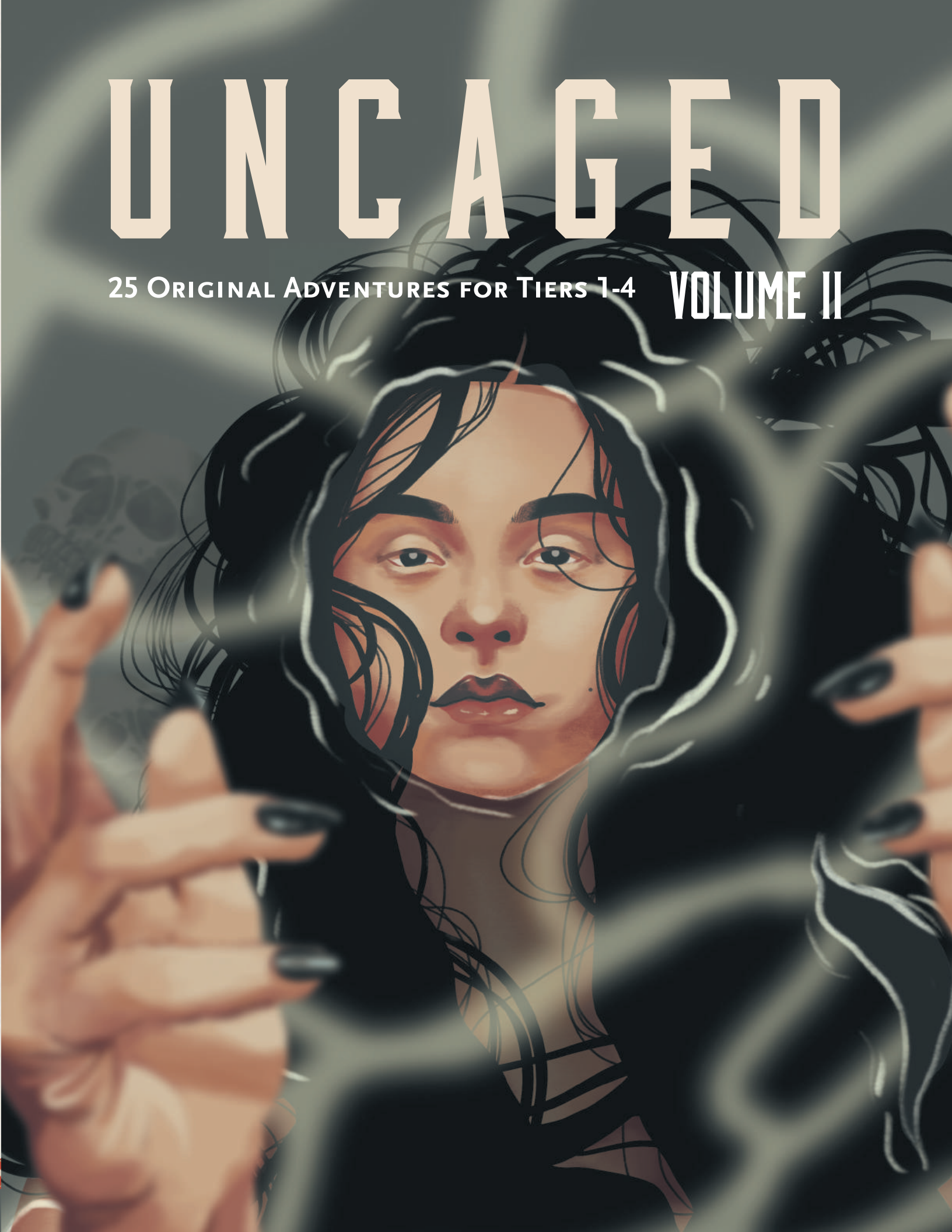

UNCAGED
VOLUME II
GUILD

UNCAGED

25 Original Adventures for Tiers 1-4

VOLUME II



CREDITS

Narrative Designers: Ally Sulentic, Amy and Tim Dziewit, Ashley Warren, Arras Wiedorn, Benjamin L. Eastman, Blinne Emersyn, Chai Power, Christine Prevas, CJ Oliver, Colleen A Taylor, David G. Harris, David Markiwsky, Dimitri Lambermont, Eleanor Hingley, Insha Fitzpatrick, Jazz Eisinger, Jess Waters, Kelly Mangerino, Leon Barillaro, Maggie Harbison, Margaret Mae, Matt Dunn, Miranda Mels, Monica Evans, Paige Ford, Remko van der Heul, Samantha Lavender, Tera Hooper, Tim Christopher, Xan Larson
Cover Art: Samantha Darcy
Art Direction and Interior Layout: Ashley Warren and Samantha Darcy
Original Interior Art: Kayla Cline, David Markiwsky, Gwendy Bee, Margaret Salter, Samantha Darcy, Wouter Florusse, Xan Larson, Jen Vaughn
Cartography: William Abeel, Leon Barillaro, Tim Christopher, Jazz Eisinger, Monica Evans, Dyson Logos, Margaret Mae, Kelly Mangerino, Christine Prevas
Editors: Dr. A. Kelly Lane, Ashley Warren, Bianca Bickford, Brent Jans, Catherine Evans, Christopher Walz, Echo Roanoke, Hadeel Al-Massari, Hannah Rose, Jamie O'Duibhir, Jeff Ellis, Jessica Washburn, Jessica Ross, Joe Nehmer, Liz Gist, Lynne Meyer, Michael Haney, Stephanie Lee, TK Johnson

PRODUCER'S NOTE

At the time of writing this, the first volume of this series has been out for two months. The response has been absolutely incredible, and we can't thank you enough for your support and love for the project.

I'm asked frequently if there are "themes" to the volumes. The theme is the same for each one: subverting the tropes that surround these creatures. There tend to be "accidental" themes; our first volume had several nods toward Greek mythos, and this volume is heavily inspired by Slavic folklore. That said, you can always expect to find a wide range of theme and cultures reflected in each volume.

As always, I'm grateful and indebted to everyone who believes in *Uncaged* and contributed to it in any way. Hope you enjoy the new volume.

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

UNCAGED
ANTHOLOGY



Volume I
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ABOUT THE COVER

Our *Volume II* cover features a rusalka, a creature from Russian mythology. According to legend, rusalki are the souls of young women who have died near bodies of water and continue to haunt these locations, luring young men to their deaths. Like our *Volume I* cover girl, Medusa, our rusalka looks defiantly at the reader, challenging them, tempting them to come closer. You'll find several interpretations of rusalki in this volume, all very different. (*Cover art by Samantha Darcy.*)

INTRODUCTION

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

VOLUME OVERVIEW

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

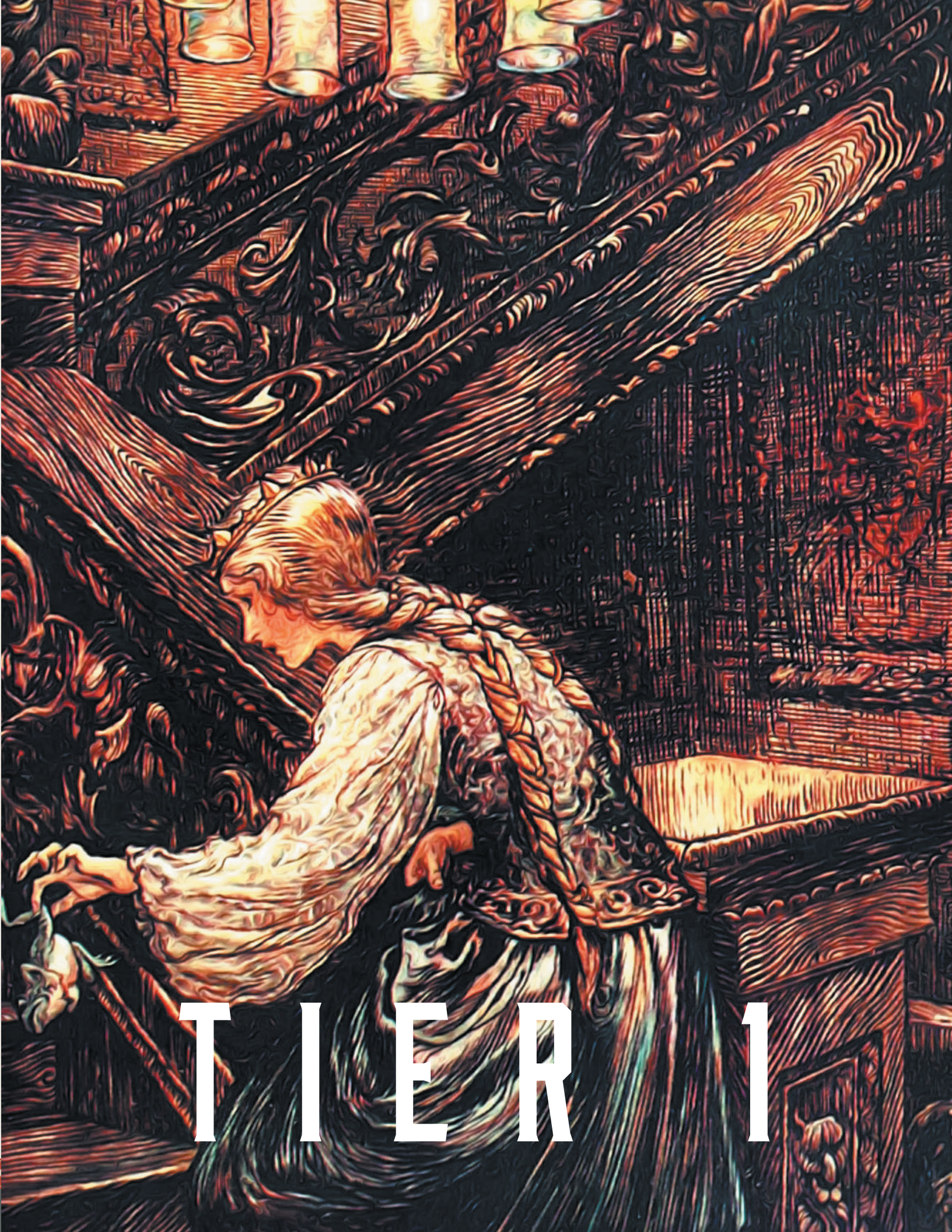
GENERAL NOTES

DMs will need the *Dungeon Master's Guide (*denoted as *DMG)* and the *Monster Manual* (denoted as *MM*) to run these adventures. Creatures/monsters that are **bolded** are found in the *MM*. Items that are *italicized* are found in the *DMG*. Stat blocks are included for new or reskinned creatures, as well as creatures found in books outside of the *MM*. See *Appendix A*, pg. 214, for a list of creatures in this volume. (Exceptions: "Serpant's Tooth" references creatures found in *Volo's Guide to Monsters.* "A Raw Reprisal" references creatures found in *Mordekainen's Tome of Foes*).

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

Most of the adventures in this anthology rely on "theater of the mind" and do not include maps. Blank player maps are found in *Appendix B*, pg. 215.

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


TIER 1



THE SHORTEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

by Samantha Lavender & Miranda Mels

Creature: *Rusalka* | **Level:** *0*

SYNOPSIS

There is no night for faeries and the fey like Midsummer's Eve, and the green woods hide many wondrous and magical things on the shortest night of the year. On this night, a group of curious villagers—would-be adventurers, perhaps—wander into the forest and encounter the lonely rusalka, who asks for their help retrieving her lost heart before the night is done.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters begin the adventure without class levels, as ordinary people attending a Midsummer festival in a small mountain village. They could have grown up in the village and been fast friends since childhood, or they could be simply passing through and were welcomed to enjoy the festivities.

0-LEVEL CHARACTERS

Characters without class levels function very similarly to 1st-level characters, but they lack any proficiencies, features, or equipment granted by a character class. They determine ability scores just as 1st-level characters do, have a proficiency bonus of +2, and have any proficiencies, traits, and equipment granted by their race and background.

Characters without class levels start with 6 + their Constitution modifier hit points, and can regain any lost hit points by finishing a long rest.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The village of Afonwen is nestled deep in the mountains, and although the surrounding woods are usually safe to traverse, the forest hides a number of fey creatures that everyone knows are better left alone. The rusalka is one of them, a fey woman who lives in a secluded forest pool. She is unable to leave the water where she lives, except once a year—the night of Midsummer's Eve.

On her night of freedom last year, the rusalka wandered across the crumbling ruin of an old human church deep in the woods. There she encountered a lone succubus reminiscing about the lost kingdom that built it. The two women shared a brief but deeply intimate night together, parting wistfully before dawn and going their separate ways. When she returned to her pool at dawn, however, the rusalka realized that she had left her heart behind.

Now that it is Midsummer again, the rusalka plans to return to the ruin and reclaim her heart.

CHAPTER 1 – MIDSUMMER'S EVE

THE VILLAGE FESTIVAL

To begin the adventure, read or paraphrase the following:

> It is Midsummer in the mountains, and the sun has already disappeared behind the western peaks. As the evening stretches long and warm in the dying golden light, the Midsummer festival has begun in the village of Afonwen.
>
> Long wooden tables crowd the village square beneath hanging lines of ribbons and fire baskets. There are people everywhere—carrying platters of food, arranging chairs, serving drinks, and chasing children as they run laughing through the chaos. A low wooden stage has been set up on the green for dancing, and several musicians are already tuning their instruments. An assortment of mouth-watering smells waft from the open windows and doors of the grassy-roofed homes nearby, and as a bright, purple dusk falls on the shortest night of the year, everyone is welcomed to eat.

Let the players describe what their characters are wearing to the festival, and invite them to explore and join in the celebrations. The following foods are available for all to try:

- Roasted rosemary duck with gravy served over small, early potatoes and the first carrots of the year
- Salads of summer cabbage, sorrel, and dandelions with the last of the spring radishes
- A warm, spiced compote of wild blackberries and blueberries from further up the mountainside
- Fresh river trout grilled in mulberry sauce and served on a bed of roasted turnips and cauliflower
- Ripe goat's milk cheese and sharp cow's milk cheese along with small loaves of dark, crusty bread
- Bowls of cherries, peaches, and plums next to plates of cooked apricots drizzled in sweet vinegar
- Strawberry rhubarb pie topped with cold cream
- Foamy beer brewed with heather and sage that is more hearty than intoxicating, and plenty of hot, green tea

Once everyone has eaten their fill, platters and plates are replaced with conversation, games, singing, and dancing. Characters can spend time enjoying the festival in the following ways:

- Dancing up on the wooden stage, or helping Fari and Hyath provide the music
- Arm wrestling with Rowan and Rilsa, the carpenter sisters (Rilsa is deaf, but most of the village can translate for anyone who doesn't know hand-signs)
- Guessing riddles with Old Mabin and her daughter, Annis
- Playing chess with Elias, the innkeeper, while his husband Medran sits in his lap and offers bad suggestions
- Playing dice with Della and Elsie from the orchard, cards with Mariseth and Clemmie from the dairy, or a game with all four if someone can get them to agree on what to play
- Singing songs with young Rhea and helping move her rolling chair around the festival
- Helping Tei the baker tell stories to a gaggle of enraptured children, while her wife Kareva, the village blacksmith, makes funny faces appropriate to the tale being told

There is plenty of time for each character to take part in multiple games, dances, and songs. Let characters make appropriate ability checks, even if they are not proficient in Performance or with particular games, for the chance to earn friendly thanks, hearty congratulations, or an extra slice of pie.

Mabin's Riddles

- "What puts its feet towards the sun, and its head into the ground?" (*A leek*)
- "What goes through a door, but never comes in or out?" (*A keyhole*)
- "Why does a chicken cross the road?" (*Because it is too long to go around*)

THE BLOOMING FERN

Well into the festival, the characters are asked to venture into the woods that surround the village. If the characters grew up in this village, then two of their friends, Bridget and Alyona, invite them to go looking for the blooming fern. Ferns do not have flowers, but local folklore tells of a golden blossom that only blooms on Midsummer's Eve. Its magic is said to grant many things, such as great wealth, true love, or a single wish.

If the party is just passing through, they are approached by Kajsa, the village huntress. She noticed that Bridget and Alyona had slipped off in search of the blooming fern, and she has a strangely uneasy feeling about it. Kajsa doesn't want to worry anyone, so she asks the party to do a quick search of the north woods for the missing girls while she searches to the south.

DEVELOPMENT

The party is free to take food and water with them, as well as paper lanterns with candles inside. When they head into the forest, proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 – FAERIE DEALS

If the party follows Bridget and Alyona into the woods in search of the blooming fern, it is a surprise to everyone when they actually find it. The fern stands inside a barely noticeable ring of mushrooms, and its golden flower seems to glow in the dim light. Even if the party is cautious, Bridget and Alyona rush forward in excitement. Upon crossing the faerie ring, the vision of the fern vanishes and the two girls tumble in surprise down a steep, muddy slope. A splash can be heard far below.

If the party is searching the woods for the two girls, they can track them to Rusalka's pool with a DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check. If they fail, they still find the pool but suffer one level of exhaustion after blundering a while through the dark forest.

RUSALKA'S POOL

The slope leads down to a still forest pool, fed by a trickling brook and bathed in silver moonlight. Bridget and Alyona are lying unconscious on the bank, soaked but uninjured. They appear to have been dragged there, and no amount of shaking or shouting can wake them.

A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Medicine) check can confirm that the water has sent the two girls into a magical sleep, and that it would be best to stay out of the pool. Characters that enter the pool immediately feel drowsy, a sensation that intensifies the longer they stay there. Humanoids that stay submerged for three consecutive rounds must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or fall into an unwaking magical slumber.

Once the party has determined that Bridget and Alyona are enchanted but unharmed, read or paraphrase the following:

> Across the pool, a woman sits comfortably on a large stone jutting out into the water. Her eyes are dark in the moonlight, and a wet braid of white hair droops over one shoulder. She is wearing a damp tunic, her bare legs crossed over the edge of the stone with her feet dipping just below the water's surface.
>
> The strange woman pushes herself off the stone and disappears below the surface of the pond. Too quickly, she rises from the water not a few feet from where you stand.
>
> *"They will not wake,"* she says, her voice deep and still as a frozen lake. *"Very few can withstand the enchantment of my pool."* She cocks her head as she examines you. *"You may call me Rusalka, for that is what I am,"* she says. *"Perhaps you will give me your names, so that I may know what to call my unexpected guests."*

Rusalka is a **dryad** with the following changes:

- She can speak Common, Elvish, and Sylvan.
- She can breathe air and water, and has a swim speed of 60 feet.
- She lacks the *innate spellcasting* and *tree stride* traits.

Rusalka is about to embark across the forest to reclaim her heart. She is nervous about the journey, however; she doesn't have time for many delays, as she must return to her pool before dawn. Without her heart, she also does not have the power to lift the enchantment on Bridget and Alyona. Rusalka is willing to make a deal with the party—if they escort her across the forest and help recover her heart, she will awaken the two girls.

If the characters are hesitant to give their names, Rusalka gives them nicknames based on any outstanding qualities or features they exhibit while speaking to her. She doesn't know anything about the blooming fern, and can only presume that pixies have been playing tricks on the party if asked about it.

Rusalka is willing to explain how she left her heart behind (see *Adventure Background*), but only to characters she feels she can trust. Although solitary and shy by nature, Rusalka has quite a romantic side, if the party can get her to reveal it.

THE FAERIE REVEL

In order to traverse the woods more quickly, Rusalka plans to ask her friend Aspen for help. Aspen is a **dryad** who can, with a touch, grant other creatures the benefits of the *tree stride* spell for 1 minute. Rusalka knows Aspen is celebrating Midsummer in a meadow about an hour's hike away.

When they reach the meadow, read or paraphrase the following:

> Several large, weathered stones dot this moonlit meadow, while soft, twinkling lights dance in the air like dandelion seeds. On one flat stone rests a curious feast—stacks of strange cakes and frosted honeybreads, baskets of living branches filled with unnameable fruits, rounds of fey cheese paler than the moon, and dark wine in goblets of crystalline ice. On stones nearby sit three figures, feasting and laughing.

The three figures are Aspen the **dryad**, a **satyr** named Forsythia, and the Nøkken. The Nøkken is a cruel and cowardly male fey who appears as a long-haired elf playing a hardanger fiddle. He uses the statistics of a **sea hag**.

