as-is in 5th edition, because most martial classes only marginally increase their damage dealt per strike as they level up; rather they scale by increasing their number of attacks. Thus, a per hit reduction would disproportionately disadvantage a Monk vs a Rogue. However, by simply keeping track of damage dealt per turn, DR can still work as intended. For example: a Flame Cultist with DR- Fire 10; DW- Cold 5 now means that on each player’s turn they ignore the first 10 fire damage they take and if they take at least 1 cold damage they take an additional 5 total cold damage (irrespective of the number of hits).

DR and DW can be to a single damage type (Fire or Bludgeoning), a general damage type (Magical), or a specific weapon type (damage from a Silvered Weapon). One can get even spicier and use damage types or weapon material types to add depth to individual classes, or the world as a whole. Perhaps Pit Fiends ignore all damage that isn’t blessed by a Cleric or Paladin, while many fey are damaged more by Cold Iron weapons.

The Reduction and Weaknesses table below (inspired heavily by Pathfinder GM Core pg. 119) lists my current range estimates for DR and DW for each CR tier. DW should be quite specific and should often use the Maximum value. DR values can fall anywhere along the range, with general reductions using closer to the Minimum and specific reductions the Maximum. Near and Full Immunity can slot into this system by either exceeding the Maximum values for DR or simply giving something made of an unusual substance a complete Immunity. For example, Fire Elementals are simply immune to Fire damage.

If you give a creature a DR or a DW you may want to alter their HP to prevent DR/DW from being the sole focus of the fight. If it had no prior resistance, consider decreasing its HP by 1-2x DR to prevent a slog. However, if a creature had resistance before, you could increase its HP from 1-3x its DR depending on the tier and rarity of the bypass. For example, the terrifying Chain Devil (SRD 5.2.1 pg.273) whose blanket resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing is changed to DR- Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing 12 but bypassed by Silver and blessed weapons, may have its HP increased by 20~40 depending on how available Silver is in your world and how martial heavy your party is. Furthermore, for a creature with no prior Vulnerability which is given an easy to utilize DW (like Fire), you may want to increase its HP 2-4x its DW value.

Reduction and Weaknesses

These estimates are still being tested and are likely very wrong! Also, I haven't yet created a conversion for any Feats/Abilities which interact with 5e Resistances. I urge anyone who tries this to experiment with different DR and DW values and to change the creature's HP to account for how the new abilities and weaknesses affect its difficulty.

Ultimately the objective of these rules is to reward planning, character knowledge, and to make creatures feel different from one another, and not to create tedious combat slogs. As always, talk to your fellow players/GMs.

CR	Minimum	Maximum
0-1/2	0	3
1-2	2	4
3-4	5	6
5-6	9	12
7-8	10	14
9-10	12	15
11-12	13	17
13-14	14	18
15-16	15	19
17-18	16	21
19-20	17	22
21+	19	30

Using Tarot Cards for Call of Cthulhu:

Classic and Gaslight period (ca. 1860 – 1945)

@Twig



A. Tarot Original 1909, Waite Smith, Lo Scarabeo
B. Lenormand Oracle Cards, Grand Tableau, Lo Scarabeo
C. Gustave Doré Tarot, Lo Scarabeo
D. Arthur Rackham Tarot, Lo Scarabeo
E. Murder of Crows Tarot, Corrado Roi, Lo Scarabeo
F. Joker Tarot, Corrado Roi, Lo Scarabeo
copyright: Twig

WHY

Historically, Tarot cards and other divination systems were part of the occult and magic practices of the 1860-1945 period. Some decks that are still available today were developed by occult societies like the Order of the Golden Dawn back then.

While a few rpg systems use Tarot or other cards to replace dice mechanics, this article is not describing such a mechanic. Instead, it demonstrates which and how Tarot decks can be integrated into existing CoC gameplay to spice things up, for character creation, storytelling and as an artifact or hand out.

WHAT

Tarot decks consist of 78 cards that are separated into two categories:

Major Arcana: 22 Archetype cards like The High Priestess, The Death, The Hanged Man.

Minor Arcana: 56 „Mundane“ cards with categories like normal playing card decks (Ace, 2 – 10, Court cards: Page, Knight, Queen, King, in 4 colors)

IMPORTANT: For use in rpg, you should get a Tarot deck that has a fully illustrated Minor Arcana. Avoid decks with „pips“, i.e. where the Minor Arcana looks like normal playing cards.