All three faeries are surprised to see the characters, but offer hospitality to Rusalka and her guests. Aspen and Forsythia are pleased to see Rusalka and wish for her to stay and enjoy the festivities, although Aspen sympathizes with Rusalka's haste. The Nøkken, however, is politely spiteful and attempts to delay Rusalka and the party for as long as possible without breaking decorum. He uses any means short of engaging in combat or using damaging abilities to do so, and may demand that characters offer food, music, dances, games, or stories to the festivities before they can leave. He is especially fond of riddle games.

If the characters aren't sure what to offer, consider which activities each character was drawn to during the Midsummer festival. Between the three of them, the faeries can turn almost anything into a competition.

Nøkken's Riddles

- "Shining teeth that downward thrust, spears that break but never rust." (*Icicles*)
- "The warmer it gets the more it does wear, but in cold it sheds clothing until it is bare." (*A tree*)
- "I know of two sisters, who before they die each gives birth to the other." (*Night and day*)

If asked any of Old Mabin's riddles, the Nøkken can correctly guess all but the last one.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the characters have managed to extract themselves from Nøkken's manipulations, Aspen leads Rusalka and the party away from the faerie revel. She asks them to remove any iron objects they are wearing or carrying before she touches each in turn, granting them the effects of the *tree stride* spell.

After thanking Aspen, Rusalka leads the party from tree to tree and they travel quickly across the forest. Proceed to *Chapter 3*.



CHAPTER 3 – HEART AND HOME

Once the effects of their *tree stride* spells have worn off, it is less than an hour of walking before Rusalka and the party reach the old ruin where she left her heart.

MIDNIGHT HUNGER

On their way to the church, Rusalka accidentally leads the party through a patch of hungry grass. This tall, dry grass grows in a 60-foot radius circle around an immobile spirit of hunger, which appears as a **skeleton** sitting at the base of a tree. Any humanoid who starts its turn in the grass must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be filled with a sudden and overwhelming hunger.

Characters can keep the hunger at bay by eating any kind of food while walking through the grass, or by climbing through the trees above the grass with a successful DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check. Giving food to the skeleton dispels the magical hunger for everyone in the grass, as does reducing it to 0 hit points. The skeleton fights back if attacked, but it has a speed of 0 and can only make unarmed strikes. Rusalka is surprised if combat occurs, and does not participate.

Creatures that fail at least one saving throw and don't alleviate their hunger in some way emerge from the hungry grass with one level of exhaustion. Rusalka is very apologetic, stating honestly that she had forgotten mortals like them would be so affected by its spell.

THE OLD CHURCH

Rusalka's destination is a crumbling human church, built on a grassy cliffside overlooking a deep, wooded ravine. The doors and roof have long since rotted away, and thick ivy covers the gray stone walls. Rusalka mentions that she spent most of Midsummer's Eve last year at the top of the belltower, and that her heart will most likely be there.

Upon crossing the low stone wall that surrounds the church grounds, Rusalka suddenly gains five levels of exhaustion (if she already had levels of exhaustion, her exhaustion level becomes five). Between gasps she explains that the church must have some lingering consecration that, while not noticeable when she still had her heart, is warding against her now that her strength is diminished.

One or two characters can help Rusalka up the stairs of the belltower with a DC 11 Strength check. On a failure, she and the party still make it to the top, but the characters helping her gain one level of exhaustion.

Upon reaching the top of the tower, read or paraphrase the following:

> Whatever wood or rope that once made up the church's belfry is long gone, and the top of this tower is open to the starry sky. Near the edge of the balcony a tiny, shining mote of pure white light floats in the air. Rusalka kneels, cups it in her hands, and embraces the light into her chest. It disappears, and Rusalka breathes deeply before opening her eyes and smiling.

DEVELOPMENT

Reclaiming her heart removes all of Rusalka's levels of exhaustion, and she is able to leave the old church unassisted. Proceed to *Conclusion*.



CONCLUSION

The walk back to Rusalka's pool is uneventful and calm. She is able to lead the party around the hungry grass and the Nøkken, and they arrive at the pool shortly before dawn. There, she is able to dispel the enchanted sleep on Bridget and Alyona with a touch.

When the party is ready to return to Afonwen, read or paraphrase the following:

> Rusalka gives you a small but warm smile. *"Our deal is done,"* she says, *"But it seems you will be leaving with something unaccounted in our bargain—my thanks."* She looks fondly at each of you. *"May it give you luck, when next you need it."*

The journey back to the village is simple, and the party returns with the two girls just as the sun begins to rise.

REWARDS

Any character that helped Rusalka and parted on good terms with her receives the following charm:

Faerie Luck. This charm allows you to reroll one attack roll, ability check, or saving throw you dislike (no action required). You must use the second roll. Once used three times, the charm vanishes from you.

Bridget and Alyona are also incredibly grateful, and the party can always find a hot meal and a warm welcome from either of their families.

Because they do not have class levels, characters do not earn experience points for completing this adventure. However, their encounters with mystery, magic, and excitement over the course of the night may be enough to push them towards developing the skills of a true adventurer.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

While action-packed adventures can be a lot of fun, *Dungeons & Dragons* can also be small, emotional, and intimate. "The Shortest Night of the Year" began as a short game between the authors, with Sam as the DM and Miranda the only player. If you've never played *D&D* one-on-one with a close friend or loved one, this is a great chance to give it a try!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Samantha Lavender has been playing and running *Dungeons & Dragons* for over 20 years, starting with the 2nd edition introductory box set and including every edition since. She is also a writer and a baker, and can be found on Twitter @RainyRedwoods.

Miranda Mels was introduced to *Dungeons & Dragons* at Sam's table during the D&D Next playtest, and hasn't stopped playing since. She now playtests hardback adventurers for Wizards of the Coast. Sam and Miranda live near a flock of ravens they call family, and talk about *D&D* together every day.



Rusalka

Medium fey, neutral

Armor Class 11
Hit points 22 (5d8)
Speed 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

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

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5
Skills darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 1 (200 xp)

Amphibious. Rusalka can breathe air and water.

Magical Resistance. Rusalka has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Speak with Animals and Plants. Rusalka can communicate with beasts and plants as if they shared a language.

Actions

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

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

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

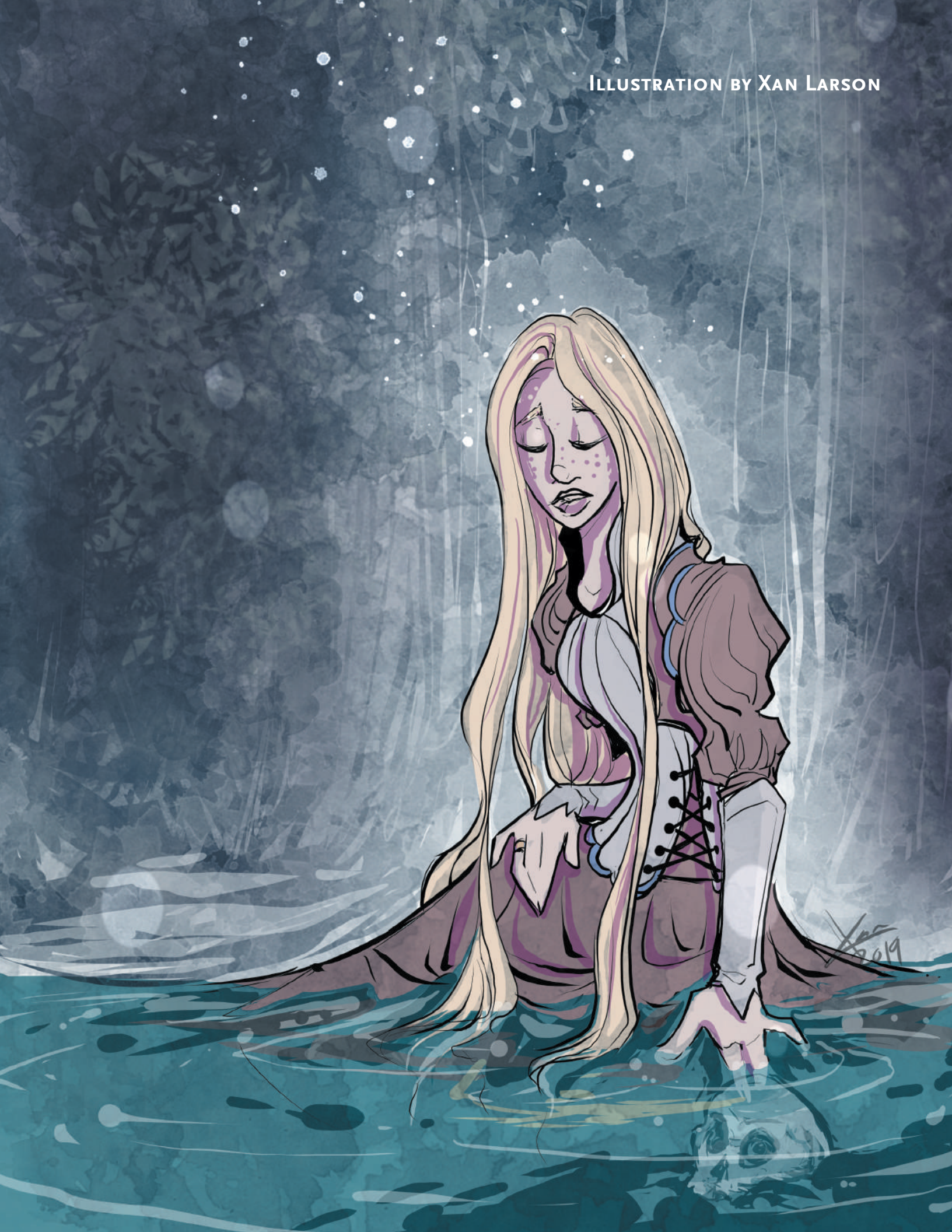


Illustration by Xan Larson

DANGEROUS WATERS

by Xan Larson

Creature: *Rusalka* | **Level:** *1* | **CW:** *Domestic Violence*

SYNOPSIS

The small village of Jaromir seems beset by a powerful curse. For the past twelve days anyone who enters the forest is never seen again. There are now six missing—all adults, five men and one woman—without a trace. The mayor has offered 200 gp and three Dungeoneer's packs to any who can find the source of the curse and free his town. This adventure is designed for two to three level 1 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Wendelin Forest has always been a strangely haunting beautiful place, but now the silence has become eerie. The birds have fled, and hunting is scarce. Those who go into the forest disappear, and the locals are whispering of curses and witchcraft. The Mayor of Jaromir has put out a call to all adventurers for assistance. The desperate man has gathered together a fund and adventuring supplies for whoever can rid the village of what is causing the disappearances.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is setting neutral. Although the monster is based in Slavic folklore, Jaromir is a small town that can fit on the edge of any forest.

Usually depicted as a coy and teasing seductress, luring men to death, the rusalka in this story is instead a lonely and vengeful spirit—a murdered girl, killed by the person she loved. Trapped and desperate, she will not rest unless her murderer has been brought to justice, or her love joins her in death.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Ivah Vassily:** CE female rusalka/former human female. A young woman with light brown hair and freckles. Murdered by her fiance, Pietor, she is now a lost spirit that will do anything to end her loneliness. She is fixated on Pietor as both the cause of her sorrow and the wishes to both punish him and be with him forever.
- **Karel Ivanovitch:** LG male human. Mayor of Jaromir. Karel is a strong stocky man of middling age. Dressed in furs and leather garments he carries with dignity. Charismatic and generous, he is smart enough to know when he is out of his depth and to ask for help.
- **Pietor Ivanovitch:** NE human male. Son of Karel, fiance and murderer of Ivah. Young handsome man with the same stocky figure of his father. However, instead of quiet dignity he instead has a darker more sullen nature. Pietor was at first relieved to have Ivah's death associated with the other disappearances, but the arrival of a more formal investigation has made him nervous and paranoid. His goal is to make sure Ivah's death is blamed on whatever is causing the disappearances.
- **Jan:** CG female human. Barmaid at the Wily Fox, Ivah's close friend. A young woman with her hair tied up out of her face. She looks tired and haggard with dark bags under her eyes. She has been having unsettling dreams ever since Ivah's disappearance. Dreams where she is in the dark, lost, and the only thing she hears is the sound of a woman crying.
- **Viktor:** LN male human. Patron of the Wily Fox and gossip. A man with salt and pepper hair with quick piercing eyes. He is mostly found in his usual corner of the Wily Fox and always willing to tell a tale or spread a little local gossip.

- **Sasha:** CG male human. A small boy that doesn't like to stay away from the woods even when he's told to.

CHAPTER 1 – THE CURSED TOWN

Jaromir is a small township, and the arrival of adventurers has caused a stir of fearful and angry whispers. The mayor, Karel Ivanovitch, according to the missive, has arranged for a meal in the tavern, The Wily Fox.

THE WILY FOX

The Wily Fox is a small rustic place which in any other town would be bustling with song and laughter, but the only sounds are murmurs, whispers, and quiet shuffling of servers and patrons. Rumors abound for those willing to search them out.

RUMORS AND INTRIGUE

The inside of the inn is brightly lit, but the atmosphere is dim and subdued. Several families are huddled close as if afraid to let the others out of sight, and when a nervous barmaid drops a plate it causes a panicked scream. As the room quiets again a large stocky man dressed in leather and furs with a tired look sighs and rubs his face tiredly. Upon seeing the adventurers he invites them to sit at his table and waves the barmaid over, ordering food and drink for all. He introduces himself as Mayor Karel Ivanovitch, the person that issued the notice.

The barmaid that delivers the food introduces herself as Jan. She looks as if she hasn't had a decent nights sleep in days and is extremely skittish.

Ivah is his son's fiancée. Evidently she entered the forest to pick berries and gather herbs. Karel and Pietor organized a search party to find her, but found nothing, and with a little investigation it was discovered that one of the searchers turned up missing as well. Now when someone enters the forest they never return. The forest is now off limits to all but adventurers.

DISCERNABLE FACTS

- Sasha (small human boy): Sasha approaches the party and asks if they are there to slay the monster. If they say yes he tells them he has been hearing music—perhaps the sound of someone singing—if they play too close to the woods. Sasha says the person singing has a pretty voice and maybe if the monster is gone they will come into the village and sing more.
- Viktor (drinking in a shadowy corner): If someone joins him in the corner and buys him a drink Viktor tells them some choice pieces of gossip. Pietor organized the search party but Viktor doesn't remember seeing him participate in the search. Pietor has been sullen and moody ever since his father set up the reward. Some people say he just doesn't trust outsiders. Others say he is resentful about being cut out of the search for Ivah. Aside from Ivah all the other disappearances have been men.
- Jan (barmaid): If approached, Jan startles and drops something, apologizing profusely. If asked about her state and feelings she will say she hasn't been sleeping well since Ivah disappeared. On a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check she expands further expressing her uneasy feelings about the relationship between Ivah and Pietor, and her persistent nightmares. Before Ivah's disappearance Jan has grown increasingly concerned at how jealous and obsessive Pietor became of Jan and Ivah's friendship. Ever since Ivah went missing Jan has been having nightmares of being lost in the dark and hearing Ivah cry out in pain.

DEVELOPMENT

While the party discusses with the mayor, a bar patron stares suspiciously at the newcomers. Mayor Karel coaxes the man over to the table and introduces him as his son, Pietor.

Pietor openly doubts the skill of the adventurers and offers to guide the party through the forest. Karel tries to dissuade Pietor from going into the forest stating it's too dangerous, but Pietor is determined to be the one to find Ivah.

Pietor presents himself as an asset to the party. He boasts of his forest survival, tracking skills, and knowledge of areas searched thoroughly. The party can choose to let Pietor accompany them and lead them into the forest, or try to leave him behind. However, Pietor is determined to go into the forest and goes in before the adventurers if they do not accept his offer.

CHAPTER 2 – THE SILENT FOREST

The plants and trees of the forest are green and healthy, but the silence is unnerving. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 14 or higher experience a strange chill and the feeling of being watched.

FOLLOWING PIETOR'S TRAIL

Wild and untamed in appearance, the Wendelin forest is an awesome sight. Large towering trees, some hundreds of years old, rise out of the dense underbrush. No wind is rustling through the leaves, and no animals are rummaging through the bush. There is a heavy feeling in the air, as if a storm is about to break, but the sun shines brightly through the trees. You can find only one trail. It's faint and difficult to follow.

Unguided: If the adventurers have not taken Pietor with them they need to make a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check to follow the trail through the forest.

If the check fails they have lost the trail and if they split up to search they need to make a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) to find it again.

The Helpful Guide: Pietor gives advantage to all Survival checks in the Wendelin forest.

Suspicious: Pietor avoids any questions about the disappearances and his fiancé. If pressed to answer, he lies, claiming not to have seen Ivah the day she disappeared, and talking at length of dangerous beasts and monsters he has seen in these woods. This is an attempt at distraction and a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check sees through his lies.

Truth: Pietor has never fought anything more dangerous than a wild dog, and certainly not a manticore or a dragon!

Ivah and Pietor had been having increasingly violent fights and the last one went too far. The last time he saw Ivah she was dead and sinking to the bottom of a lake.

Pietor doesn't know that Ivah is the Rusalka and plans to fabricate evidence to blame whatever monster is behind the disappearances for Ivah's death.

If the party catches his lies and confronts him on a successful DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) check, Pietor leads them to where he left Ivah's body where they will hear the Rusalka's song.

It's Dangerous to Go Alone: For characters that separate themselves from the group (by more than 30 feet), a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check allows them to hear faint music and the sound of flowing water. They must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed to follow the song, leaving the rest behind.

DEVELOPMENT

An ethereal voice, raised in song, drifts through the forest. Each member of the party must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be drawn toward the source of the music.

If Pietor is guiding: Pietor automatically fails the saving throw and dashes in the direction of the song.

If Pietor is absent: Those that are not charmed hear a blood curdling scream in the direction of the song.

CHAPTER 3 – THE WATER'S SONG

THE RUSALKA

The song leads to a 20 foot circular clearing in front of a crystal clear lake. A figure sits at the edge of the water, with its back to the forest. The voice is strong and lovely. While the words are indistinct, the meaning is clearly that of a love song.

APPROACHES

If Pietor is guiding: Pietor immediately moves toward the singing figure. Once he reaches within 5ft he gasps the name Ivah, clearly recognizing her.

If Pietor is absent: He is unconscious and face down in the water. If not pulled from the water and revived within two rounds, he dies.

Characters who are charmed cannot approach stealthily and must use their full movement to attempt to come within 5 feet of the Rusalka.

A beautiful young woman with golden hair sings and dangles her feet in the water of a large pond. Her dress is soaked through, but she doesn't seem chilled. Her hair is dripping, and as she stands and turns to the group, she holds a hand out in welcome. As she smiles, her song never wavers. While her demeanor seems bright her song is bittersweet and the urge to step close is strong.

- **Semblance of Life.** On a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check, the Rusalka's disguise fails; her skin is too pale, her eyes are slightly glazed over, the scent of decay, and some faint bruising around her throat are visible. She is clearly an undead creature.
- **Toxic Love**. The Rusalka retains some of their former self and attempts to make a connection with Pietor. "Come into the water, beloved. The water is fine… just as you said it was. I'm cold… so cold." "You said you loved me…" "You left me here… you… killed me… and LEFT ME HERE ALONE!" Once Pietor is within five feet, the Rusalka will knock him unconscious and let him fall face down in the water. Pietor will drown in two rounds if no assistance is rendered. If the Rusalka is dealt a killing blow with Pietor still within reach she will attempt to drag him with her into death.
- **End of Life.** While Pietor is alive, a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check, convinces the Rusalka to move on in peace. The bar for success can be lowered by appeals to her humanity and reminders of her living self such as her name or people from the village (-2 for each appeal). Example:
  "Jan is worried about you."
  "Do you remember anything before Pietor killed you?"
- If the Rusalka succeeds in killing Pietor, a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces her to move on without more bloodshed.

CONCLUSION

If the Rusalka dies with Pietor still within reach, she drags him to his death.

Ivah whispers cruelly into Pietor's ear as she holds him one last time. *"Come into the water, beloved. The water is fine... just as you said it was. Let me hold you, like you did me. See, it's not so bad—just let your breath go and we can be together once more. I can't let you leave me ever again."*

With her words she slips under the water, with her love, vanishing under the surface.

If the Rusalka remembers who she used to be, and is convinced to pass on in peace, she moves on and leaves a gift for the party.

"Thank you... for bringing me back to myself. Tell Jan I'm sorry. I wish I could see her again but I need to go. I have a gift for you. I hope it serves you well." Ivah pulls a ring from her finger and clutches it to her chest for a moment, before gently setting it on a stone and turning back toward the lake. A bright light shines on the surface as she steps into the water and vanishes.