While the Major Arcana symbolizes „big picture“ concepts or roles, the Minor Arcana carries a lot of storytelling on each card and can be easily adapted for backstory, minor events and so on. The Major Arcana and court cards can also be used to characterize an NPC or PC.

The Little Books: Don't lose the small interpretation book that comes with each deck! This is the secret sauce for game play. Draw a card, and use the image and accompanying text from the little book for storytelling.

WHICH - A Review

There are probably hundreds of Tarot decks available today, including those that were created specifically for rpg or computer games, like the D&D Tarot deck. For this article, I have reviewed about 40 Tarot decks to find those that are appropriate for the 1860s-1945 time period and atmosphere, focusing on decks that are easily available, easy to use and affordable.

1. Authentic decks: Designed 1860 – 1945, compatible with rpg game mechanics

A. The Real Deal: Tarot Original 1909, Waite Smith, Lo Scarabeo

The Waite Smith (aka Rider Waite) Tarot was drawn by Pamela Colman Smith based on the concepts of A. E. Waite when both were members of the occult Order of the Golden Dawn. While published first in 1909, the reviewed version is a newer variant from ca. 1935, but captures the original colors and layout best for a reasonable price. The Rider/Waite/Smith deck was the first fully illustrated Tarot deck.

B. The most authentic deck: Lenormand Oracle Cards, Grand Tableau, Lo Scarabeo

For the time before 1910, Oracle card decks like the Lenormand were the main system for divination. They usually contain 36 cards that correspond to normal playing cards, and carry symbolic illustrations like The Key, The Fish, The Mountain and so on. Due to the reduced images and more specific meanings, they are harder to use in rpg, but might be interesting to integrate as an artifact.

2. Time appropriate decks: Period illustrations, compatible with rpg game mechanics

C. The Victorian Master: Gustave Doré Tarot, Lo Scarabeo

Victorian illustrations, fantastic and macabre, period appropriate backsides, good booklet, rich storytelling. Good deck for CoC Gaslight, but usable up until 1945.

D. The Whimsical: Arthur Rackham Tarot, Lo Scarabeo

Similar type of deck as C., slightly later illustration style, appropriate for up to 1920s and 1930s, more fantastic and fairy tale atmosphere, also for Vaesen and similar systems.

3. Modern decks: Compatible with rpg mechanic and atmosphere, no anachronistic illustrations

While there are numerous modern Lovecraft Tarot decks, it was not easy to fulfill the listed criteria. In the end, two horror decks by comic artist Corrado Roi provided the most seamless integration.

E. The Grimdark Allrounder: Murder of Crows Tarot, Corrado Roi, Lo Scarabeo

The black and white illustrations have a timeless feel and the craziest backsides I have seen so far. Both the visuals and booklet texts are grim dark, so this deck can be used for all kinds of hard horror. The crow theme and ancient elements evoke E. A. Poe's fantastic historicity, making this is the most versatile horror deck, from Roman period to modern day.

F. The Modern Macabre: Joker Tarot, Corrado Roi, Lo Scarabeo

While similar to E., this deck is slightly less dark and more macabre. The illustrations feel more modern and contain many elements that came into fashion in the 1910s/1920s like early motorbikes, harlequins, or Ferris wheels.

HOW

Due to their versatility, a single Tarot card can represent an action, an event, a motive, a goal, a character, a trait, an outcome, a fear or hope, and so on. Tarot decks can be used at different times during CoC game play, for example:

During character creation or NPC/enemy design, for backstory.

As an artifact that belongs to an NPC or PC, and that can be consulted from time to time.

As a generator for minor events or NPC interactions, similar to dice tables. As they are slower and less abstract than dice, Tarot cards should be used only in addition to dice.

In the next article, I will demonstrate the use of Tarot cards during fast character creation.

5-minute character creation for CoC one shots with Tarot cards

@Twig

In the following example for 5-min. character creation, using only a dice table and image would have generated a relatively basic older female author without much complexity. For a deeper background, the players are usually expected to write 3 sentences about their character's backstory. But due to time constraints, they are often unable to come up with anything but clichés. Drawing Tarot cards instead supports them by immediately providing them with impulses for backstory that are quite rich and evocative.