REWARDS

200 gp, three dungeoneer's packs, and a *ring of water walking* (DMG).

Rusalka

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 11
Hit points 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

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

Skills passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 xp)



Actions

Multiattack. The Rusalka can make two attacks one with fingernails that pierce like claws, and another with a club fashioned from driftwood.

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

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

Luring Song. The Rusalka sings a magical melody. Every humanoid and giant within 300 feet of the rusalka that can hear the song must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed until the song ends. The Rusalka must take a bonus action on its subsequent turns to continue singing. It can stop singing at any time. The song ends if the rusalka is incapacitated. While charmed by the rusalka, a target is incapacitated. If the charmed target is more than 5 feet away from the Rusalka, the target must move on its turn toward the Rusalka by the most direct route, trying to get within 5 feet. It doesn't avoid opportunity attacks, but before moving into damaging terrain, such as lava or a pit, and whenever it takes damage from a source other than the rusalka, the target can repeat the saving throw. A charmed target can also repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns. If the saving throw is successful, the effect ends on it. A target that successfully saves is immune to this rusalka's song for the next 24 hours.

Author's Notes

I need to thank my friend Sean for pulling me into an epic adventure, and encouraging me to create my own characters. Also to my players who believed in me enough to fall into my world and gave me the confidence to continue writing my own adventures.

About the Author

Xan Larson is an illustrator, comic artist, mythological creature enthusiast, DM and more. Artist of If Dragons Were Horses, SVN, Deep False Waters, and creator of the teacup almiraj and teacup wolpertinger. Follow on Twitter @PaleWhiteRabbit or Instagram @pale.white.rabbit.



RITES OF PASSAGE

by CJ Oliver

Creature: *Lamia* | **Level(s):** *1-5*

SYNOPSIS

Every autumn the reclusive goliaths of the Silvertop Mountain Clan hold their Festival of the Hunt, inviting neighbors to join in the partaking of merriment and mead. Your adventuring company finds themselves drafted as monster hunters when a young huntress is slain. The culprit? A lamia, whose lair has discouraged all previous attempts to destroy her. What the party finds inside her cave triggers a different call to action.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Rites of Passage is intended for characters of 1st-5th level. The Festival of the Hunt is well-known to the locals of small towns near the mountains, and word of it even reached the city. The party might be tourists or guards for others seeking the festivities.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The goliaths of the Silvertop Mountains value hunting and wilderness survival skills above all others. The Festival of the Hunt is a coming-of-age celebration where teens are tested on survival skills and pass into their adult roles within the clan. Those who fail to complete a successful hunt are relegated to the bottom of the social structure or exiled.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Chief Nokroz:** The leader of the goliaths.
- **Elder Reah:** A powerful spellcaster who performs services for the village.
- **Atli:** A young goliath woman determined to achieve her personal goals.
- **Madla:** A **lamia**, cursed into the snake-like form as punishment for her defiance of tradition.
- **Suez:** A goliath suspicious of Atli's death.

Atli is one of a dozen young goliaths participating in the Festival of the Hunt. The party enters an uproar as she fails to return from the forest. When evidence is produced that she was killed by a lamia, Suez recruits them as monster hunters. Should the party successfully navigate the lair's obstacles, they find goliath outcasts. Madla and Atli request the party's assistance in continuing the ruse.



CHAPTER 1 – INTO THE WOODS

A cool breeze whips the serpentine ribbons and snake bone wind chimes adorning the colorful cotton festival tents set up across the goliath village. A din of music and laughter echoes from people enjoying the festivities.

Suddenly, a shout goes up from a gateway near the forest. You follow the crowd to a platform decorated with snake iconography, where the goliath leaders stand. They greet young goliath men and women entering the camp from the forest. The teens look exhausted, but in good spirits. As the procession ends, a murmur begins in the crowd. Finally, a hunter appears, holding a bloody satchel. The crowd hushes. The chief turns, and raises his hands. He says a single word a name—*"Atli!"* There is a moment of silence, as the goliaths in the crowd look down in sorrow. Then the crowd disperses back to the festival.

A young goliath nervously approaches your group through the crowd. *"Hail friends,"* he says nervously. *"You look strong and capable. I, uh, need some help from someone outside the village, if you would consider it?"*

The young goliath is Suez (see *Dramatis Personae*), a friend of Atli, the young huntress who is presumed deceased. Suez provides the following information:

- The teens were completing the Rite of Ascension, an overnight ritual of wilderness survival.
- The satchel belonged to Atli, his friend and someone who never fit in with the village. Some consider her to be an outcast.
- In the last few years, other teens who were similarly considered to be "odd" were killed by a monster called a lamia—a snake-like creature sacred to the Vort. The goliaths have hunted for her after the Festival of the Hunt in the past, but she has eluded them.
- Suez is concerned that the elders in the village might be using the lamia to get rid of clan members that don't fit in. He is eager for someone to hunt for her right away, before she can escape again.

If the party tries to gain an audience with Chief Nokroz they are rebuffed by guards. Other members of the Vort speak of the lamia with reverence and fear.

After accepting Suez's offer, he leads them to the edge of the forest with a description of Atli's ritual site, points out Atli's tracks leading into the forest, and encourages the party to follow them.

TRACKING ATLI

Atli's tracks through the woods are easy to follow. Roll a d8 to determine the party's first location. After resolving that location, a successful group DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check is needed to pick up Atli's trail again. On a failed check, return to the goliath village and repeat. After two random locations, the party arrives at Atli's camp.



FOREST LOCATIONS

D8 Result	Description	Found on DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)
1	A small cave lined with dried leaves	Pouch containing 15 silver pieces
2	A grove of birch trees that buzz with the sound of bees	A honeycomb
3	Mushrooms speckled red and white arranged in a circle	Edible mushrooms
4	A worn tent, long abandoned	A small wood carving of a wolf
5	A small muddy clearing where many tracks intersect	—
6	An enormous spruce tree, with a hole large enough to fit inside	Paints made from natural plant material worth 10 gp
7	A wide brook spanned by a worn stone plinth	Remnants of a snake statue lie buried in the grass nearby
8	Burned logs in a makeshift fire pit, warm to the touch	A small knife

When the party arrives at Atli's camp, read the following:

> You emerge into a clearing where a brook flows by a flat rock. An enormous spruce dominates the clearing. The natural beauty is marred by the blood staining the rock and torn leather jerkin lying discarded in the brush.

DEVELOPMENT

When the party investigates, they find a trail made by a large snake-like creature that leads to a cave. Proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 – THE SERPENT'S MAW

When the party follows the trail, it leads to the lamia's lair. Read the following:

> The trail leads into a dark cave. Bleached bones litter the entranceway.

The bones are identified as giant rat bones on a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check.
The interior of the cave is dark.

THE AMBUSH

As the party enters the cave, they are ambushed by a **swarm of poisonous snakes**. After completing combat, read the following:

> The tunnel opens into a circular cavern. A statue of a snake-like woman is carved into the far wall and the floor is carved with stone tiles. Discarded snake skins clutter the edges of the chamber.

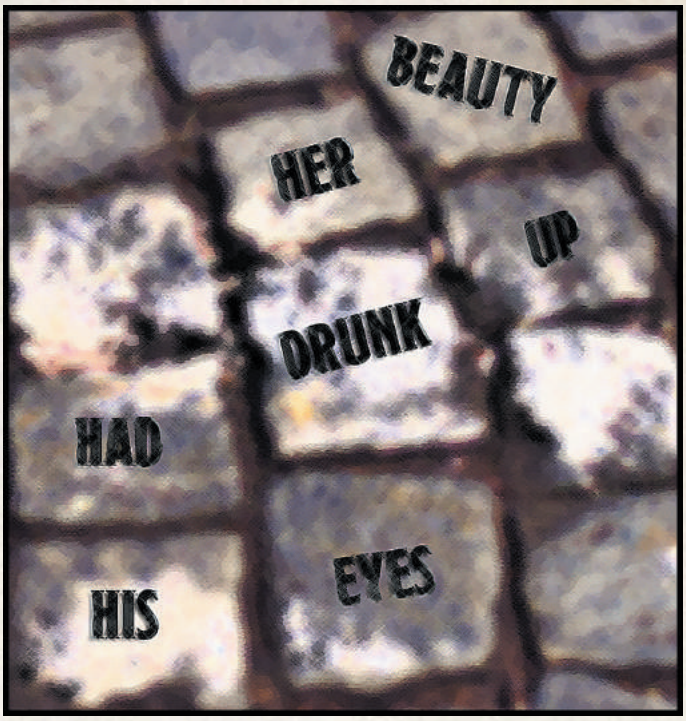
THE LAMIA CARVING

The statue is identified as a lamia on a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check. Investigating the statue reveals it is a door with no obvious way to open it. The party must speak the passphrase, "His eyes had drunk her beauty up." The words of the phrase are carved on the floor tiles. Read the below description when the room is investigated:

> A search reveals there are no other exits. The floor tiles are carved with words and drawings of snakes.

The words are arranged as below. After uttering the phrase the carving opens, revealing a tunnel.

[snake drawing]	*HER*	*BEAUTY*
HAD	*DRUNK*	*UP*
HIS	*EYES*	*[snake drawing]*



THE SAFEHOUSE

When the party solves the puzzle, read the following:

> A tunnel spirals down. As you descend, the musty cave smell gives way to fresh air. Abruptly the passage opens into a canyon. Water trickles down into a wide pool. Soft music emanates from a goliath woman seated nearby, gently strumming a lyre. Another goliath woman sways to the music as she whittles a design into a staff. Several other tunnels lead away from here.
>
> (If the party is not sneaking): As you enter, the goliaths leap to their feet. The whittler brandishes her knife, as the other woman dashes up a tunnel. An enormous snake with a woman's face bursts from the other tunnel. *"Who are you?"* the snake hisses. *"Speak! Your swift answer spares your immediate death!"*

If the party becomes hostile, see tactics below. Otherwise, any reasonable explanation results in the women relaxing. The goliath introduces herself as Atli. She explains that she chose exile rather than the condemnation of her clan or a life of hunting. She chose to fake her death to save face for everyone. Atli introduces the lamia as Madla, a cursed goliath who seeks out fellow outcasts. As they speak, a dozen other outcasts appear.

If asked about her curse, Madla explains she was exiled after her Festival of the Hunt several years ago. When she tried to persuade the elders that she should stay, Elder Reah told her she spoke "like a politician, with a snake's tongue," and cursed her into this form. The only way to break the spell would be to become a leader of the clan. Madla is concerned others might be sent to slay her if the party doesn't. She suggests you retrieve the head of a giant snake from a nearby colony of ettercaps to fool the goliaths.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party fights: Madla is a lamia and Atli is a tribal warrior. If other outcasts (**commoners**) have entered the area when combat breaks out, they throw rocks at uncharmed characters.

Tactics: Madla first uses *geas* to command a strong character to protect her. She uses *intoxicating touch* to make *suggestion* and *charm person* spells more effective. Atli uses her whittled staff as a spear and attacks characters adjacent to Madla with pack tactics. If Madla is defeated, proceed to *Conclusion, Part A*.

- If the party accepts the offer to retrieve the giant snake from the ettercaps: Proceed to *Chapter 3*.
- If the party tries to persuade the outcasts to return to the encampment: Proceed to *Conclusion, Part B.*
- If the party tries to persuade Madla that she is already a leader of the outcast goliaths: The party needs a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, the lamia form peels away and Madla in goliath form steps out of the snake. The lamia's actual head is taken back. Proceed to *Conclusion, Part A.*

CHAPTER 3 – COILS AND WEBS

If the party agrees to retrieve the head, read the following:

> The tunnel forks in two directions. Madla gestures down one. *"Ahead, you will find the nessst of the ettercapsss,"* she hisses. *"We observed them capturing the sssnake only a day ago. It ssshould ssstill be there. Fate'sss blesssing upon you."*
>
> A chilling wind moans from the tunnel. You emerge into a maze of skeletal trees festooned with thick spider's webs. Ahead of you in the pre-dusk gloom, you see the body of an enormous snake caught in the sticky cords. Nearby, a foul gray humanoid lovingly pets a giant spider. They don't appear to have noticed you —yet.

Characters may reach the snake without the **ettercap** or **giant spider** spotting them. The spider's websense immediately alerts it when the webbing is touched, or the characters interact with the snake.

Tactics: The ettercap opens with web attempting to entangle as many characters as possible, then blocks the tunnel entrance. The spider attacks the nearest hostile. If facing a strong party, an additional ettercap and giant spider arrive, summoned by commotion in the webs.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the enemies are defeated, the party can remove the snake's head and return to Madla. She makes alterations to the head to make it appear like hers. As a gift of thanks, Atli presents the party with her finished staff, a *staff of the python* (see "Rewards"). Proceed to *Conclusion, Part A*.



CONCLUSION, PART A

The party returns to the Vort encampment with the fake or real lamia head. Read the description below:

> The first stars appear overhead as you re-enter the campground. A crowd forms as you approach the platform, where the clan leaders and Suez await you. Suez eagerly looks from one party member to another. *"Well?"* he pleads.
>
> [The party explains what has happened.] Suez cries, *"You have avenged Atli's death! "* The crowd mutters. Chief Nokroz raises a hand for silence. *"Long had the creature preyed upon our young ones. Thank you for this service to our village!"* He waves to you, *"Come friends, share my fire!"*

The party is now free to enjoy the festival in comfort.

CONCLUSION, PART B

The party returns to the village with the outcasts. Read the description below:

> The first stars appear overhead as you re-enter the goliath village. A crowd forms as you approach the platform, amidst gasps and murmurs. *"Madla!"* Rhea cries as the lamia comes into view, but Chief Nokroz puts a firm hand on the elder's arm. *"Atli,"* the chief booms, *"What is the meaning of your return with that... creature accompanying you?"* Beside you, Atli shrinks under the disapproving tone in Nokroz's voice. She whispers to you, *"What can I possibly say?"*

To avoid the DM having a one-sided conversation, the party should guide Atli. The key to winning over Chief Nokroz is to appeal to his sense of strength in community. Look for the following points in the party's suggestions:

- The tribe is about community, which is stronger with diversity.
- The importance of diverse skills and interests bringing value to the village.
- The Festival of the Hunt is about surviving the wilderness—who is stronger than those who survived exile?
- Other positive points that don't denigrate individuals and are about strength, growth, and community rather than calling the old ways wrong. Attacks on the tribe's traditionalism harden the listeners and create negative reactions.

If the party makes a convincing argument, read the following:

Chief Nokroz hangs his head. *"Atli, you shame me with your wisdom. The Festival of the Hunt is complete for you—all of you. Welcome home."* Suez leaps to embrace Atli, and the two hurry away towards one of the festival tents.

As the Vort outcasts begin to mingle with family, Madla hangs back. Chief Nokroz approaches her and contemplates her face. *"I remember Reah's words to you. She had no idea what she would create. You have become a leader for these people, protecting them, doing what I failed to do. I thank you for returning to us. You are an honored leader of the clan."*

As Chief Nokroz finishes speaking the lamia's form peels away and Madla in goliath form steps out of the snake's remains. *"I accept your offer chieftain,"* she replies.

"My offer?" Chief Nokroz looks confused.

"To lead." Madla grins.

The party is now free to enjoy the festival in comfort.

If the party does not make a convincing argument, read the following:

Chief Nokroz's face hardens. *"You are welcome no longer,"* he booms, nodding at Reah. The elder points at Atli. With a guttural word, Atli's body twists and grows, taking on a snakelike form. The outcast Vort scatter into the woods. *"This issssn't over!"* Madla threatens as she pulls Atli after their companions.

The chief looks at your party. *"I thank you for revealing a hard truth to my village. Such difficult work deserves a reward."* A hearty meal and mead are quickly procured for you. Despite the words of thanks, it is clear your presence is no longer welcome here, and you are escorted out of camp as soon as you are ready to travel.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS:

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

Obstacle	XP
Swarm of Poisonous Snakes	450
Lamia	1,100
Guard	25
Commoner	10
Ettercap	450
Giant Spider	200
Solving the Lamia Statue Puzzle	50 per person

TREASURE REWARDS:

Item	Value
Pouch	15 silver pieces
Paints	10 gold pieces

Staff of the Python

Staff, uncommon

Requires attunement by a Cleric, Druid, or Warlock

You can use an action to speak this magical staff's command word and throw the staff on the ground within 10 feet of you. The staff becomes a **giant constrictor snake** under your control and acts on its own initiative. Using a Bonus Action to speak the command word again, you return the staff to its normal form in a space formerly occupied by the snake.

On your turn, you can mentally command the snake if it is within 60 feet of you and you aren't incapacitated. You decide what action the snake takes and where it moves during its next turn, or you can issue it a general command, such as to attack your enemies or guard a location.

If the snake is reduced to 0 Hit Points, it dies and reverts to its staff form. The staff then shatters and is destroyed. If the snake reverts to staff form before losing all its Hit Points, it regains all of them.

This beautiful wood staff is carved with vines. On closer inspection, a long snake that winds its way from one end to another is hidden in the carving of the staff.

Author's Notes

The historical basis for *D&D* included medieval ideas about women's roles in society. Additionally, female monsters in myth and fable are usually intended as warnings to women in society about the consequences of defying expectations. Today we often see heroic female heroes, but many NPCs and our monsters rigidly follow traditional roles. We rarely get to dive into these character's psyches to see if they are happy in the role they have to play. I wanted to do that with this story, and re-imagine a monster that represented the violation of those norms as the empowerment of others who wanted to defy them.

About the Author

CJ Oliver resides in Central Virginia. A lifelong fan of *D&D*, she has served as an Adventurer's League coordinator, a contributor to the D&D Round Table podcast, and convention DM. She's also usually running and playing in three or more campaigns at a time. (There's never enough D&D!) She can be reached at @DungeonMasterCJ on Twitter.





TOUCH OF WINTER

by Colleen A Taylor

Creature(s): *Marzanna* | **Level(s):** *1 - 5*

SYNOPSIS

Though villagers fear the monster in the water, the rusalka seeks the help of a party of adventurers to save her sister. The local village is welcoming and kind on the surface, but many there hide a dark secret that they would do anything to keep concealed.

ADVENTURE HOOK

When the party rests in a small village they are approached for help by the local judge.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is intended for a party of 2nd level. If your party is large or of a higher level, adjust the enemies accordingly. The village the party is investigating should have an unsettling, overly-friendly feel. A subset of villagers have begun a ritual. Every ten years, they sacrifice a woman to the river to appease their goddess of death and winter. Due to this, they have benefitted from mild winters, and no one has died. It is once again time for the ritual.



CHAPTER 1 – A MYSTERIOUS VILLAGE

Following the river, you come to a small village —around one hundred people—primarily relying on goats and wheat to sustain itself. You are immediately recognized as strangers, and are met with kindness. You quickly see all there is: A small inn, a few houses, three small shops (shoe-maker, carpenter, and furrier), a larger general merchant, and a small pier on the river. The town is busy with preparations for winter.

EXPLORING THE VILLAGE

The villagers are kind and willing to answer questions. However, a dark secret is known to some, who may deflect if pressed on certain subjects. It is noted below which villagers know the truth; this will be particularly relevant in *Chapter 3*.

- Yakov is the middle-aged human innkeeper of The Firebird. He stays in his inn, which has three small rooms and a common room where he serves fairly good spirits and fairly unimpressive beer. He likes Liduna quite a bit, and may be convinced to share very limited information. Knows the truth.
- Sasha is a young halfling man who manages the small pier where the village receives goods and ships them onward. He has only recently been told, but as his father died to the winter when he was a young lad, he does not share what he knows. Knows the truth.
- Raisa is an older half-orc woman who lives in a fine house, serving as a judge for this and other surrounding villages. She is among the main organizers and does not crack. Knows the truth.
- Oksana is a middle aged human woman who runs her own wheat farm and lives in town. Does not know.

- Martyn is a young dwarven shoemaker who operates a small shop in town. He is happy to talk while he works. Does not know.
- Natalya is an elven woman who owns the large general store, but does not run it. She is the woman who took Liduna in. She feels guilt about what is happening to her young ward, but is resolved to carry the deed out. Knows the truth.
- Silvia is a middle aged half-elf who manages Natalya's general store and is her biological daughter. Does not know.
- Anatoliy is a young human, the son of the local carpenter who runs the shop while his father gathers materials. Does not know.
- Vena is the local midwife, an older halfling, who also serves as an herbalist when needed. She makes the mixture that puts Liduna to sleep. From years of being a midwife, she has no compunctions about losing one to save others. Knows the truth.