Method:

1. Roll basic character information with a dice table-based character creation system, as used in the Liminal Horror system (in the example adapted to a British environment).
Dice tables for character creation, based on Liminal Horror system
Copyright: Twig
2. Draw a photo from a stack of ca. 30 character portraits, to determine age, gender, cultural background and class. Here I used the "People of the '20s 100 VTT Tokens" by Chaosium.
3. Draw 3 Tarot cards for:
Past
Present
Underlying motivation or explanation

Example:

Creation time: 5 min

1. Roll dice and look results up in tables
Profession: Author (could be novels or non-fiction)
Trait: Professional
Look: Bland
Physical: Small
Belief: "nonsense!"

Flaw: Violent

Virtue: Tolerant

2. Draw portrait from bag
An older lady in conventional Victorian dress
3. Draw 3 Tarot cards
 1. Past: 10 of Cups
Image: Rich children playing
Text: Enchanted life
= Possibly spoiled, upper class?
 2. Present: 3 of Pentacles
Image: Reaching for the stars
Text: Success, fame
= Bestselling author?
 3. Underlying motive or explanation: 2 of Pentacles
Image: Young dancer
Text: (Too?) Easy going, fraud
= Does the author steal her content, or maybe has a younger ghost writer that she exploits?

Full character background:

A (former?) upper-class, spoiled person who takes everything for granted and gets violent when her wishes are not met, narcissist. Strong willed and realistic, commits fraud to reach her goals. Tolerant, maybe because she understands living by your own rules? Is making a lot of money, but does not show it (bland dress, small stature).

Obviously, this is just one possible interpretation of the cards. For example, the children in the first card could point to a large family, the astronomers in the second card could stand for science, the dancer could be a vulnerable relative that the author wants to protect, and so on. By interpreting the cards to "read" the backstory, the players make the characters their own.

Character Creation

D 20			D 10			
ROLE			TRAIT			
			LOOK			
			PHYSICAL			
1	Engineer	1 tool, one technical book	1	nervous	poor	small
2	Villager	shopping bag, 1 tool	2	cold	posh	big
3	Doctor	2 pieces of medical supply	3	dishonest	practical	rounded
4	Widow(er)	Bag, 1 object of sentimental value	4	professional	cheap	thin
5	Rich Kid	1 expensive object	5	naive	colorful	impressive
6	Clerk	notebook, pencil,	6	wise	bland	normal
7	Priest / Nun	2 religious objects	7	cheerful	old fashioned	strong
8	Archaeologist	1 book, 1 artefact	8	angry	strange	soft
9	Occultist	1 tarot cards, 1 pendulum	9	chill	expensive	pale
10	Photographer	1 bottle of chemicals, small camera	10	anxious	fashionable	healthy
11	Artist	2 tools or chemicals		BELIEF	FLAW	VIRTUE
12	Gardener	2 tools	1	non believer	fraud	honest
13	Journalist	small camera, adress book	2	true believer	theft	honorable
14	Author	notebook, pencil	3	adaptable	psychological	cautious
15	Hobbyist	2 books, 1 tool	4	superstitious	alcohol	humble
16	Teacher	3 books	5	neutral	lying	courageous
17	Ex-Soldier	1 small weapon	6	„nonsense“	affair(s)	merciful
18	Student	2 books	7	traumatised	phobia(s)	desciplined
19	Servant	1 tool, 1 bag	8	scientific	drugs	calm
20	Criminal	2 tools for crime	9	a bit crazy	violent	humorous
			10	curious	gambling	tolerant

3 D6
ABILITIES

STR Strength, physicality, endurance
DEX Dexterity, precision, creativity
CONT Control, understanding, willpower

1 D6	1 D4	1 D10
HIT PROT.	ATTACK	ATTACK
HP	Weaponless	Large weapon
	1 D6	1 D?
	ATTACK	ATTACK
	Normal weapon	Special weapon



Tabelle 1

Character Creation

D 20	ROLE	D 10	TRAIT	D10	LOOK	D10	PHYSICAL
1	Engineer	1 tool, one technical book	1	nervous	poor	small	
2	Villager	shopping bag, 1 tool	2	cold	posh	big	
3	Doctor	2 pieces of medical supply	3	dishonest	practical	rounded	
4	Widow(er)	Bag, 1 object of sentimental value	4	professional	cheap	thin	
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6	Clerk	notebook, pencil,	6	wise	bland	normal	
7	Priest / Nun	2 religious objects	7	cheerful	old fashioned	strong	
8	Archaeologist	1 book, 1 artefact	8	angry	strange	soft	
9	Occultist	1 tarot cards, 1 pendulum	9	chill	expensive	pale	
10	Photographer	1 bottle of chemicals, small camera	10	anxious	fashionable	healthy	
11	Artist	2 tools or chemicals		BELIEF	FLAW	VIRTUE	
12	Gardener	2 tools	1	non believer	fraud	honest	
13	Journalist	small camera, adress book	2	true believer	theft	honorable	
14	Author	notebook, pencil	3	adaptable	psychological	cautious	
15	Hobbyist	2 books, 1 tool	4	superstitious	alcohol	humble	
16	Teacher	3 books	5	neutral	lying	courageous	
17	Ex-Soldier	1 small weapon	6	„nonsense“	affair(s)	merciful	
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19	Servant	1 tool, 1 bag	8	scientific	drugs	calm	
20	Criminal	2 tools for crime	9	a bit crazy	violent	humorous	
			10	curious	gambling	tolerant	

3 D6	1 D6	1 D4	1 D10
ABILITIES	HIT PROT.	ATTACK	ATTACK
STR Strength, physicality, endurance	HP	Weaponless	Large weapon
DEX Dexterity, precision, creativity		1 D6	1 D?
CONT Control, understanding, willpower		ATTACK	ATTACK
		Normal weapon	Special weapon




Seite 1

Design Dungeons Using Molecules

@nilceps

Do you get a headache whenever you have to come up with a BIG dungeon? Sprawling labyrinths with branching paths, looping corridors, and multiple levels? Yeah, those can take quite a while to lay out. That's why I am sharing a surprisingly effective and fun method: using chemical skeletal structures as your blueprint!

Since we're talking headaches, let's use the molecule Sumatriptan, a real-world migraine medication, as our dungeon inspiration. Its skeletal formula already looks like a fantastic dungeon layout.

In case the last time you saw a chemical formula was forever ago here's a refresher:

Each letter in the structure represents an atom which matches the Periodic Table of Elements.

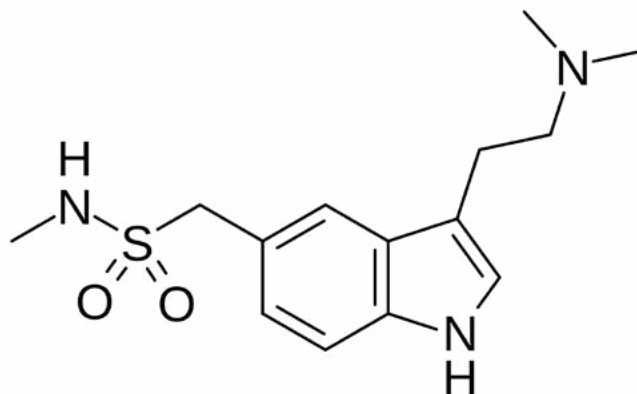
Hydrogen atoms and their bonds are not shown unless it is important to show it.

Carbon atoms are typically not displayed as letters and are simply junctions or ends of a line segment.

Parallel lines indicate double bonds, these could be paths with special properties.

Dashed/Wedged Bonds = Verticality: Dashed lines (---) go away from the viewer (downward slopes, stairs down), solid wedges (▴) come toward the viewer (upward slopes, stairs up).

Now let's turn this diagram into a dungeon.



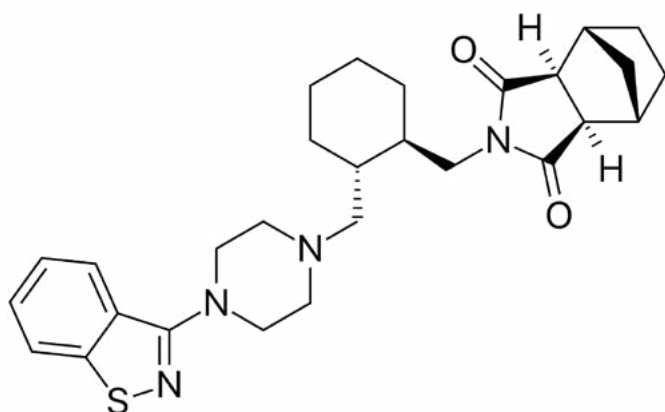
We see two O's and three N's (two with attached H's). Let's make the O's potential portals to other planes or distant kingdoms. The N with no H becomes our main entrance. The two N's with H atoms? Perfect hidden entrances that could circumvent parts of the dungeon or give the villains a chance to escape!