DEVELOPMENT

The party is approached by Raisa. She explains the village has been having some trouble with a troublesome spirit. Recently a four year-old boy fell into the water, compelled by the spirit, and drowned. The village would be grateful if they were able to help—she will do her best to scrounge up some reward.

Raisa does not know this spirit is Marina.

CHAPTER 2 – MEETING THE RUSALKA

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The wood is filled with pines and firs, and it is a cold fall day with a definite hint of winter in the air. There are few birds, most having flown off before the frost sets in, but you hear the scurrying of animals preparing for winter. A river winds its way through the woods and pools into a small lake. In the pond you see a beautiful woman, sitting on the edge with her legs in the water. She sings as she combs her wet hair, the song inhumanly beautiful. As you approach, she looks up from the pool and cries out, *"Wait!"*

INVESTIGATE OR ATTACK

Depending on your players, they may choose to investigate or attack.

If they investigate, they can learn the following with a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check:

- DC 12: You recognize this creature as a rusalka, a water spirit. They can be helpful, but typically are not.
- DC 15: You know rusalka are frequently unquiet spirits of women who suffered violent deaths in water. Some stories of rusalka tell of them dragging men to their deaths. Other stories are not violent, such as a rusalka helping during a harvest.

Otherwise, if they attack, she defends herself with the statistics of a **harpy**, but asks that they listen to her, trying to explain that she needs their help. If they continue to attack, she swims away on the second round and attempts to approach them downriver. She cannot leave the water, and uses a branch she picks up from the riverbank as her club. If the party continues to attack despite her pleas to stop, she begs them with her dying breath to help her sister—they don't receive all of the information below.

MARINA'S REQUEST

The rusalka speaks with a deep, unearthly, and musical voice. She introduces herself as Marina and asks the party to sit by her pond.

> *"Fear not, I cannot pass the water's edge. Please, be seated and hear my tale—I see you are adventurers who may be able to help me. I fear for my sister, you see; I've dreamed of her in my waters, her breath failing. I cannot go check on her myself, for the village does rituals to keep me at bay. They fear me... A child falls into the river and it is assumed that I am to blame. Please, find little Duna, and ensure she is safe."*

If they ask about the drowned child, Marina is surprised, but sad for the family. The river is dangerous and this is not the first time a child has escaped its minder and drowned.

She offers what treasure she has – 250 gp in various objects people have lost in her pond.

HISTORY OF A RUSALKA

If the players are interested in how Marina came to be a rusalka, she may relay the following:

- She drowned just ten years ago. The current of the river carried her body to the bottom of this pond, so this is now her home.
- She does not know who killed her.
- Her younger sister, Liduna, was only seven years old when she died.
- She knows Liduna was taken in by the townsfolk, and Liduna does not know Marina still "lives."
- Marina and Liduna's parents died when their farm burned, and Marina took her sister with her as she travelled to the nearest town to seek work. Once she arrived at the village, she worked as a maid for a local merchant.
- The last memory she has is the feel of hands on her neck holding her beneath the cold water.

DEVELOPMENT

Marina offers each party member a small square sweet, and tells them that this pastila allows them to breathe underwater for 1 hour. It can only work once, and therefore should be used carefully.

The candy is sweet, tasting of apples, and is very airy to eat. It works as a *potion of water breathing*, and allows the players to cast spells and speak underwater. You may allow any player who doesn't use it during the adventure to keep it, or can have it spoil quickly.

CHAPTER 3 – FINDING LIDUNA

If the party returns to her directly, Raisa is curious if they have succeeded in defeating the water spirit. Depending on what they tell her, she may become suspicious that the village secret has been discovered and warn others.

INVESTIGATING THE VILLAGE

Information can come from a variety of villagers, see *Chapter 1* for a list of possibilities. It is noted if the villager knows the truth in case the players make Wisdom (Insight) checks. Even if confronted with their lies, most won't reveal the truth.

The party may not find all information. That is fine, the adventure is written to allow even the most unobservant party to advance, and the information can be discovered later.

ASKING ABOUT LIDUNA

- Liduna lives with Natalya Uskin, the wealthiest merchant in town, especially after she began getting glass from some of the larger cities.
- Natalya took her in when she was only seven, after her sister died.
- Kotsya, a local goatherd, has his eye on Liduna, and they've begun courting. Those who know may be uncomfortable saying this, betraying some small guilt on a successful Wisdom (Insight) check. If the party wishes to find Kotsya, he is out herding and will not be back until nightfall.
- Liduna is much loved about the town, especially for her stunning singing voice.
- She is generally considered the town's daughter.

ASKING ABOUT MARINA

- She was a young woman who died tragically about ten years ago.
- No one ever found her body, but everyone assumes she drowned in the river.
- No one knows how she died; there's a rumor that she became pregnant and killed herself from the shame. This is a lie for villagers who know the truth.
- Like Liduna, she had a stunning voice and was quite pretty.

GOING TO LIDUNA

Liduna is a seventeen year-old human girl who is beautiful and a bit reserved. She offers the party potato dumplings she is cooking—despite her evident enthusiasm and effort, they aren't very good. If the party convinces her to open up, she discusses her hopes that a local boy (Kotsya) will propose. They've been friends since she was ten years old, and she loves the idea of going back to a farm.

- She remembers her sister well, especially her singing lessons.
- She does not know how her sister died.
- She does not feel like she's in any danger.

- If the party informs her that her sister lives, she becomes furious and insists they leave, believing it to be a cruel trick.
- She is grateful to Natalya, but feels uncomfortable in this house; there has always been some distance between them.

GENERAL RUMORS AND OTHER INFORMATION

- A rusalka has taken up residence in nearby waters; some fear it will act as a vengeful spirit.
- The beginning of winter is soon, so the villagers will ask Marzanna (the local goddess of winter and death) for a kind winter.
- The winters recently have been good, and no one has died of starvation or from the cold for at least five years.

If the party tries to learn more using other tactics, they may discover the following:

- Natalya is writing a note in her private study that reads, "S — the back door will be unlocked."
- If followed, Raisa can be heard whispering to a few other villagers, telling them to "be careful around the outsiders."
- Yakov has a small book titled, "Marzanna's Grace," written in Dwarvish, which he keeps in his apron pocket. The apron is usually on him, but sometimes hangs behind the bar. The book includes a variety of ways to keep Marzanna happy, including a midwinter feast and the sacrifice of animals into a river.
- In Vena's home, there are a variety of ingredients arranged on her work table. A character who is proficient in herbalism kits or who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check knows they are ingredients for a sleeping draught.

DEVELOPMENT

Night falls. The party may wish to sleep or to continue investigating. They can rent rooms at the inn for a reasonable price.

CHAPTER 4 – NIGHTTIME SACRIFICE

MURDERERS IN THE NIGHT

The villagers send out two groups. The goal of the first is to kidnap Liduna, bring her to the small shack near the pier, and drown her. The other group attempts to stop the adventurers from interfering.

- Group A, sent for Liduna, consists of 4 **guards** and an **acolyte**. This includes Sasha and Yakov.
- Group B, sent for the party, consists of 3 **thugs**, 2 **acolytes**, and a **noble**. Natalya is the **noble**. Raisa is one of the **acolytes**.

If the party is sleeping in the inn, they awaken to noises of scraping wood across the door, as a villager secures the door from the outside. They can use strength to break free, or find another way out of the inn—regardless, they encounter Group B.

If the party is still investigating, what happens next depends on their location.

- If they are near Liduna's house, they may make a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to see Group A.
- If they are investigating elsewhere, they may make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice Group B, who is attempting to follow stealthily, or DC 15 to notice Group A with Liduna. If they fail, Group B launches an attack and gains surprise.

MEETING KOTSYA

After the players have been beset by villagers (Group B), Kotsya approaches them and alerts them to what is happening. He recently learned this information from his father, who wished to spare him the pain of not knowing what happened to his beloved. He fills the party in on what they have not discovered for themselves.

- Liduna is to be sacrificed to the goddess of winter, allowing the village to have another mild winter.
- He was intending to ask Liduna to marry him.
- Someone is sacrificed every ten years.
- His father told him that ten years ago Marina was dragged from her bed, taken to the river, and drowned.
- He couldn't bear this happening to his Liduna, and immediately set out to find the party.

ROUND CLOCK

If the party failed to prevent Liduna from being kidnapped, begin counting rounds after Kotsya approaches. At 3 rounds, Liduna is in the water. At 5 she begins to drown. At 7, she requires magical healing or a healer's kit to recover. At round 12, she dies.

If they did not prevent Liduna's kidnapping, Kotsya ushers them toward an underground chamber in the building near the pier, where Group A waits, prepared to fight.

- Once the party has defeated them, they can see Liduna in the water, being pulled down by 2 **specters**. Kotsya recognizes them as "Marzanna's Minions" and runs away in fear.
- The specters are pulling Liduna down, but release their grasp to fight the party. Keep in mind the rules for underwater combat increase the difficulty of this battle. A character may now want to eat the rusalka's gift–this takes 1 bonus action.
- When the party succeeds they may pull Liduna from the water; she is freezing cold to the touch. Depending on the round clock, describe her condition.

If they did prevent Liduna's kidnapping, Group B now finds them, attempting to grab Liduna and run.

- Once they defeat Group B, 2 specters climb out of the water and onto the dock, bringing unearthly cold with them. They attack the party, attempting to drag Liduna into the water's edge.
- At the beginning of their turn any character within 20 feet must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 1d4 cold damage.

DEVELOPMENT

Liduna is grateful for her rescue, and asks the party how they knew she was in danger. Once she learns her sister is not wholly dead, she asks them to take her to the pond, so she may meet her sister again.

The villagers who were not involved awake at the commotion, and are shocked by all that has occurred. Once they realize what their leaders were doing, they are appalled and thank the adventurers for stopping such a horrible crime. They don't want to lose their own during the winter, but it is not worth such an evil deed.

The party might wish to investigate further, perhaps not all who knew or were involved were part of the raids, but they're keeping quiet. This could be an easy way to expand the adventure if you still have time.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the pond is a simple task. Liduna is a good traveler, but does slow down the party. The journey takes approximately five hours. Read or paraphrase the following:

> Marina stands at the edge of the water, her ankles covered, and she begins crying as she sees Liduna approach.
>
> *"DUNA!"* Liduna breaks out into a run and they embrace. Marina becomes less solid with every moment she holds on.
>
> Marina removes a silver chain from her neck, which holds a plain silver ring. She places the chain around Liduna's neck, kisses her cheek, and turns to you.
>
> *"Thank you,"* she says before fading entirely, leaving no sign she was ever there. On the side of the pond, you see a small chest.

If asked, Liduna tells the party that the ring belonged to their mother. With her sister safe, Marina's soul is set to rest, and she is no longer tied to the world as a rusalka.

REWARDS

Marina has left 250 gp worth of objects in a small box on the edge of her pond. The box contains: A small necklace with a black onyx pendant (100 gp), a potion of healing, well treated fine leather gloves (25 gp), a palm-sized statuette of a bear made of marble (40 gp) and 35 gp in assorted coins.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Marzanna is a real goddess in many Slavic cultures. She is no longer worshipped, but the tradition of drowning her in effigy at the end of winter continues to this day. If it is more appropriate to your setting, change Marzanna to either your own god of winter, or modify her to be less of a goddess and more of a spirit.

Thanks to Paul for his proofreading skills and to my regular group for making the village more mysterious.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colleen Taylor, Wizard at Law



THE POLLUTION OF CONATHA

by Insha Fitzpatrick

Creature(s): *Sea Hag* | **Level(s):** *2-3*

SYNOPSIS

Mare Vinceret has kept the underwater city of Conatha thriving for centuries. Deep within the Greyspace lurks a force so strong that it could impede their progress toward peace. It dwells in a place beyond where they would ever choose to go, filled with dark aquatic life and a menacing presence that no one could match.

Juliya Alastor, the leader of Mare Vinceret, sends her best to dispose of the threat known only as Biandra, the Hag of Conatha (**sea hag**). The Hag of Conatha seeks to fix what Mare Vinceret has done to the beautiful land that she sees as corruption in disguise, then live in peace. Biandra has taken their forgotten structure and made it her own. She sits within a three-domed greenhouse with walls blanketed by vines of kelp and seaweed and swimming with deadly aquatic creatures.

Within the dark, polluted lair, Juliya's team falls into madness. One by one, Biandra's hallucinatory tricks destroy them, leaving each of them within her grasp.

Believing all is lost, Juliya finds a glimmer of hope in a crackled communication—one of the members of the party must be alive. She must send out one more group of brave adventurers to bring down Biandra for good and reclaim the underwater dome. Will the adventurers find the lost orc rogue, fight their way in, and investigate through the biodome maze? Or will they be confined to the underwater maze of Conatha in madness, trapped with the Hag of Conatha herself?

ADVENTURE HOOK

This frightful adventure is designed for characters of levels 2-3.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

As the party accepts their mission, Juliya has told the party all that she knows. She isn't holding back, but the party will be able to tell she is frightened for them. Juliya provides the following to start their journey:

- Marcelay is trapped beneath the ocean floor with the Hag of Conatha in the biodome called Conatha. She escaped the onslaught of the Hag and her hallucinations as well as her aquatic creatures. The rest of her team is gone.
- *Sending* spells and *sending stones* are weak and/or damaged. When they go deeper into the dangerous waters, they may not be able to send communications to the surface.
- The Hag of Conatha is a master manipulator. She can disguise herself in any way she sees fit. She will and can pull any tricks out of the bag, including any type of hallucinations based on fear. The adventurers must watch out for her death glare.
- Juliya's intentions: to bring Marcelay back safe and to gain back control of the polluted biodome from the Hag of Conatha and to return Conatha to its "former glory."

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Juliya Alastor:** Leader of Mare Vinceret. A young woman, who can seem very distant. She may appear cold and unfriendly, but she does this to keep tight the secrets of Mare Vinceret.
- **Quardian:** Frequently travels the Forgotten Realms but currently employed by Mare Vinceret. A young, goofy, smart **mindflayer** serving as a captain and shipbuilder of the *Yutani*, his home away from home.

- **Marcelay**: A sympathetic orc rogue who is trapped in the polluted city. She knows a bit of the way around after some exploration and is not dead yet. She was a part of the original mission of to the city. Her companions were killed, one by one, by Biandra and her creatures.
- **Biandra:** "The Hag of Conatha" to Mare Vinceret, though the city refuses to say her name. "Biandra" to those who has sympathy for her and will leave her in peace. Biandra resides inside of Mare Vinceret's forgotten dome. Biandra's ultimate goal is to have peace, but when travelers come and disturb her home, she takes matters into her own hands.

CHAPTER 1 – SINK DEEPER

The adventurers board the ship with Quardian as their captain. The ship is named the *Yutani*, a submersible design, built with rugged steel for heavy protection from the deep ocean. The *Yutani* is also rusted underneath and around the sides, from its many adventures underneath the water.

> As you voyage along the deeper reaches of the grand seas, the push of the ocean floor continues to rumble against the steel of the ship. The sound is more violent than you have ever heard from a ship—it screams in agony, but nevertheless pushes through to get to its destination.

The journey takes adventurers a full day because of the angry waters and current pushing back towards the ship as they sink deeper. DMs are encouraged to create a spooky atmosphere on the journey. They are also encouraged to allow players to speak among themselves about the mission. Maybe encourage them to dive into their deepest fears so you get a sense of what the Hag of Conatha should torture them with later on.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE DOME

Adventurers are encouraged to talk with Quardian about the dome. He's seen the structure many times and dropped off the first group before their tragic demise. Marcelay was his favorite.

Information Quardian knows about the dome:

- The dome was a sacred structure of Mare Vinceret for a very long time. Hidden below the depths of the sea, it became old and ravaged among the other buildings of the ocean city. Mare Vinceret abandoned the structure and left it to ruin and decay.
- From what he's heard, Biandra had a fascination and love for the structure.
- The Hag of Conatha is "sympathetic in creation, vicious in execution." She is unapologetic in her need to protect the structure because it is her home.

"WE'RE HERE."

> You look outside the window of the ship — the lights of Mare Vinceret long past swallowed with the oncoming of the smug and fog of the ocean soon devouring you. The atmosphere shifts significantly, becoming dark and sinister but intriguing. The dome is almost in view, about 1,000 more feet left to go — a circular, round structure surrounded by the moss of the sea and kelp.

Quardian tells the adventurers to suit up so he is able to drop them off on top of the structure. He can only go this far, so the characters will have to drop in from the top.

The party needs to gather their gear to descend into the dome. It should be reasonably easy, but something isn't quite right. A success on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check will alert the party to a **swarm of quippers** aiming to attack. Any character that fails the perception check is caught off guard by the quippers.

After defeating the quippers, the party can pause and take a breather but have to get to the biodome quickly before losing oxygen so deep down. Have the party figure out how to get into the dome from the top. They are equipped with a harpoon, knife, and whatever utilities they have at their disposal. A success-

ful DC 12 Strength check would allow them to penetrate the structure.

DEVELOPMENT

The full party lands inside the biodome at once. If someone is missing, let the party figure out a way to save them and bring them into the dome. The biodome is dark, misty, and eerily silent. As they look above them, the vines of the dome seal tightly, covering up the part that they came through. They're now locked in with a sea hag, unknown territory, and a lost rogue.

CHAPTER 2 – OPERATION: MARCELAY

The party can look around this first room for clues of Marcelay's whereabouts. On a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they see Marcelay's *sending stones* underneath a desk. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check is necessary to determine whether they're able to work the device. The device may crackle and break up if mishandled.

There is one door that leads into the rest of the dome. It's against a hidden panel wall that adventures have to push and/or search to open. A similar panel is on the left side of the room but cannot be opened. DMs are encouraged to give an atmosphere and further features to this room.

> As you enter the biodome structure, you start to look around. The dome is barebones at best, but this particular part is the entrance of the first sphere. It contains remnants of the past, a couple of desks, chairs, a control pad that doesn't work anymore. All these things are overlaid with and by gross kelp and aqua ooze.
>
> As you enter, there's a long hallway leading toward the next dome.

Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 11 or higher sense something behind them. They will see the illusory appearance of a woman behind them. She is slit-mouthed, with one eye covered by the sea kelp and the other looking directly at the party. She projects something that the adventurer fears. This image should not attack them! Only scare them. If the DM chooses to attack the character with the image, the rest of the party will not be able to see it.

HYPNOTIZED

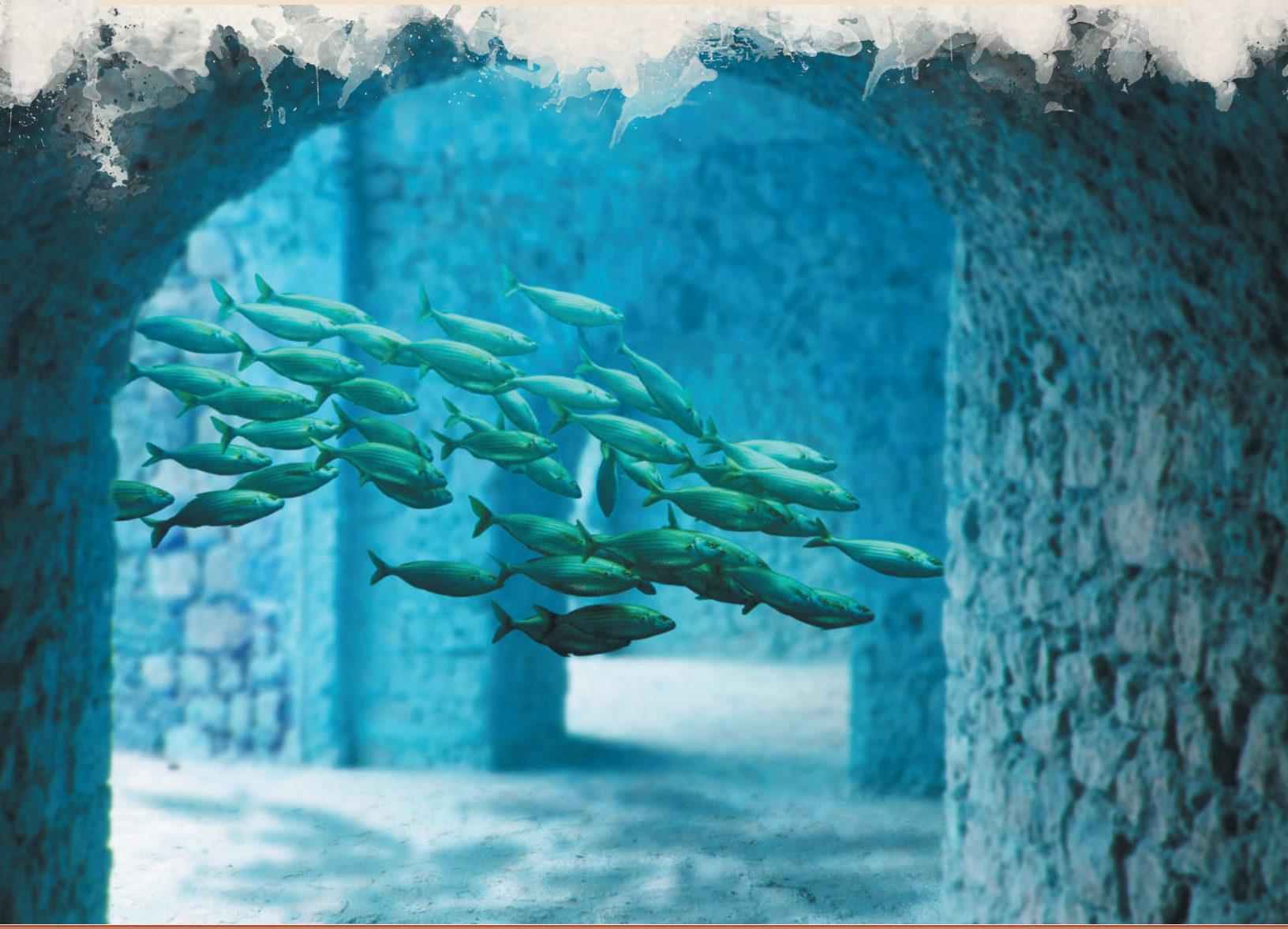
The party come upon another door and must push past to get into the next room. Once they enter, they see a larger room than the previous one. The door slams shut behind them. A success on a DC10 Wisdom (Perception) check will let them begin to figure out what's going on in this room. Let the team start to investigate.

> This particular room is very damaged, much more than the first. Thick kelp has grown to reinforce the walls and keep. There are bones lacing the bottom.

Once in the room, use the table on pg. 38 to determine the order in which characters make discoveries in this room. This is a "pass or fail" loot table; meaning, some adventurers may find multiple items or none at all. They must discover all the items until the table runs dry.



D6	Description	Successful DC 12 Investigation Check
1	A large panel, much like the one in the first room.	This panel will open up a secret door into the next hallway.
2	Underneath a pile of broken glass, aligned with seaweed and sea ooze. A pile sits off to the side.	Remove the muck to find the remains of a fallen adventurer. He still has meat on his bones, torn apart by sharp teeth. In his bag, a pouch containing 20 sp, a knife, and a *potion of healing*.
3	Bones, twisted and broken, placed in a pile, with meat fallen off some bones and others picked dry.	Scattered kelp, with Mare Vinceret jeweled golden symbol token. Worth 50-100 gp.
4	A hum is heard, distant and faint, through the wall of the dome toward the hidden door.	The hidden passageway to get closer to the last remaining dome is here. A success on a DC12 Strength check is needed to be able to push it.
5	A small group of frogs pile against something standing.	Marcelay's bag with her belongings. She's been camping out here for a while.
6	A twisted lock of kelp woven around a tall figure.	Push the seaweed off to reveal another fallen adventurer, stood up by kelp like a statue. He possesses a small knife, 5 gp, *wand of magic missiles*.



A passive Wisdom (Perception) of 10 or higher hears a faint humming sound. The humming sound softly switches and become a very high-pitched tone, one that isn't designed to stay in your ears for long. The sound becomes deafening to them and starts to drive them mad.

Those who fail the Wisdom (Perception) check face further issues. The Hag of Conatha is 30 feet away, and now uses her *horrifying appearance* ability on those who failed the Perception check. The ones who see the horrific appearance of the Hag of Conatha are frozen on sight.

> The ones who are seeing the horrific appearance of the Hag of Conatha are frozen on sight. You are constricted, not able to move a muscle. It feels like you're paralyzed. Something invisible wraps around your throat tightly and you're struggling for air like you're trying to breathe underwater. You lose breath bit by bit.
>
> In the darkness, a masked woman, average build with travelers gear, comes out of the shadows. She points her bow at the Hag. The Hag tries to turn her glare towards the woman, but Marcelay's glasses are blacked. She shoots again. The Hag of Conatha becomes frightened and disappears. The masked woman lifts her goggles and mask, *"ARE YOU TRYING TO DIE?!"*

The adventurers can have some time to catch their breath and get their vision back on track. Seeing the Hag's power can be quite a lot. Let Marcelay and the adventurers figure out a game plan before dealing with the Hag of Conatha again.

What Marcelay knows about the Hag of Conatha is important:

- The Hag of Conatha used to live deep below the sea, and thrived there. She took over the structure when Mare Vinceret decided that they wanted to destroy what she found sacred. Marcelay does not believe in their philosophy to do this, but it's her job to protect Mare Vinceret's goal.
- The Hag of Conatha is unforgiving. She is unapologetic and knows she's a monster. She uses this to her advantage to keep everyone away.
- The Hag of Conatha believes Conatha is sacred. She believes that what she is doing is beautiful, and she can finally rule over something that is as beautiful as she thinks it is.

> **Marcelay:** *"She's a conqueror now. She's a conqueror of something she thinks is so beautiful. Biandra wants to take what's hers because Mare Vinceret failed to protect what she held dear."*

DEVELOPMENT

Marcelay starts to mess with the panels. The door opens by itself. Marcelay reveals that she didn't do that. A weaving tunnel appears, not like the hallways before. This tunnel is circular and transparent, appearing like an aquarium. Aqua blues surround the tunnel—the creatures of the deep swim around it. The pathway is filled with meatless bones, sea ooze, and dead quippers. Once they follow the path to the door, they find it open to the largest of the structures. The door slams shut behind them. The Hag of Conatha has them right where she wants them.

CHAPTER 3 – BIANDRA, THE SEA HAG

Marcelay warns the group that they must stay together. The dome is dark, the darkest out of all the domes. The Hag of Conatha starts her attack with another illusory appearance. She appears to the group, surrounding them with her multiple appearances—each character must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence check to detect which hag is the real one. When exposed, the Hag attacks with her claws.

A BARGAIN

If the party is losing to the Hag, Marcelay quickly observes the damage to the party and thinks on her feet. The Hag of Conatha immediately stops and look at Marcelay and the party. She smirks a bit with a cunning smile. Sea hags think they are the most clever creatures.

> **Marcelay:** *"WAIT! STOP! I.... WE WANT TO MAKE A BARGAIN."*

Have the party work together to figure out what the Hag of Conatha might want to bargain for. Each character should get a turn. The DM chooses whether to accept or reject the bargains offered to the Hag of

Conatha. They are the ultimate judge and juror.

Bargains are no joke. To bargain with a sea hag means giving up something precious. Let the adventurers think of what they've heard about The Hag of Conatha so far. What would she desire the most? What would be something that the adventurers can do or have that she would want to obtain?

For each bargain, the party must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check to see if their bargain is good enough to be considered by the DM or sea hag.

DEVELOPMENT

When the bargains are proposed, proceed to *Conclusion*.

CONCLUSION

If the Hag of Conatha accepts the bargain, the party will be set free. They are free to find a way out of the dome. The Hag will return to her existence under the sea and have the privilege of calling her Biandra. However, if they think they can outsmart The Hag, they can most certainly try. The bargain is broken, and the adventurers have to fight the Hag of Conatha until she is defeated.

If the sea hag does not accept the bargain, the fight continues until the sea hag is ultimately defeated.

Alternative: Characters who feel sympathetic towards the sea hag and turn against Mare Vinceret are also free to leave. Marcelay, who has grown to have sympathy for the Hag, will go along with this deal, even though she is somewhat hesitant at first. Marcelay knows how it feels to be displaced so this guides her to agree with the characters if they have sympathy toward the Hag. However, when the party travels back to Mare Vinceret, they have the choice whether or not to tell Juliya about the sea hag.

Leaving Conatha: The adventurers must suit themselves up beforehand. They find their way out of the dome through the last entrance of the last dome. A success on a DC 12 Strength check can move the door. Once they do, they are now on the floor of the sea. Quardian waits for their arrival atop the structure. Once he sees the party, he's thrilled to see his friend and the party safe.

REWARDS

Characters will be rewarded XP for the following. All values are per character.

DESCRIPTION	*XP*
Swarm of Quippers	200
Investigation	300
Best bargain to the sea hag	200
Defeating the sea hag	450
"Defeating" the sea hag	450



AUTHOR'S NOTES

There's something about the sea hag that always gets to me. I didn't want her to be this person who wants to destroy beautiful things. I wanted her to make her OWN beautiful thing. Within the bones and decay of Conatha, the sea hag is still protective of her space, her sanctuary and that's something that's important to her as a character. People have tried to take over and conquer things, but now she's conquered her space. She's fulfilled in this.

I want to thank my unbelievably WONDERFUL friend Justin Partridge for being my cheerleader throughout all of this. You've put up with my many, many questions, my late night yelling, and taught me all you know. You're the absolute best.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Insha Fitzpatrick is a freelance writer and editor straight out of Jersey. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the horror website DIS/MEMBER (dis-member.com). She has contributed to many publications including Geek, Rogues Portal, Nightmare on Film Street, Birth. Movies.Death, Frederator Studios and Women Write About Comics. She has a mighty love for comics, RPGs, *D&D*, and all things horror. Find her at @benwyyatt on Twitter and @iinshagram on Instagram.





Illustration by Dungeon Secrets

TANGLED BRAIDS

by David G. Harris

Creature: *Banshee* | **Level:** *3*

CWs: *Depictions of murder and male predatory behavior*

SYNOPSIS

A spirit is attacking a town — no one knows why, but they're determined to be rid of her. The adventuring party is recruited to investigate. However, what appears to be a simple haunting turns into a story of justice. *Tangled Braids* is designed for characters of 2nd – 5th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The town of Kiln is a well-known place nestled in a valley. A cry for help has reached the entire region and a substantial reward is offered.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

A murder has occurred and the victim seeks justice. Aela and Brisa were about to be married, but on their wedding day, Aela was killed out of jealousy and hate by the town's leader, Toalf. Now Aela haunts the town, attacking as she pleases. Brisa has sought out the help of Gaea, the town cleric, to put Aela to rest and find out who killed her love.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Aela:** The elf **banshee**. Killed on her wedding day by Toalf. She now attacks the town, attempting to seek out justice.
- **Brisa:** Aela's lover and town huntress (**scout**). She seeks out the reason why Aela's spirit is haunting the town. Turning to Gaea, her friend and cleric, she hopes to put her love's spirit to rest.
- **Toalf:** The town's leader (**bandit captain**) and murderer of Aela. He killed her out of jealousy of their love and hatred for her kind. He seeks a way of removing the spirit before he is found out.
- **Gaea:** Cleric (**priest**) and historian. She seeks to put the spirit to rest and help her friend Brisa.
- **Nithel:** Half-elf owner (**commoner**) of The Cat's Bed. She is kind but doesn't suffer fools easily.



CHAPTER 1 – A ROAD TO KILN

THE CAT'S BED

The Cat's Bed is a small, cozy inn a few hours' ride from the nearest village of Kiln. Kiln is the largest town in the Gilded Valley. Local legend tells of an ancient relic called the Bruden's Braid, an artifact that has the ability to grant wishes to those who possess it. However, the relic may just be a myth.

A fire roars, and behind the bar a petite but lithe old half-elf makes herself busy. Just to the left of the fireplace is a small notice board of jobs and requests.

On the notice board is a large wanted sign, which reads:

Adventurers needed!! Must be of good standing and able to deal with monsters. Large reward offered. Speak to Toalf in Kiln.

Arriving at The Cat's Bed is a good place for the party to start the adventure. The party might meet each other here first, or if this adventure is being played in a longer campaign the inn may provide a nice rest between locations.

Nithel is happy to welcome new travelers and pesters the party for news about where they've come from and where they might be headed to.

Nithel also provides the following information if the party is friendly and tell some interesting stories:

- The wanted sign went up seven days ago. Rumor has it that Kiln is beset by some ghost or banshee and no one's brave enough or smart enough to stop the entity.
- Toalf and his cronies often come here to harass some of her elven patrons. She would gladly see Toalf and his men leave the area.
- She's heard of the Bruden's Braid, and when she was younger she thought she could find it, but she thinks it's more of an old legend than an actual object. Story has it that the Braid could grant wishes.

ARRIVAL AT KILN

The ride to Kiln is gentle. The land is picturesque — tall valley mountains frame your view, and the roadside is scattered with long forests. However, this peaceful atmosphere is broken as suddenly screams come from up ahead, and the sound of running feet and commanding shouts echo around you.

As you round the bend you see a whirling spectre dashing around half a dozen warriors. Moving from one warrior to the next, the spectre leaves them dazed and fallen. There are two warriors left standing: a man with a long moustache, brandishing a sword and curved dagger, and a cleric wrapped in long white robes, her hands wrapped around a staff.

The party should fend off Aela the Banshee, but give them a taste of her power.

Tactics: She attacks the party if they attack first. Aela focuses her attacks on Toalf, the town's leader and thane, and avoids hurting Gaea, the cleric and town priestess. Once she has lost 15 hit points, Aela flees and disappears.

After the fight, Toalf greets the heroes. He rewards them immediately with a bag of gems for their aid in the battle. At this moment, Toalf is kind and genial, and although Toalf is genuinely grateful for their help his honest face hides a more nefarious intent. Gaea also greets the heroes warmly. She has no rewards for them, but heals them if they are injured.

THE DEBATE

Toalf and Gaea ask the party to deal with the spectre once and for all.

Toalf's plan is simple: go to the tombs, kill the spectre, and burn her body so that she can never return. He offers a considerable reward — 500 gp. Gaea warns that desecrating the body may anger the dead in the tomb. A DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Toalf is hiding something about his plan. If confronted, Toalf emphatically denies any dishonesty. If further pressed he will grow angry and even threaten violence if they dare besmirch his honor and good word.

Gaea requests that the party guard her. She will attempt a ritual, once at the grave of the spirit, that will commune with the dead to find out why the spirit is hostile.

Toalf says that the spirit only wishes to hurt people. Gaea admits that she has little gold, but that Toalf's plan is doomed to fail and the spirit is sure to return.

In this argument, a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check shows a flash of Toalf's anger and disgust towards Gaea. He is extremely dismissive of all her suggestions and the party can tell that Toalf's anger can be triggered at the smallest of slights.

CHAPTER 2 – WHERE SHE DID SLEEP

THE ROAD TO THE MOUND

A hunter sits by the road towards the tombs, skinning and gutting a deer. Her hair is tied into a tight braid which hangs down over her chainmail and leather armor. She looks up at you, her face covered in scars and notches.

- If the party is with Gaea, Brisa offers to join them. She's curious to no end to hear about the adventuring party's stories and adventures.
- If the party has decided to go with Toalf's plan and have left Gaea behind, Brisa is cautious of them and suggests that this plan of attack is folly that they had best head back. She does not offer to join them in their quest, but warns them that not all is as it seems.

THE MOUND OF THANES

Standing in a huge clearing are three large hills. White flowers bloom over each one. Looming in front of you is a stone doorway leading into the darkness of the hilltop.

The Mound of Thanes is the resting place for a series of ancient, petty thanes. Many people stay clear of this place if they can, as the dead do not rest easy. Brisa weeps openly at the sight of the tomb before revealing her story.

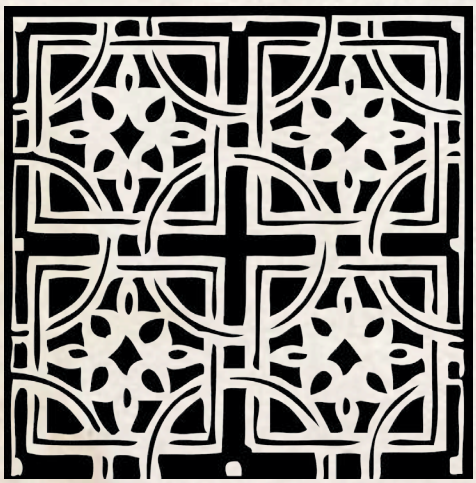
"Three months ago I met a travelling elf. Her name was Aela. I had never felt anything like it; it was like a dream. We would wander the woods together. I felt at home in her arms. For years, I had searched these tombs for Bruden's Braid. But the day Aela walked into my life, I realized I was given my one wish. To be with her...

Just over two tendays ago, the day we were to be married under a big oak tree. That's where I found her... I just remember looking at her and thinking how red her blood was compared to her skin.

I took her body to rest among the thanes of old. I swore to watch over her and make sure none would disturb her final slumber. That's when the trouble started. She needs revenge. I'm not sure against whom, but she needs it. I now search through these tombs for Bruden's Braid again, for one last wish: revenge."

Brisa is determined to enter into the tomb and find out what happened to her love.

If the party does not have Brisa with them, the story between Aela and Brisa will be missed entirely. Instead, once the party has burnt the body of Alea and dealt with her spirit, Brisa is waiting for them outside the Mound. There she confronts them with her tale but also challenge them to combat over her lost love. If the party is sorrowful for their actions, a DC 19 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Birsa not to fight. However, the party must help her find the murderer who killed Aela and bring them to justice.



Room 1: The Entrance Chamber

You enter into a large chamber, the smell of dirt and damp air filling your nostrils. There is a corridor to the east and another corridor that slopes downwards to the north. Two unlit braziers sit in opposite corners of the room. It is completely dark a few feet from the doorway.

Room 2: The Eastern Chamber

A large stone sarcophagus sits in the center of this circular room upon a small outcrop. There is only one corridor behind you leading back to the entrance chamber. The floor in front of you has collapsed down to darkness, and there is no obvious way to cross it. Along the walls are engravings of warriors riding horses in a procession on the way to battle.

A DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check gets the party across the pit, otherwise they fall into a 15 foot deep pit taking 1d4 bludgeoning damage from falling. Upon the small outcrop where the sarcophagus lies, a skeletal figure rests in wait inside. If the sarcophagus is opened a hand shoots out to attack. A small skirmish with a **skeleton** takes place, an ancient thane of old.

Tactics: The skeleton is a mindless being, intent on doing harm to whomever disturbs its slumber. Once the skeleton has been defeated, the party finds a series of items inside.

You see a slender ribbon made of gold cloth, a bag of coins, and a rusted blade. The center of the ribbon has strange runes sewn into it. Some of the ribbon appears to be burnt.

This is **Bruden's Braid**, a magical ribbon imbued with three wishes. Two wishes have been burned through. Gaea attempts to identify the item for them.

Room 3: The Long Cooridor Down

Descending before you is a long dark corridor. The air is musky and the damp smell of mold fills your lungs.

Without a light source, a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check (or DC 10 with a light source) reveals:

The walls are solid stone. However, seeing past the cobwebs and dangling lichen are small holes, situated at head, chest and leg height to a human.

The corridor is an ancient trap to guard the bodies of the thanes of old. Every second stone slab is a pressure plate. If a weight of 20 lbs. is placed on the plate, three darts fire from both sides, dealing 1d4 damage; on a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, this damage is halved. There are four pressure plates, each one separated by a safe plate.

Disarming the pressure plates requires a DC 13 Dexterity check and an iron spike or similar object to wedge beneath the plates. Leaping over the plates is simple with a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check for each plate.

Room 4: Northern Chamber

You enter into a large circular room. The walls are pitted with carved alcoves each containing a sarcophagus. Inside, each skeleton is wrapped up in cloth of gold, silver, white or burgundy. In the center of the room lying on a bed of moss and leaves is a woman, untouched, wearing a white robe stained brown with blood. A crown of decayed flowers sits upon her hair. Her body is strangely well preserved.

This chamber appears to be an intersection, with passageways leading east, north, south and west.

If the party is with Gaea: Gaea prepares the room for a spell. She requires some time to communicate with the spirit. While she is within her trance, she cannot be disturbed, or else the spell may break and she must start again.

On a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the party discovers that the wounds on Aela's body were made by a small curved dagger, rare in this region. At the finding of the dagger allow the players to make another DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check to remember that Toalf was carrying one when they first met him.