Players start at the main entrance (N), facing three doors. Two lead to dead ends (or perhaps very dangerous mini-encounters!), while the third path leads through two chambers before reaching the central hexagons. Here, they'll discover looping paths offering potential shortcuts – maybe even finding one of those hidden entrances (NH), allowing them to leave quicker.

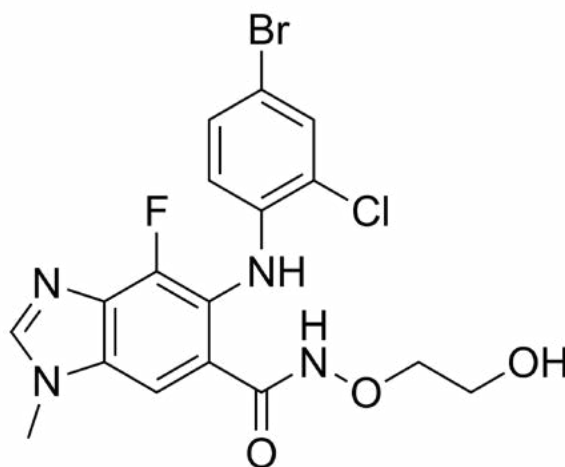
Eventually, the path leads to the Sulfur (S) atom – the Sanctum of Migranix, lair of a cult leader devoted to an Elder Brain! Our heroes defeat the boss and have conquered this dungeon.

Ok I hear you, you'll tell me that this one was not big or complicated enough so I'll throw in a few more freebies you can look at and hopefully get inspired by.

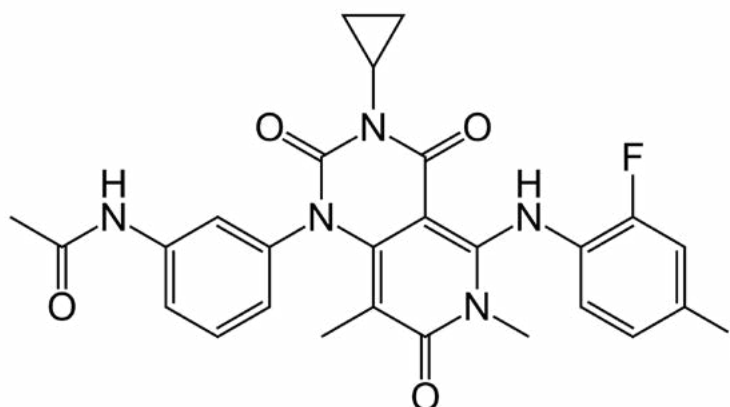
Presenting the following dungeons:



The Citadel of Healing Light
Lurasidone (An antipsychotic drug)



Vault of the Rampant Bloom
Selumetinib (A Cancer Drug)



The Metastatic Gauntlet
Trametinib (A Cancer Drug)

Finding those skeletal formulas can be difficult if you aren't a chemist so I'll leave you with another tip. Regular search engines can work but PubChem has a few features that make it stand out. Its structure drawing tool lets you sketch a molecule and instantly find real compounds. In PubChem you can also search for pharmaceuticals, then sort results by ascending complexity to discover wonderfully intricate yet manageable dungeon inspirations.

Remember: Use the molecule as a template, but remember that it is not a rigid mapping rule. See a spot perfect for a Hidden Room? Add it! Does a section feel too convoluted? Delete a few connections! Let the molecule's shape guide your imagination but don't be constrained by it. Find a structure that speaks to you and start building. Your players will never know the dungeon started as a molecule, and you'll have created it completely headache-free!

Nibiru – a Science Fiction RPG about discovering yourself

@MelOne

Imagine a gigantic space station that is automatized so far that it is self-sustaining. It collects resources automatically from the system around it. And on board; a human society that has grown inside of the station for at least thousands of years, b. Brought there by an entity called The Shepherd. The fact that they live on a space station is to a certain degree observable and is also part of the myths of the people on board.

Your world is called Nibiru, and your characters are....different. You are playing Vagabounds - a special kind of people who have lost their Memory and have features or powers that divide them from the rest of society. Some are AIs living inside a human body..... others have such a strong bond to nature that the beast of nature can talk to them..... and so on. Theyse have special powers gained by their nature - and abilities that they must discover over their travels. The cComes with characters that will have to create memories to contain skills and have this special power that is coming from their nature.