Once the party is ready, Gaea attempts to summon the spirit. **Skeletons** assemble around the characters in the room, responding to the spell. They drag themselves out of their sarcophaguses, pushing off the heavy stone lids, still dressed in their macabre clothing. Combat lasts for six rounds. If Gaea is hit by any creature, she must redo the spell for that round. If a player is close enough to Gaea, they may voluntarily take the damage instead. One skeleton should awaken per round, each from a different wall, ending in total of six skeletons that the party needs to fight.

Tactics: The skeletons are mindless beings drawn to Gaea's power. Their priority is to attack Gaea. If the party intervenes, the skeletons fight them instead.

If the party have taken Toalf's route: Once inside, the party will find the body easily accessible. They need a way of burning the body and keep the fire stoked for at least ten rounds of combat. As soon as they attempt to desecrate the body, the spirit of Aela will materialize in the room.

Tactics: Aela attempts to first stop her body from being burnt, but then will harm the party.
Aela fights to the death. If slain, she uses her last moments to write, in ghostly fashion, Toalf's name in blood.

Aela's Message

If the party is with Brisa:

> The ritual ends with a shattering white light and standing on the stone sarcophagus is the image of Aela the elf. She gently steps down on the ground and puts a spectral hand upon Brisa's cheek.

Reunited between the worlds, they cannot touch one another but Aela can speak through Gaea. She reveals the truth of who killed her and how.

Aela had waited under the oak for Brisa, but while she was waiting, a man had appeared, and specifically said that Brisa had sent him. He had told her that Brisa had changed her mind and that he was to deliver a message. That's when he approached her and drew a dagger. Aela names the killer: Toalf.

Aela's spirit returns to her body, to rest for now. Brisa asks the party for their testimonies, as she plans on accusing Toalf and seeing justice brought upon him. Gaea warns that Toalf is well liked in the community, and that it will take a great deal of effort to change some people's attitudes.

If the party followed Toalf's plan:

> The spirit wails in torment and the flames surround the body lying on the floor. Howling, the spirit whirls around the room before hovering gently above the ash. A spectral finger reaches out and pulls the ash across the stone floor, T-O-A-L-F, before vanishing into the darkness.

Aela's spirit has been trapped within the confines of the mound. She will stay in the tomb for the rest of eternity covering the walls in Toalf's name until someone eventually finds justice. The party may leave the tomb safety but they will be met with Brisa as outlined in The Mound of Thanes section above. There the party might piece together Toalf's plan and his murderous ways.

Chapter 3 – Facing Monsters

The Trial

Toalf is well liked in the community. Many people outright refuse to believe that he is in the wrong. Various arguments are made against the party and their accusation:

- "He's not a monster!"
- "He's a nice man."
- "Brisa is a liar, and the outsiders are liars."
- "Brisa is clearly upset that her lover left her, she shouldn't take it out on other people."
- "Brisa is hysterical."

Toalf's influence over the town, especially the men of the town, is toxic. How will they convince the townsfolk of Toalf's horrific behavior? On a successful DC 10 Wisdom check, offer one suggestion:

- Toalf has been a bully. Maybe find those he's intimidated and encourage them to speak out. A successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check finds a few people in the town who overheard Toalf talk about a killing, but were too afraid to tell anyone.
- Maybe Toalf has some evidence in his house. On a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check the party finds a curved dagger — the murder weapon.

It is possible to resolve this conflict without violence. However, Toalf is violent if he is about to lose the trial and attempt to request a trial by combat. A trial he knows he might win.

If the party feels like they have no option, that their statements are not being heard, they too can request a trial by combat and solve things by the sword.

FIGHTING MONSTERS

Toalf and his two **bandits** fight against the party.

Tactics: Toalf taunts as many as he can, while two bandits systematically surround one person until they are knocked out.

CONCLUSION: THE LAST WISH

A huge oak nestles at the top of a hill overlooking the town. Its boughs have grown so long and large that they droop down to the grass, while others spread themselves across the sky creating a cool shade in the sun. Brisa is standing with Aela's body waiting patiently.

Aela's body is brought to the oak tree deep in the forest. Brisa gives Aela's body a final burial at the base of the tree. She invites the party to join her to bid farewell to her love.

Just as the last rites are being read for Aela, Gaea will run up to the party to tell them she has unlocked the secrets of the ribbon and believes it still contains enough power, she suspects, to cast one last wish.
If they give the wish to Brisa, she is overwhelmed and reunited with her love. They immediately make plans to leave the valley and make a new life somewhere else.
If not, Brisa thanks them anyway and makes plans to leave the valley and make a new life far away.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The party have completed the adventure, but more awaits! The crypts are far larger and there are many more artifacts to be found within them.

Gaea is planning on going to a festival up the valley. Strangely, she hasn't heard from anyone there in quite some time. She might ask the party to join her, Brisa, and Aela, if she has been revived, to investigate.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

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

Obstacle	XP
Initial Aela Fight	250
Skeletons	50 per Skeleton
Dart Trap	50
Defeating Toalf without violence	700
Toalf (bandit captain)	450
Bandits	25 per Bandit
Aela (banshee)	1,100
Gaea (priest)	450
Brisa (scout)	100

TREASURE REWARDS

Item	Value
Bag of Gems	30 gold pieces
Bag of Coins	17 silver pieces
Rusted Blade	30 copper pieces

Bruden's Braid

Trinket, rare

Requires attunement by a Cleric, Wizard or Sorcerer.

You can use an action and incant the runes printed up on ribbon to cast the *wish* spell, igniting the ribbon in the process.

This item can only be used once.

This beautiful ribbon once belonged to Bruden, a powerful warrior mage, who wore it in her hair.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This story is a practice of listening to voices that don't have a chance to be heard and how to convince others to hear them as well. In real life, the villain is rarely so obvious and violence certainly isn't the first option for conflict resolution. I wanted in my story for players to explore conflict options when facing Toalf other than violence. How do they access the community? How do they convince people who do not want to hear? How do we change minds and empower those who feel powerless? It's certainly not by the edge of a sword or the heat of a fireball. It's the major reason why I decided to reward a substantially larger amount of xp for clever players who can resolve and "defeat" Toalf in a non violent manner. Good luck fellow DM, and keep telling stories.

I'd like to acknowledge all the amazing and strong females and non-binary people in my life, especially Bella. You continue to inspire and empower. I could not forget to mention my wonderful *D&D* group, love you all. Finally thanks to Ashley, who is an inspiration and powerhouse all to herself!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David is a theatre maker, DM and writer from Melbourne, Australia. He lectures and teaches in game design and has travelled the world making art and telling stories. He can be reached at @Harrowmir on Twitter.





"Ruins" by Lluis Rigalt

THE LOCRIAN WAY

by Benjamin L. Eastman & Matt Dunn

Creature: *Siren* | **Level:** *3*

SYNOPSIS

Driven off course by a devastating storm, you crash land on an island where sailors are lured beyond the foreboding treeline. While searching for your comrades, you find yourselves trapped between two warring cultures. Can you unlock the mysteries of Locria before it kills you?

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters spent the last several months in a faraway locale, slaying monsters and saving villagers. Their task completed, they've booked voyage home on the *Aedein*, a sailing vessel. If you're inserting this adventure into an ongoing campaign, you already know what happened in the last adventure. If you're running this as a one-shot or the first adventure of your campaign, ask the characters the following questions to fill in their mutual backstory.

- Where are you coming from?
- What was your goal?
- How did you succeed?
- What did this cost you?
- What did you learn about your companions?
- What did your companions learn about you?

You should also pass each player a blank index card and ask them to write down what their character misses the most about home. The answers to these questions will help you to run the rest of the adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Locria is an island adrift in the middle of the Calquean Sea. Distant from any major trade route, its main inhabitants are a choir of sirens and a tribe of lizardfolk. With Locria's natural resources stretched too thin, the lizardfolk now hunt sirens to eliminate their major competitor.

CHAPTER 1 – A COMING STORM

The adventure begins aboard the *Aedein*, an old wooden shipping vessel that's seen better days. Each player should introduce their character to the party and describe their location on the ship — whether piloting from the helm, perched high in the crow's nest, or even swabbing the poop deck.

The Aedein is captained by Goose Seonu (CG female human **pirate**). While an apt sailor, she often defers to the wishes of the characters, who are her employers on this voyage. Another fifteen pirates of various races and gender identities crew the ship.

1. TEMPEST

It is a clear sunny day on the Calquean Sea as the *Aedein* rocks with the gentle waves. Suddenly, the sharp smell of ozone draws your attention to the changing skies as alarmed cries arise from around the ship. Dark black clouds roll in, covering the vessel like a swift blanket. *"It's too big to go around,"* bellows the captain gravely. *"Make yourselves useful, lest we all take a long swim!"*

An intense storm front is rapidly overtaking the *Aedein*. The characters must help batten down the hatches and secure its cargo. Success means that they just might survive the storm, while failure could mean their death.

In this skill challenge, each character describes the action they're taking to protect the ship. This might include piloting the ship (water vehicles proficiency), lowering the sails (Athletics) or casting protective spells (Arcana). Encourage creative thinking when approaching this problem, and make sure that every character acts once before anyone takes a second turn.

After they describe their action, the character must succeed on an appropriate skill check against DC 13. Grant advantage on the skill check when an approach is especially favorable or novel, and impose disadvantage when an approach seems unsuitable. Describe the consequences of each result.

If they make three successful checks before three failures, the characters pass the skill challenge. If they fail three times before their third success, they fail the skill challenge and suffer consequences detailed in the next encounter.

II. Running Aground

A mass of land arises from the torrential darkness as a soaked voice from the crow's nest cries, *"Brace for impact!"*

Pushed off course by the storm, the *Aedein* is on an unavoidable collision course with the Isle of Locria. The character at the helm must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Water Vehicles) check to avoid major damage to the ship. If the characters failed the skill challenge this check is made at disadvantage.

After running aground on the island, Captain Seonu suggests that everyone remain on the ship. She cautions that nothing can be learned until the storm passes.

After the worst of the storm passes in the early evening, a cold front rolls over the island. The characters must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw to gain the benefit of a long rest. They have disadvantage on this saving throw if they leave the confines of the ship or they failed the skill challenge in part I.

Chapter 2 – Scouting the Island

Measuring four miles in diameter, Locria is a oblong forested island amidst the Calquean Sea. Lacking a natural harbor, sailors have never dropped anchor off its shores. Locria isn't marked on any of Captain Seonu's maps.

I. Scouting the Beachhead

The characters can best examine the damage to the ship by the first rays of the morning. Much of the hull was ripped up when the ship ran ashore, leaving a sizable hole in the vessel. Until the hull can be repaired, the *Aedein* is stranded on the beach. If the characters succeeded on their water vehicles check in the last encounter, it takes seven days to complete repairs; if they failed, it takes fourteen days.

A former shipwright, Captain Seonu can repair the Aedein if she has enough lumber. Luckily, the island is covered with oak and pine trees, many which were downed during the recent storm. The captain orders her sailors into the forest in teams of five to retrieve downed trees. She asks the characters to accompany them.

Characters that choose to scout the beach find flotsam and jetsam washed up along the shoreline. One of these characters first encounters the siren's "song"—see the *What You Desire Most* sidebar below.

What You Desire Most

In Greek mythology, sirens are beautiful women who use the power of song to lure sailors into shipwrecks. This adventure presupposes that sirens are actually genderless humanoids whose songs allow them to appear as whatever the viewer most desires. For sailors who have spent months at sea, this may be a serenading female. Your characters may glimpse visions of what they aspire toward, such as riches or titles, while others might see something they lost, such as family members.

Hunted by lizardfolk, the sirens struggle to survive on Locria. While they don't directly harm visitors, the sirens will manipulate the characters into conflict with the lizardfolk. If tracked by the characters, the sirens use major image to project a greater threat that allows for their escape.

While traveling between encounters in this chapter, sirens may use their Luring Song, tempting the characters by evoking the thing they miss most about home. Use this tactic whenever the characters fail a Wisdom (Survival) check to track the sailors or when the characters don't know what to do.

Two sailors don't return from the woods after stepping away to relieve themselves. The captain asks the party to find her missing sailors. Returning to the forest, the characters locate tracks left by the sailors leading deeper inland. Characters that succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check notice that the sailors' footprints are elongated and erratic, suggesting the sailors may be charmed.

Characters that succeed on DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) checks continue to track the missing sailors to the subsequent encounters in this chapter. If they fail a check, the characters may be tempted by the sirens or suffer other consequences listed below.

II. LIZARDFOLK PATROL

Traveling along a game path, fragrant smells greet you as reeds and amaranth flowers spread out from nearby pools. A group of lizardfolk, their scales brown and dark with mottled yellow spots, observe your approach, readying weapons with threatening hisses.

Lizardfolk patrol the island's interior in search of sirens. Realizing that the characters are pursuing the missing sailors, sirens have led the characters near this patrol in hopes of thinning out lizardfolk numbers. This patrol consists of five **lizardfolk**. (Add one more lizardfolk for each character after the fourth.)

Two of these lizardfolk hide in deep ponds among the reeds along the paths. From this vantage point, they can observe from stealth while still able to breathe. Lizardfolk have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks while submerged.

Lizardfolk wrap wet clay around their ears to protect against the siren's song—treat all lizardfolk as deafened. As an action, lizardfolk can remove the clay to end this condition. While they can't hear the characters, they smell them coming and aren't surprised.

These lizardfolk also use noxious projectiles attached to their javelins. In lieu of damage, a targeted creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. At the end of each turn, a creature can make another Constitution saving throw. On a success, the poisoned condition ends.

Languages of Locria

Long isolated on the island, the lizardfolk speak an archaic form of Draconic. Sirens speak both Common and Draconic.

III. BOAR'S HEAD

Bones and corpses of boars litter the bottom of a nearby pit. Four long sharpened spikes erupt up from the earth, clearly designed to spear whatever beast who has the misfortune of falling from above.

Two boars stride towards the pit but your appearance changes their path. They turn, digging their hooves into the dirt while lowering their tusks in your direction.

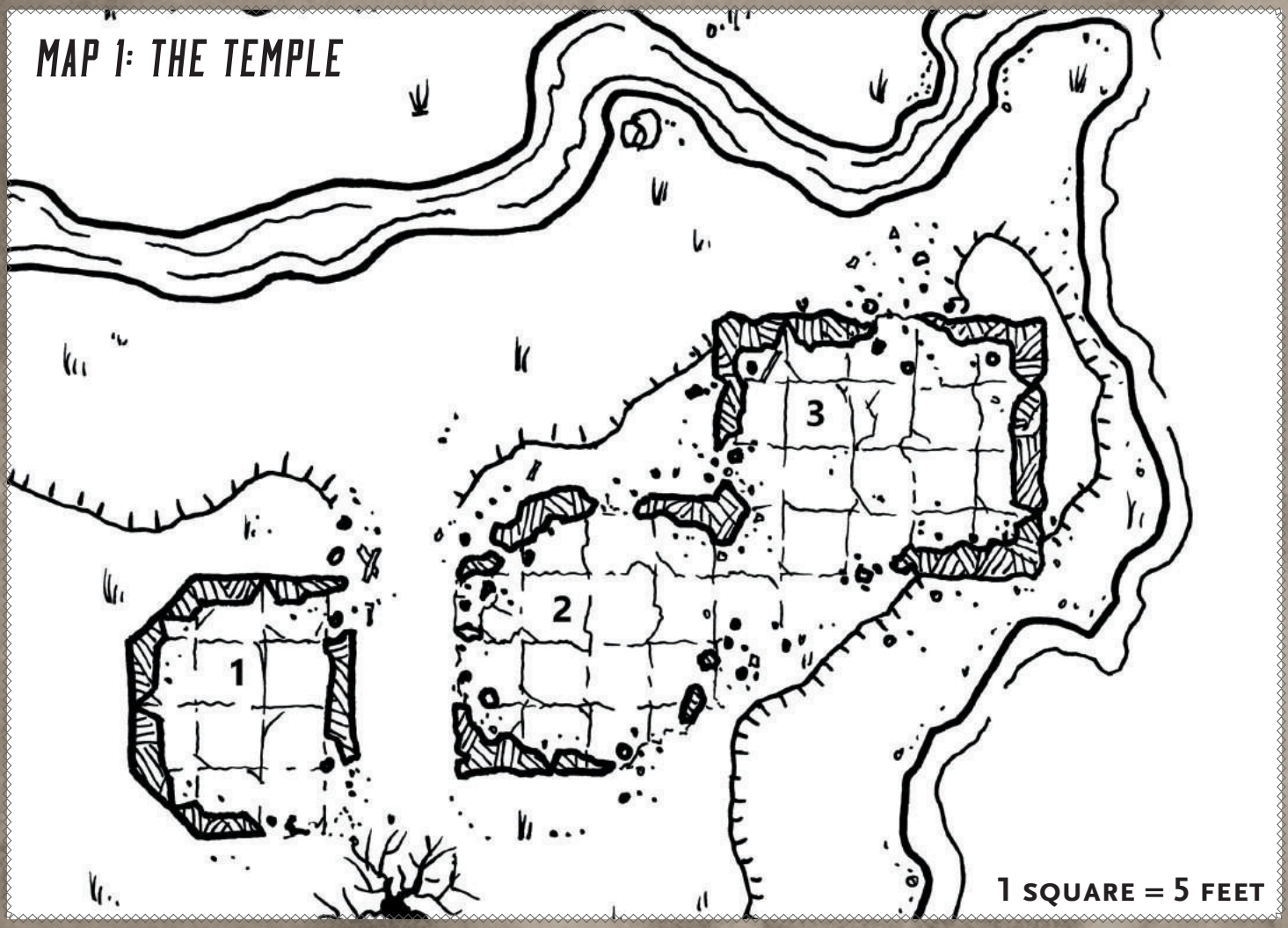
The characters encounter a pit trap that the sirens dug to bait game to their deaths. While the broad hole is easily spotted up close, it is not easily seen from afar given the bright, flat terrain. Two giant boars have discovered the party and are considering fighting them for territory. If the characters choose to fight, the boars fight to the death.

The characters may convince the giant boars that they mean no harm. If they succeed on three DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks, the boars let the characters pass. Three failures before three successes, however, lead the boars to attack the characters.If the characters failed their Wisdom (Survival) check to track the missing sailors, the boars are more riled up, increasing the check DC to 15.

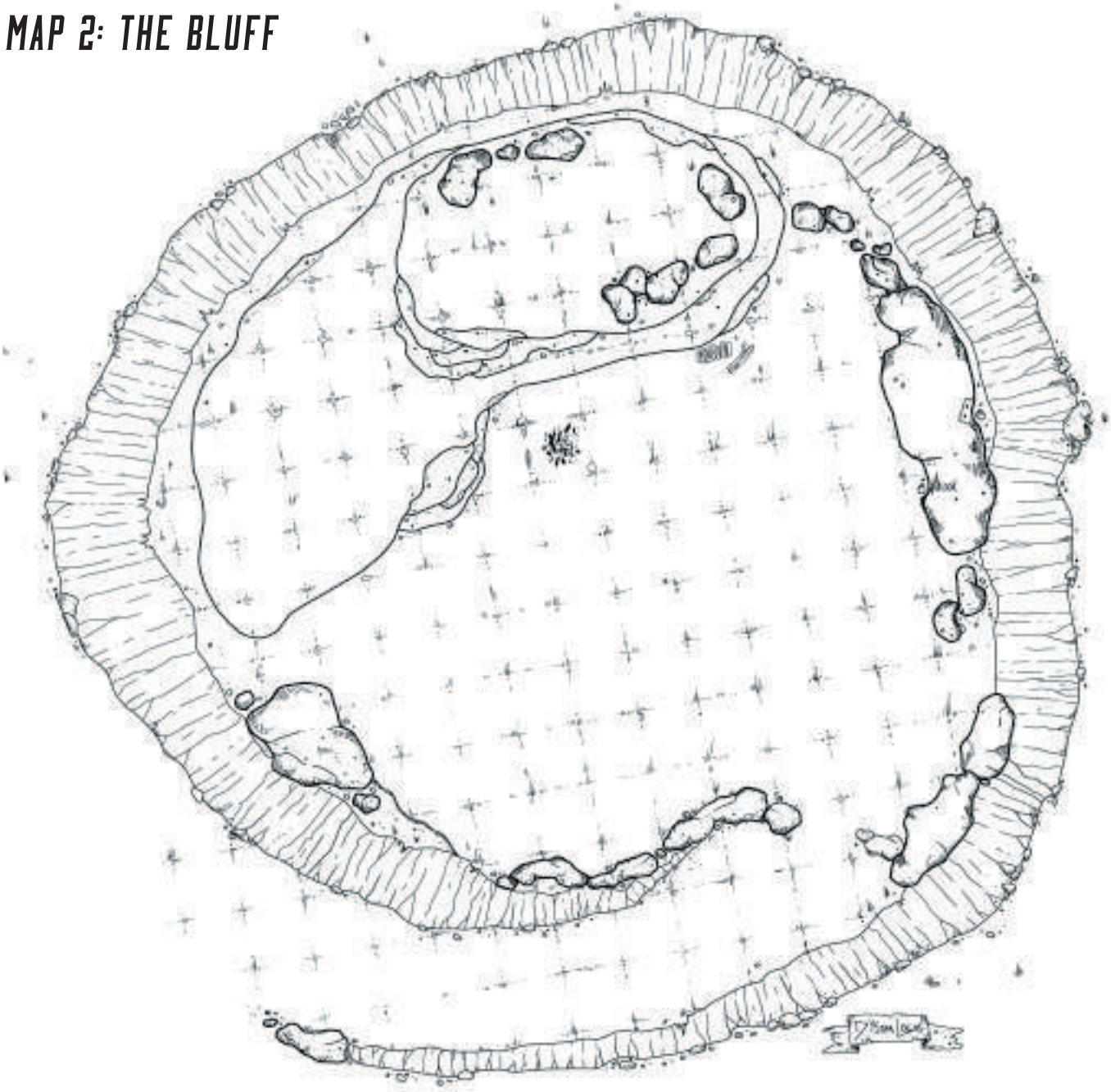
If fleeing the giant boars, the party can try to lure them across the mouth of the pit trap by leaping across. As the giants boars are unaware of the pit, they plummet into the pit. Any character who makes a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check can jump across the 10 foot pit with ease. Failure means that the character lands on the other side but is slowly slipping into pit. Characters can retry the Strength (Athletics) check once to avoid falling to the bottom of the pit, which deals 11 (2d10) piercing damage to anyone who falls in.

The Red Herring

In *The Odyssey*, Circe ensorcelled the sailors into swine. Following the Grecian theme of the piece, the characters might incorrectly conclude the boars are the missing sailors.


MAP 1: THE TEMPLE
1
2
3
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

MAP 2: THE BLUFF



Maps by Dyson Logos

IV. THE TEMPLE

Continuing to track the missing sailors, the characters arrive at a crumbling temple covered in crude paintings (see *map 2*). The characters can successfully decipher the story told by these paintings with a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. Characters proficient in History or Religion have advantage on this check.

Two groups are portrayed on the walls of the temple — the first form is reptilian, while the second is humanoid with indistinct features. In chamber 1, the faded paintings suggest cooperation between the groups. However, the paintings in chamber 2 depict the humanoids hoarding a disproportionate share of resources from the reptilians. This illustrates the deteriorating relationship between the lizardfolk and the sirens.

In chamber 3, the paintings reflect a growing number of reptilians compared to the humanoids. The reptilians now wield weapons, and the most recent painting depicts a reptilian figure in conspicuous headdress stabbing a spear through a prominent humanoid. This illustrates the ongoing conflict between the lizardfolk and the sirens.

While inspecting the paintings, a **lizardfolk shaman** and her **lizardfolk** attendant arrive at the temple. (Add one more lizardfolk attendant for each character after the fourth.) The lizardfolk fight to drive the characters from their holy temple, but they don't pursue beyond the vicinity of the temple.

DEVELOPMENT

After interpreting the paintings in the lizardfolk temple, the characters have learned about the core conflict on the island. The characters now follow the missing sailors to their siren captors in the center of the island.

CHAPTER 3 — STANDOFF

An overgrown earthen mound dominates the central clearing of the island. Through the overgrown vegetation, you see a flurry of activity, as a group of lizardfolk surround the sirens. The sailors lay unconscious behind the sirens as they face off with the lizardmen. Both groups eye one another with suspicion, waiting for the right moment to strike.

Three **sirens** in the form of human women have led the missing sailors to the center of the island (see *map 2*). However, they have been trapped by two **lizardfolk** and one **lizardfolk shaman** wearing a prominent headdress matching the painting in the temple. (Add one lizardfolk and one siren for each character after the fourth.) While both sides are posturing, neither side risks combat until they discern the characters' intentions.

The characters may resolve this encounter through force, choosing to side with the lizardfolk or the sirens. Being an honorable people taken in by superstition, the lizardfolk fight to the death. The sirens, fighting for the survival of their choir, have nowhere to run and fight to the death.

The characters may instead attempt to broker peace between the sirens and lizardfolk. If so, the characters must succeed on three DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) checks before they fail three checks. If they fail, both sides attack the characters.

The characters have advantage on Charisma checks if they offer to leave Locria with the sirens. If the lizardfolk shaman is dead, asleep, or incapacitated, the target DC is reduced to 12.



CONCLUSION

With their missing companions returned to the fold, Captain Seonu completes the necessary repairs. Now seaworthy, the *Aedein* can sail to its next destination — home.

If the characters sided with the sirens, read the following:

The last of the lizardfolk collapses to the earth, warbling curses in Draconic. Gazing upon the sirens, they appear in their true form — featureless humanoids with olive skin and deep blue eyes. Their leader gestures toward you peacefully, thanking you for restoring balance to Locria.

The sirens charm boars and other beasts into aiding with the repair of the *Aedein*, while surviving lizardfolk keep their distance from you. The sirens return one last time before you depart, pinning oak leaves to your clothing.

If the party sided with the lizardfolk, read the following:

Collapsing to the earth, the last of the sirens warbles a short and beautiful melody that serves as the tragic coda for their choir. Wiping the blood from their javelins, the lizardfolk thank you in raspy Draconic.

That evening you are invited to the lizardfolk camp where you dine on spit roasted lizard and a slow cooked boar's head. The lizardfolk chieftain gives you a shelled necklace to demonstrate his gratitude. Upon learning that your ship requires repairs, he orders his tribe to aid your efforts. Once the *Aedein* is seaworthy, you depart the island in peace.

If the characters brokered peace between both groups, read the following:

Your wise words have convinced the sirens and the lizardfolk to put down their weapons. Over a meal of spit roasted lizards and citrus fruits, their leaders air their grievances and talk for the first time in a generation. Over the course of the week, they come to an arrangement whereby both groups can coexist on Locria.

On the morning of your departure, the two leaders meet at your vessel. There is no elaborate exchange of words or deep ceremony. Both leaders' faces show telltale signs of emotions—shame, fear, and even hope. In turn they say goodbye in their own way. The lizardfolk shaman digs her claws into you uncomfortably, grabbing your shoulders. The siren gently smells your hair before saying goodbye with a pursed smile. With that, you board the *Aedien* and set sail for home.

If the characters convinced the sirens to leave the island, read the following:

The sirens have seen the paintings on the temple wall and realize that they will struggle to coexist with the lizardfolk. Reluctantly, they agree to board the *Aedein* to sail to new lands abroad.



REWARDS

Each character earns 450 XP for successfully completing the adventure.

If the party sided with the sirens, their leader gifts each character a *Locrian oak leaf*. If the character fails a saving throw against being charmed while wearing this leaf, they may use their reaction to reroll the saving throw and use the second result. Once used, the oak leaf flutters into the ethereal plane.

If the party sided with the lizardfolk, their leader gifts the characters a *shelled Locrian necklace*. This common item allows them to hold their breath underwater for 15 minutes longer than normal.

If they brokered peace between both groups, the leaders of both groups grant the characters the following potions: a *potion of animal friendship*, a *potion of heroism* and two *potions of healing*.

Pirate

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)
Hit points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)

Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 0 (25 xp)

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

If you have any questions or comments, please email eastman.dunn.press@gmail.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

When not delving dungeons, piloting starfighters, or interpreting the Prime Directive, Benjamin L. Eastman works as a mild-mannered attorney in the Maryland suburbs. A friend of DeSoto, he thanks his wife and daughter for all the late nights he can play elfgames in their basement.

Matt Dunn is a middle school teacher living in Virginia with his wife and son. He has been designing gaming products for the past few years, but has 25 years of playing board, video, and role playing games of all kinds.

Siren

Medium monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11
Hit points 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 1 (200 xp)

Innate Spellcasting. The siren's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

1/day: *major image*



Actions

Multiattack. The siren can make two attacks, one with its claws and one with its club.

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

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

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

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

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



PERMANENT COLLECTION

by Leon Barillaro

Creature: *Banshee* | **Level:** *3*

SYNOPSIS

When elf noble Caracticus Swordstar approaches the party with a fetch quest, it seems simple enough. But the item he seeks was brought deep within the forest, stashed in a long-forgotten mansion, and guarded by a sentimental banshee. The party must navigate the mansion and the entangled pasts of the Swordstar and Shandorel families to finish the job, or find themselves the next undead guests of Giltred.

This one-session adventure is intended for a party of level 3 adventurers.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins in a tavern, when Caracticus seeks their help in *Chapter 1*.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, a reclusive family of wood elves, the Shandorels, made the forest their home. The Shandorels are no more, and the manor has stayed relatively undisturbed since their mysterious disappearance. The stray adventurers (or burglars) who dare peek into the overgrown house all say the same: something is haunted in House Shandorel.

What happened to the Shandorels? Lord Sylpetor and his twin sister, Lady Pyntris, were tinkerers who built enchanted music boxes. Sylpetor designed and built them and Pyntris composed the musical spells to put inside. Pyntris met and fell in love with an artificer from a rival noble family, Crakien Swordstar. She left Shandorel manor and took the music box with the gold heart-shaped Shandorel insignia, as well as their blueprints.

Inconsolable and in denial, Sylpetor began plans to preserve the house, so that it would remain just as she left it for her "inevitable" return. He ordered his family to surround the manor with a mythal, a powerful spell made of old elven magic. However, mythals are dangerous and come at a great price, something Sylpetor's granddaughter Giltred knew when she protested. Sylpetor ignored her cries and pushed forward with the spell, which claimed the lives of everyone in the house.

As the spell was designed to preserve, it did just that: the food that had been laid out for the celebratory dinner remained delectable for centuries, and the rose petals in Hanali's chapel have yet to decompose. The Shandorels were preserved, too, as undead. The mythal turned Sylpetor into a **specter** and the rest of the family into **zombies**. Granddaughter Giltred, whose protests fell on deaf ears, became a **banshee**, although her cries in the afterlife serve her no better.

Pyntris died peacefully in her sleep some time after, in her lush Swordstar home with her loving Swordstar wife. She never visited.

Centuries later, Giltred, the heiress-turned-banshee, has decided to turn her home into a museum illustrating the grim fate of her family. She sends her undead attendants out of the house to scout for new artifacts to add to her collection.

Enter Caracticus Swordstar, an eccentric moon elf tinkerer, and the descendant of Pyntris and Crakien. His cart was overrun by those zombies while traveling through the forest. He lost a precious heirloom in the conflict, and he's willing to pay to get it back.

CHAPTER 1 – A JOB'S A JOB

Caracticus Swordstar delivers the quest to the party. They embark on their trip to investigate the elf's capsized caravan.

TAVERN BUZZ

The players are settled down in a tavern, a rest stop on the side of a busy road. Nearby, Caracticus Swordstar (LN elf, male **noble**) darts between tables like an electric current. With expensive clothing that look the worse for wear, Caracticus pleads with each table until he is rejected and laughed away. Eventually he approaches the players and says:

> *"I was making my way through Emerius forest with my horse-drawn carriage when I felt everything shaking. I jumped out of the driver's seat just in time; my carriage capsized, and my horse took off without me. The fellows attacking me sure didn't speak common, or elvish. They only seemed to grunt when I confronted them. And they reeked. Oh, did they reek. The smell was so awful I turned tail and ran all the way here, leaving everything behind."*

Caracticus asks the players to go into the forest and retrieve from his capsized caravan an enchanted music box, which is made out of a very dark wood and has a gold-plated, heart-shaped engraving on the lid. The music box is a Swordstar heirloom of priceless sentimental value, which originally belonged to his great-great-great-great grandmother Pyntris. He will do anything to get it back.

Caracticus can offer the players 10 gold each on the spot, with 40 each waiting for them on their return. He also reminds the players that it never hurts to be in the good graces of a family as rich and powerful as the Swordstars.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Scatterbrained Caracticus doesn't know much about the forest. He suggests talking to other tavern patrons about it. Speaking to them prompts the dialogue below:

- "The man's crazy. Smelly bandits? He probably just got jumped by a bunch of kids in masks."
- "I'm not going anywhere near that screwy manor! They say someone tried going in there last month. Nobody's heard from her since. Not that anybody's checked in."
- "Nobody's gone inside Shandorel Manor for hundreds of years. Not since that incident wiped out the whole family. I don't know what kind of incident; if I did I wouldn't have called it 'that incident!'"

THE FOREST

When the players enter the forest, read or paraphrase the following:

> The sun sets as your party's steps draw nearer and nearer to the forest. You approach the trees: thick, heavy oaks whose leaves form a natural barrier between the rich forest soil and the air above. Though the moon is bright, the forest prevents much of its light from entering.

The rest of this adventure should take place over the course of one night. If the players suggest waiting for the sun to return to the sky, don't be afraid to send zombies after them and chase them into the manor. They won't be getting sleep tonight.

Caracticus's Caravan. Nature has already begun to claim the caravan by the time the party reaches it. Bugs swarm Caracticus's food rations. Mice have made their homes in his old toolkit. The players can search for the music box, but it is not here.

During the investigation, three **zombies** attack. They're ex-thieves, recently vanquished by the banshee, raised from the dead, and sent off to scout for more artifacts.

Tucked into one of their pockets is an envelope with a golden wax seal in the shape of a heart. Unfurled, the paper reads, *"The Shandorel Exhibit, Coming*

Soon." Following either the zombies' footsteps or a zombie deeper into the forest leads the party to the Shandorel Manor.

CHAPTER 2 – SHANDOREL MANOR

When the characters enter the forest, read or paraphrase the following:

> Past the overgrowth stands the proud manor of Shandorel: a stone structure boasting two floors, a large marble door, and several thin windows lining the sides. Moss and vines inch up the weathered walls of this place, waging a long-fought war with the stubborn stone.

CRAWLING WITH TRAPS

Giltred did not intend for her museum to be hands-on. She has stocked each downstairs room with hidden **crawling claws**, which pop out from underneath, inside, or behind an object that is improperly handled. Lifting an urn, for example, causes crawling claws to climb out of it and overtake the player handling it.

The number of crawling claws that appear in one instance is equal to 1d6. The claws appear and use their full movement speed to approach and sound the closest noise-making item. For example, claws in the living room crawl up the writing desk and ring the handbell. If noise is made, add 1d4 **zombies** to the encounter at the top of the next round.

THE SILENT SENTINEL

The **specter** who was once Lord Sylpetor watches over the manor. His form matches the likeness of the painting in the foyer. On the first floor, he watches the party and haunts several of the exhibits (detailed below). On the second floor, he takes a more active role. Though Sylpetor no longer speaks, he shows himself and intervenes if the party makes a mess of upstairs.

POWERFUL MAGIC

House Shandorel is surrounded by a powerful spell known as a mythal. On the manor grounds, the following conditions are in effect:

- Food and drink does not go bad.
- Stone does not erode, and plants do not grow.
- If a creature dies, it is resurrected as a **zombie** or **specter** at the DM's discretion.

THE FIRST FLOOR

A1. THE FOYER

This room contains high ceilings and doorways. In the center of the back wall hangs a giant, illustrious portrait of an elven man.

The Portrait. Players examining the portrait find an engraved plaque that reads, "Lord Sylpetor Shandorel." A successful DC 16 History (Intelligence) check identifies him as the last head of house before the family disappeared. When players leave the portrait to continue their journey, have them roll a Wisdom (Perception) check. With a 12 or higher, players feel as though the portrait is watching them. With a 15 or higher, players know that they saw its eyes move.

A2. THE LIVING ROOM

The furniture in this room is arranged tastefully, but it is all behind metal stanchions, as though it were on display. There is a couch, a bookshelf, and a small writing desk with a noise-making handbell on top of it.

Bookshelf. The bookshelf holds many songbooks and old historical texts. The paper doesn't look more than thirty years old, but anyone who opens and reads the books can tell they were published centuries ago.

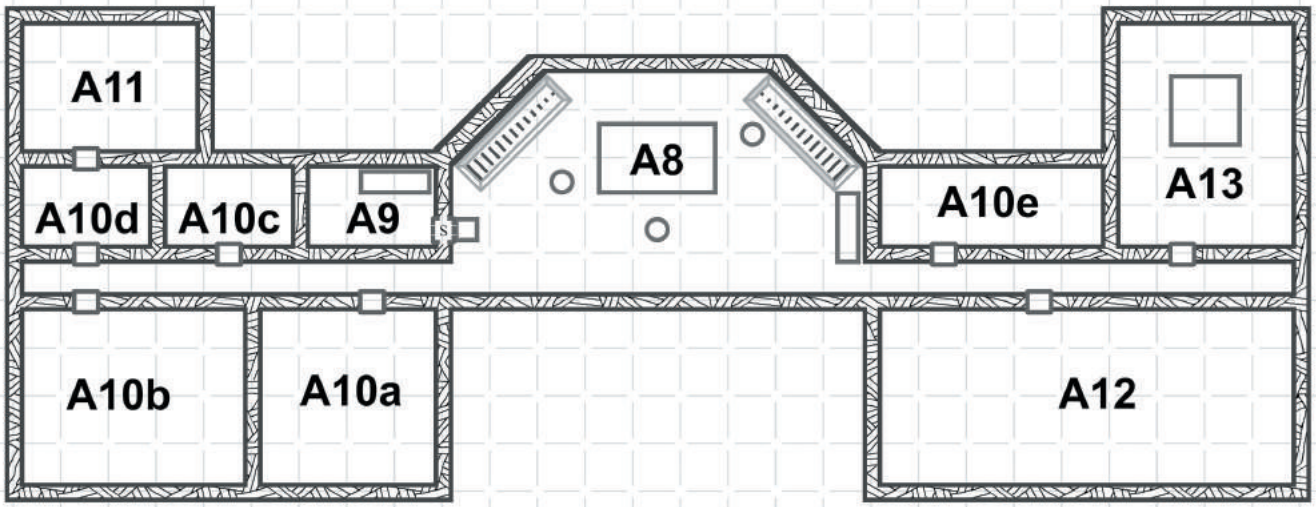
A3. THE ARMORY

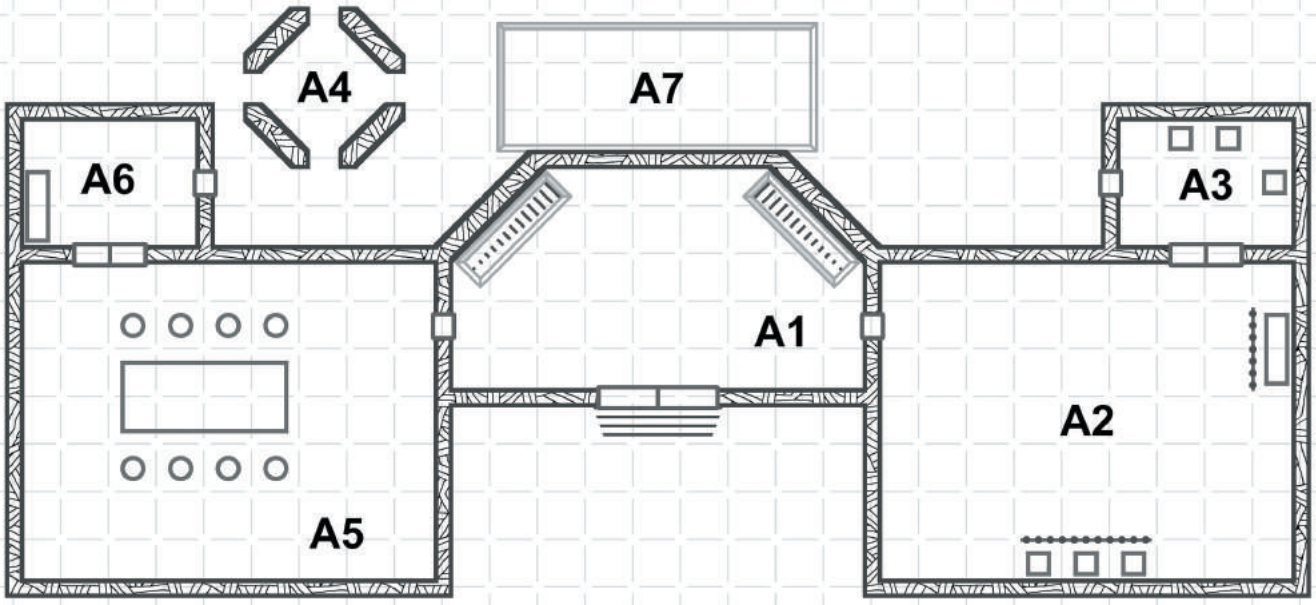
Lining the walls of this room are plates of armor and weapons of various sizes and shapes. Many items hang on the wall or are encased in locked glass cases.