The World

Nibiru, the skyless world, is a machine of nigh-inconceivable complexity fueled by a seemingly endless stream of power flowing from its center towards millions of terminations, built to last for millennia and to preserve the precious life found therein. Although its design remains a mystery, the most important components of what make Nibiru are, conceptually, easy to observe and comprehend. The station is a disc-shaped structure, roughly measuring 3600 kilometres in diameter. Its rotation generates artificial gravity in such a way that approximately 20% of its total surface can be inhabited. Human societies have traversed much of

Nibiru for thousands of cycles, and yet, they still have the grand majority of it to discover. At the center of Nibiru lies the Core, the giver of all light. The Core hides all manner of strange mechanisms designed to bring the world to life. The nature of the Core is shrouded in mystery, and it has been regarded as a deity and a living thing by many belief systems across the station. A ring of colossal facilities surrounds it, thundering pillars that rise as far as the eye can see, and labyrinthine complexes—all bursting with raw power. These are the locales of the Ring; the bulk of the station's power-generating machines, as well as the birth-point of Nibiru's power lines.

The first inhabited area of the skyless world is that of the Core Sectors, the first of the Umbras (also referred to as "Antumbra"). Today, the cradle of civilization is today a massive sprawl of overgrown city-states, where 95% of Nibiru's people live. With over 60 populated vaults (the areas in the station that allows life and room for cities), and spanning great expanses and long hallways, the main turning points of human history happen within the Core Sectors. Past the Core Sectors, the Outer Reaches (often referred to as "The Reaches" or "Penumbra") are located. It is the largest populated sector of the station, sparsely dotted by small settlements and colonies, where hard-working industrialists and fortune seekers live.

The Umbra, which lies beyond, is a place of non-life where no one dares venture forth. The world itself crushes anyone who treads there, choking the life out and breaking the bodies of those stupid enough to brave the dark.

Technically speaking the viable zone gets limited to the part further away from the center by the artificial gravity – which is life threatening in the Umbra region.

The Characters

Awakening somewhere in the station, the Vagabonds awaken without any memory of their previous life. Mechanics-wise, Nibiru is a skill system. Freshly awakened characters don't know their skills, but they have Memory Points available. Each time they have to make a roll, they have the option to automatically succeed in it and spend Memory Points. With that, they can create a skill based on the task they had to roll on. What exactly that skill is named and for what kind of situations it can be used is discussed between GM and players. The character remembers a story about how they have already used this skill previously – and writes that story, the skill and a bonus on their character sheet. Alternatively, the player may also decide to automatically fail the roll. This will also give them a skill, a story – and a penalty to it, but it will also give the character new memory points.

Besides the memories and skills: You are coming from a so-called Habitat. This thing is the Nibiru version of a class. The Habitats are giving you special abilities. The following Habitats are available in the base book:

The Machine

You are the inheritor of an artificial sentience, – the final resting place of a globetrotting virus. The Machine is the domain of the Rogue Affliction, which is a virus-like phenomena that affects AIs throughout Nibiru. It gives machines consciousness and gives them human-like behaviour. And now this virus has awakened inside of a human body. A special ability of this virus is that you can initiate communication with other AIs, machines, robots etc.

The Wild

You are regarded as a human, ... you may even think of yourself as a human yet, but deep inside you, there's something that betrays that thought. A primal beacon that resonates with your past, a time in which you crawled. A time in which you swam, glided, slithered across the vastness of Nibiru. The Wild has a connection to the nature side of Nibiru – and can as a special feature connect to the beast of nature through a synapse. Solving problems based on nature's laws – or making contact with other wilds out there.

The Dreadlands

Somewhere far from the Core, enclosed in a cold, coffin-like vault lies a library containing the most heart-

wrenching tales a mind could ever conceive. These tales of human suffering, of oppression, apathy, heart-break and betrayal might be just that, tales, when on their own. But distilled in the mind of an unborn, left to grow as the seed of a fake life, they become as real as they can get. Unfortunately, these tales are yours, and they have you as their protagonist. The nightmares and stories have taken a shape, nested in your insides, forcing you to relive the most lonely, cold and despair-filled moments of this twisted tale of the past. But: this also leaves you with a lot of positivity for the future. It couldn't get any worse than the past. Also you can use the nightmares inside you as a special ability to materialize into reality – and try to force it to follow the commands you are giving the nightmares.

The Dreamlands

You are connected to the dreams out there. You have lived uncountable lives through the eyes of others. To be reborn into an unknown body; its memories, a collage of strange, convoluted moments. You have the experience of a lot of other lives – but a lot is buried with your amnesia. But as a special ability you may discover a lot of links to people around you and use them for your advantage.

BrightTown

One needs not make a huge effort to imagine what it would be like to be from BrightTown. Remove yourself from your world, and place yourself in Nibiru. Simple, right? However, out of all Vagabonds, BrightTowners face one of the roughest challenges. Theirs is a fall from grace — from everything they knew and loved, and all they considered real — into a dark world. But it also gives you an item from your past, with which you can create memories for free until the item is powered off. But you can find more items from BrightTown in Nibiru.

Besides the memory and the habitat your character also contains a value for representing mental health and physical health. In general the system around health is built quite deadly. The whole setup is made for exploration of the station and yourself, and less epic battles in space.

Another element you track on your character sheet is the influence of gravity on your character. If you travel through the station and travel long enough that gravity is significantly changing, it will have a positive or negative effect on you. Positive, if you travel from a region with heavy gravitation to a region with a lower gravity, and the other way around.

For tracking the health of your character, you have two different elements. A tracker named “Body” and another named “Mind”. If physical attacks are hitting you, your Body changes from OK to Beaten, then to Wounded if hit again. Dipping below Wounded means only one thing: You are dead. After sustaining mortal damage, falling prey to a deadly illness, etc., your character will inevitably shuffle off their mortal coil.

The Mind will be tracked similarly: if you are confronted with violence, helplessness or the unknown, which may drive your mind to go from OK to Stressed and then to Shaken. If you get over that limit, you will get symptoms your character has to live with. If you get over that limit again, you may earn another symptom or your current symptom may get a new intense level – which may go up to 3 (an initial symptom is at intensity 1). Having one symptom of intensity 3 or any combination summing up to 3, the character will be gone: irrevocably broken, mentally and emotionally.

The Society

The main difference between people on the station are between the Arku (the term used for the natives of the Core Sectors) and the Eněšu (the inhabitants of Penumbra, the Outer Reaches). Reigned from Ashur, the Core sees the station as a provider. Their vaults, in which the cities are built in, are fully functional, their life support and food supply are plentiful. The lower gravity in the core sectors also has several physiological implications – taller people with delicate bones and slower heart rates. This also results in a lower calorie intake which is helping to survive in the station.

On the other side in Penumbra, life is usually harder. Not all the vaults are providing all means for living comfortably. While it is much larger than the areas comprising the Core Sectors, the impersonal hollow nature of Penumbra seemed not to care for human life. Here you need to fight for survival. This means survival games can be set in Penumbra.

Another story driver can be the political situation. The Core has colonized the Outer Reaches – and still reigns over it. But the people of Penumbra have lived for generations outside of the Core. The fact that they are still ruled by careless, detached governments hundreds of kilometers away has (rightly so) made them rebellious.

The Wildlife

While Earth had its primordial soup, the birth of Nibiru’s fauna was nourished by the very lifeblood of the station: electricity. Almost all lifeforms in Nibiru are bioelectric in nature: their bodies work like a complex circuit—seizing electric power, preserving it and using it to keep the spark of life from fading. The resulting ecosystem, divided in four taxonomic orders, has stood the test of time as flickers come and go. For all of Nibiru’s cold, artificial trappings, the life it holds within it is as unique as it gets. Life, that is, at the end of the day, the one reason humanity need not feel alone under the ceilings of Nibiru.

The wildlife gives the option to integrate weird bioelectric life forms into your adventures, – either as simple background, followers or enemies. Some of the creatures are made to also hunt humans.

Summary

The world and the system is quite unique. One of my groups have played it over roughly 5 to 7 sessions and the characters grew nicely with memories over the time. With the different parts of the station you can go with adventures in the civilized Core, or working with Penumbra to get a feeling from the Frontier of the Wild West. It allows the players to play out political plotlines, survival lines or even horror setups, b. But it needs players with already a bit of RPG experience, who are also able to write creative memories to bring their character forward. Also the artwork of the book is well done, and fun to work with. There is also an expansion book named Xanadu available.

Coat of Arms for Ashur

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