Giltred's Dagger. +1 magic dagger, hanging up on the wall. A placard is placed near it, reading: "Sylpetor's gift to his granddaughter Giltred for her 101st birthday. Unused."

+2 *Plate Armor* and *Boots of Elvenkind* are encased in locked glass cases. A successful DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check opens them, but a roll less than a 15, or an attempt to break through the glass (DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check), summons **crawling claws** to emerge and head for the living room handbell.

HOUSE SHANDOREL





Map By William Abeel and Leon Barillaro

A4. THE CHAPEL

The roofless chapel allows the moon to cast its rays upon a smooth onyx statue of an elven goddess kneeling over a bowl full of clean water. She holds a lump of gold fashioned into the shape of a heart. There are fresh rose petals scattered by her feet.

Succeeding on a DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) or Intelligence (History) reveals this is Hanali Celanil, elven goddess of beauty and love.

On Display. A placard on the wall reads, "In Pursuit of Beauty."

A5. DINING ROOM

The long, rectangular table spans the entire room. It is decked out in the estate's finery and set for dinner. On the menu this evening are only the finest delicacies: whole stuffed birds and racks of ribs and wooden boards full of expensive cheeses. The food is delicious, but Sylpetor attempts to stop the players from eating it if they try.

On Display. A placard on the table reads, "Last Supper."

A6. KITCHEN

The cauldrons and cookware in this room are covered in food, having been left unwashed. In the window sits a small ribbon plant. By the doorway is a large suspended gong, originally used to announce meals.

On Display. The placard by the unwashed dishes reads, "Dead Elves Do No Chores."

The Ribbon Plant. The placard reads, "To Pyntris from Crakien." The soil is moist. Sylpetor waters it regularly.

A7. COURTYARD

Marble busts of elves with solemn faces sit among the greenery. The lawn is well-kept by Sylpetor.

The busts are arranged as shown on the right, with relevant names included. The ears on Sylpetor's bust have been broken off. Likewise, Pyntris's and Giltred's mouths have also been destroyed. Giltred is proud of her symbolic modifications to the statues.

Interacting with the busts causes the the specter to intervene. If the party chooses to honor Pyntris in some way (watering her plant, talking to Sylpetor's bust about her), a "drop of condensation" falls from Sylpetor's statue's eye. If the party destroys or defaces anything, the busts grow warm to the touch.

THE SECOND FLOOR

A8. STUDY

Bookshelves are haphazardly stocked with books and scrolls. More literature is strewn about a large, round table in the center of the room.

Bookshelf. The books are written in antiquated elvish. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that most of these books contain passages on mythals.

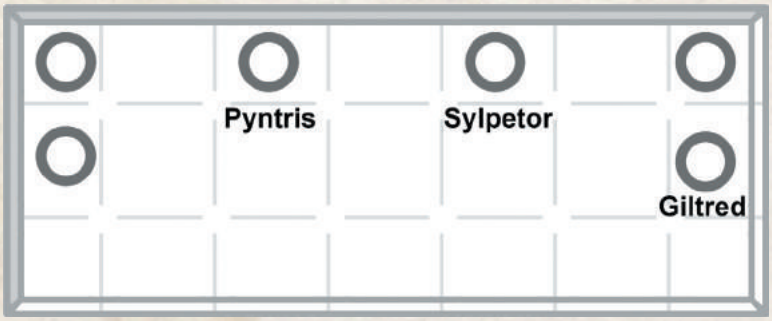
Secret Passageway. Pulling a book off the middle shelf causes it to swivel 180 degrees, bringing the people in front of it to the other side of the wall, to A9.

Table. Strewn about the table are several open books. The most striking is a leather-bound spellbook. It is lying flat on the table, open to a specific page. Inscribed are these words:

Through clash and conflict
Past our death knell
Preserve what matters most
To House Shandorel

Engraved on the inside cover is, "Sylpetor." The rest of the pages are full of engineering doodles and the following spells: *blindness/deafness*, *dispel magic*, *Bigby's hand*, *magic circle*, *creation*. When the book is left lying on a flat surface, it always turns to the last page Sylpetor used, as it was when the players found it.

On Display. A placard amongst the scrolls on the table reads, "Hubris."



A9. Sylpetor's Study

This cramped space houses Sylpetor's workbench, which he hid from the rest of the family after Pyntris's disappearance. Sylpetor still uses it. Music boxes are strewn about carelessly, but none are what the party is searching for. In Sylpetor's workbench drawers are filled with many scribbled-over iterations on a music box blueprint, all dated several centuries earlier. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following letter in a hidden drawer:

> *Dear Brother,*
>
> *I deliver this news on paper because I cannot bear to see your face. I have left to start my new life with Crackien Swordstar. I must follow my heart, which leads me to her. I do not need to imagine the pain this decision will bring to our family, and to you my twin; I will carry it with me for all time. I hope someday you will understand.*
>
> *Gently,*
> *Pyntris Swordstar*

A10. Family Bedrooms

These bedrooms are all finely laid out for people who are long gone. These wings have since been cleared out, and there is nothing of value here.

A11. Storage Room

This room is stuffed with zombies! There are so many of them packed in tight that another person can hardly fit inside. If the characters defeat all four zombies in this room, they can investigate it. Among the cleaning supplies is a *broom of flying*. They can just as easily close the door.

> The door opens into a closet. As your eyes adjust to this lightless room, a nasty stench assaults your nose. You begin to hear a familiar groaning.

A12. Pyntris's Room

This room is full of instruments: guitars, lutes, flutes, and pan pipes. The pipes are *pipes of haunting*. If the party tries their hand the instruments, Sylpetor's specter appears and listens. He judges any performance roll under 15... harshly. However a successful DC 16 Charisma (Performance) check moves Sylpetor. He will vouch for the party when they are confronted by Giltred.

A13. Giltred's Room

This room seems eerily still. The gilded furniture reaches to the ceilings. Standing in the center of the room is a small table, atop which sits an enchanted wooden music box with a gold-plated heart-shaped engraving. The placard reads, "The Shandorel Twins' Final Iteration."

This is the box the players are looking for. Once per day, the holder can wind this box, open it, and use it to cast hypnotic pattern. Approaching the box causes Giltred the **banshee** to confront the party.

Role-Playing Giltred

"Shall I take your incessant meddling as critique on my museum?"

- Giltred may be a banshee, but she's no tortured elven soul. Her dress is smart and chic, and her wry wit disarming.
- Giltred does not mind being undead, because it has forced her to think of her own needs, as opposed to the needs of her family. She has decided to use her afterlife to forward her goal of opening her museum.
- Giltred refuses to give up the music box. It belonged to her family, and it is the centerpiece in her exhibit. She hopes to expose the story of her family's disappearance and prove she was right all along.

Giltred has been spying on the party by way of her undead staff. She demands recompense for any damage caused. She also offers to strike a deal with a group that is reluctant to leave without the box: the opportunity to become curators, who travel to distant lands and retrieve artifacts for her museum. It is, of course, a paid opportunity. Sylpetor, if prompted, can use his workshop to fashion a knockoff. Without the help of his sister, he cannot build it to cast *hypnotic pattern*.

If the characters attempt to take the music box by force, or if she is being kept from the conversation, Giltred uses her Wail ability on a word such as, "no," "stop," or "listen!" She attacks, triggering Sylpetor's specter and two zombies to join.

CONCLUSION

No matter the party's choice, there are consequences in the living world. If the spirits are forcibly put to rest, House Shandorel is officially ghost-busted. In time, if the house is unclaimed by the Swordstars or the players themselves, bandits come to loot the house clean.

If the party strikes a deal with Giltred, Caracticus is eager to meet his ancestor. He gives the players half of the reward originally agreed upon. If the players are defeated by Giltred, they rise as zombies and specters: new museum staff for Giltred to order about. If the players give Caracticus a nonmagical replica, he mentions he has his ancestor's "dusty old blueprints" around to finish the job.

REWARDS

The players each earn 50 gp plus their choice of a magic item of uncommon or lower value if they return the original box to Caracticus. They receive half of that if they return a different box or news of the Shandorel exhibit.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Banshees, from Irish mythology, are spirits of ancestors who come to announce or even warn of the death of a living family member. The wailing aspect comes from the Gaelic tradition of keening, a mourning cry performed at funerals. The Monster Manual paints banshees as the punished spirits of elves who in life had used their beauty for selfish reasons.

I wanted to blend the traditional idea of Banshees serving their family with the D&D concept of them idolizing beauty, but ultimately I wanted to write a story about a woman who learned to use her voice for herself. The Shandorels didn't listen when she warned them, and it cost them everything. Although Giltred is still physically bound to the house of her family, she has reclaimed the home and the incident in a way that empowers her.

Special thanks to Scott Ginsberg for letting me continue the tale of the Swordstars.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leon Barillaro is a narrative designer, theatrical director, and computer scientist in New York City. Their interests include cooking, Pokemon, and absorbing large amounts of dog content. Find them on Twitter @snatent.





Illustration by Dean Spencer

ALL'S FAIR

by Jess Waters

Creature: *Succubus* | **Level(s):** *3 - 5*

SYNOPSIS

The increasingly erratic behavior of Lady Selyse, Knight Captain of the small, but strongly held frontier outpost Fort Selsmire, is provoking unrest among her soldiers and fear from passing supply caravans. Many whisper of how the Captain now goes without sleep for days at a time, pacing the walls of the keep long into the night.

Despite these rumors, the party has found employment at Fort Selsmire, conducting additional patrols of the nearby forests. While patrolling, they find evidence that may lead to the strange creature who seems to be provoking the Captain to madness.

ADVENTURE HOOK

All's Fair is intended for characters of 1st-4th level. Fort Selsmire is a distant outpost in rugged and largely unexplored territory. Nonetheless, the soldiers there can always put capable adventurers to good use. The party may have travelled there seeking mercenary work or as hired guards for wagon chains supplying the fort. Members of the Lord's Alliance may also have been sent by their faction to investigate rumors of the commander's alleged lawlessness.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Fort Selsmire is a relatively new frontier military outpost. It is commanded by Lady Selyse Blackwall. The men and women who serve at Fort Selsmire are the worst the military has to offer—criminals and outcasts banished to the literal edge of known civilization. Lady Selyse herself has a disreputable service history, and was forced into her current position as a de facto exile. Fort Selsmire is a distant and ill-favored outpost, and receives little support. As such, its captains regularly hire passing mercenaries and adventurers to help with patrols and other tasks.

Recently, strange rumors have emerged of erratic behavior from Lady Selyse. Her growing paranoia and disturbed mental state is the work of a **succubus**, who has lived in the nearby forest for many generations and resents the presence of Lady Selyse and her soldiers.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Captain Hadrian**: A guard captain at Fort Selsmire who manages day-to-day affairs. A surprisingly good man, but overworked.
- **Lady Selyse Blackwall**: The reclusive, eccentric Knight Captain of Fort Selsmire—its chief commander. A woman haunted both by her past as well as the mind games of a local succubus.
- **Inala**: A several-hundred-year-old succubus residing in the forest near Fort Selsmire. In ages past, she was a devoted priestess of the Faerûn demigoddess the Red Knight (also known as the Lady of Strategy). She uses her abilities—dreamwalking, telepathy, shape-changing, and manipulation—not for her own pleasure, but as weapons of psychic warfare.

Fort Selsmire and its unscrupulous soldiers have disturbed Inala from her peaceful retreat into the forest. She has approached the situation with the calm determination of a seasoned military commander, and has used her magical abilities to send disturbing dreams and visions to Lady Selyse.

The cause of her visions is unknown to Lady Selyse, but she is profoundly disturbed by them. She has grown paranoid and erratic, and her soldiers resent her

more each day. The growing unrest among Fort Selsmire's own ranks is exactly what Inala wants.

When the party finds work at this troubled outpost, they uncover evidence of both Inala's actions and Lady Selyse's own inglorious history. Soon they will have a choice to make—to support Inala in the destruction of Fort Selsmire from within, regardless of cost, or to help Lady Selyse's struggle to redeem herself by carving out a foothold for civilization in a place where it is not wanted.

ADVENTURE THEMES

All's Fair is meant to be a dark, haunting adventure themed around the realities of exile, isolation, and colonization. The succubus who serves as the main "villain" of the adventure is no seductress; instead, she is a elite operative in a psychic war which bleeds over into the waking realm. Aesthetically, Fort Selsmire and the surrounding territory are meant to evoke the post-fantasy landscapes of Dark Souls, the gloom of Mirkwood, and the fallen glory of the Night's Watch.

CHAPTER 1 - ARRIVAL AT FORT SELSMIRE

You make your way inside the wooden palisade of Fort Selsmire, a minor frontier outpost deep in the untamed wilds of the Sword Coast. The staked wooden walls, maybe sixteen feet high, are reinforced in some places with stone. The ground is cold mud, which sucks at your boots and splatters the bottom of your cloak. The sky is gray, and a cold wind makes the whole structure creak and whistle.

Soldiers drill on the far side of the yard. You stand in front of a man in a blue captain's cloak. He's unshaven, with dark bags under his eyes, but still stands at sharp attention with the reins of his horse in his hand. He introduces himself as Captain Hadrian, and says, *"So, you're here for work, you lot?"*

Captain Hadrian provides the following information:

- He wants to recruit the party as mercenaries to help conduct additional patrols of the area, on the orders of the fort's commander, Lady Selyse.
- The party may face bandits, wolves, or other monsters—he does not believe, as Lady Selyse does, that there may be a more dangerous threat, and thus does not suggest such to the party.
- He is intentionally vague as to why the fort needs additional patrols—if pressed, he truthfully says he is just following Lady Selyse's orders. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals he does not necessarily agree with these orders.
- A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check will get Hadrian to admit he does not see the need for the additional patrols himself, and that recently Lady Selyse has given many orders he does not understand or agree with.

He orders the party to patrol the east side of the river, and report back anything unusual, promising 10 gp each upon their return. He also gives them:

- A map
- An amulet with House Blackwall's black owl sigil, denoting the party's authority
- A potion of healing

The party is not permitted to wander the fort freely or speak with Lady Selyse, but may speak to other soldiers on their way out. If they do, the party begins to recognize both the poor quality of these soldiers and their apparent loathing of their commander.

On the ramparts above, a figure in black plate armor watches you. She's not wearing a helm, allowing you sight of a severe face with a tight crown braid of dark hair. Her cloak bears the black owl sigil of House Blackwall.

THE PATROL

As the party travels, ask each character to make a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Any player whose result is higher than 12 also rolls a d6, and discovers the following depending on their result:

Roll	Result
1	An ancient, half-rusted helm in an unfamiliar style
2	A four-sided die engraved with a different weapon on each side—sword, axe, arrow, and hammer
3	An amulet identical to the one you're carrying, swinging from the branches of a tree 30 feet above you

4	A small book filled with rules of combat. There's a marked passage, 'You must know the desires of your enemy's heart. Then you need not fear the results of a hundred battles.'
5	A single gauntlet made of black steel
6	Two gold coins so old the markings have worn smooth

THE SHRINE

You enter a clearing filled with the stumps of old-growth pines. Several are blackened as if from fire and soot softens your footfalls. On the far side of the clearing stands the immense head and neck of a horse, a once grand statue, now cracked and lying in pieces in the mud.

THE STATUE

- A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the statue reveals traces of red paint. What may have once been gemstone eyes appear to have been pried out.
- A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check exposes a small groove at the base of the statue where offerings to a deity or spirit would have been left.
- A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check identifies the statue as a symbol of The Red Knight, a mostly forgotten demigoddess of combat, strategy, and tactics.

THE CLEARING

A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the clearing uncovers boot prints, traces of a campfire, and a broken bottle. It's clear that this destruction, including the damage to the statue, is fairly recent.

A strange bluish glow falls over the glade. You hear the soft patter of hooves. Turning, you find yourself face-to-face with an enormous skeletal horse. Bits of rotting heraldry hang from its bones, and a silvery bit is held in the jaws of its empty skull. Astride its back sits a figure, an amorphous shape of ghostly azure light, casting a spectral energy over the glen.

Tactics: The **warhorse skeleton** charges, striking at an armored character with its hooves. The **will-o'-wisp** stays "mounted" until a character is within 5 feet, then it attempts to phase through them and use its shock attack. The will-o'-wisp fights until dispatched. If the will-o'-wisp is slain before the skeletal warhorse, the horse flees into the trees.

When the will-o'-wisp is defeated, it leaves behind a signet ring engraved with the symbol of the Red Knight, a red chess piece. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) or (Religion) check reveals the ring to be a holy symbol.

CHAPTER 2 - THE LADY SPEAKS

If the party decides to report back to Captain Hadrian about this strange encounter, they return to Fort Selsmire immediately. Proceed to section 2A. If they decide to camp in the forest, skip to section 2B instead. Regardless of their decision, the next time the party takes a long rest the character who has or had the signet ring has the following bizarre dream:

You dream of a woman with a stone face, and a chess game where all the pieces are red. The stone woman grabs you by the wrist and pulls you close. Her lips don't move, but she whispers to you, *"Don't lie to me. Don't lie, don't lie, don't lie."*

2A THE REPORT

You find Captain Hadrian at his desk in the officer's quarters. He looks even more haggard than the last time you saw him. He studies your faces quietly for a moment. *"Well, what did you find out there?"* he asks.

Hadrian is disinterested in the report of the desecrated shrine itself, but very intrigued by the encounter with the will-o'-wisp. If the party shows him the signet ring, he confiscates it immediately to show to Lady Selyse. If the characters protest, he reminds them that he has close to a hundred men at his disposal and it's in their best interest to cooperate.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Hadrian already knew about the desecrated shrine and doesn't want the characters talking about it. He has the

party escorted to bunks in the barracks and promises to summon them when he knows more.

LADY SELYSE'S ORDERS

You are awoken by guards before sunrise, and led by torchlight across the yard—but not to Captain Hadrian's office. Instead, you are taken up a short flight of wooden stairs and into the private quarters of the Knight Captain Lady Selyse Blackwall herself.

Despite the odd hour, she is wearing the black plate armor you saw her in earlier. Her dark braid of hair is coming undone, her desk is a mess, her bed looks unslept in, and she is pacing as you enter. Yet when she looks at you, her gray eyes are sharp and piercing.

If the party gave the ring to Hadrian, Lady Selyse questions them about it. If they did not, Lady Selyse knows the party is hiding something from her—it's been revealed to her in one of her fitful, frightening dreams—and demands the truth. She is particularly suspicious of whichever character is currently in possession of the ring.

Regardless of whether the characters reveal everything they know, Lady Selyse grows impatient. She insists that time is of the essence, and that she has discovered the location of the source of what she calls the "madness of the forest"—the source of both the will-o'-wisp and her own strange and frightening visions.

She is both terrified of confronting the source herself and desperate for her nocturnal torment to end. She offers the party anything within her power in exchange for their aid, including the 150 gp she has in her personal coffers.

CHAPTER 3 – THE TEMPLE OF THE RED KNIGHT

If the party accepts Lady Selyse's offer, she gives them surprisingly detailed directions to an old temple set into a stony hillside. Or, if the party took a long rest in the forest, the character who dreamt of the stone woman leads them to this same place seemingly against their will.

ENTRANCE

You stand before a massive stone door set into a jagged hillside. The door is embossed with the deteriorated figure of a woman, a knight's helm held under her arm. The features of the woman's face have all been worn away. An engraving atop the door reads, "Speak to me your true desire."

Each character must speak their true desire. Those that do feel a weightlessness settle over them and are able to phase through the door, though once on the other side they return to normal and cannot pass back through. Those characters inside can see and hear those without.

GUARDIAN

The characters find themselves in a narrow stone hallway roughly 5 feet wide and 30 feet long facing down an armored giant boar who charges immediately. The party must strategize carefully to defeat the creature in such a cramped space.

THE FINAL CHAMBER

You enter an ancient stone chamber. Leather-bound volumes line two massive bookcases against the back wall. Sitting at a desk in the center of the chamber is a strikingly beautiful woman with red hair. She absently toys with a red chess piece, a knight, tied to a cord around her neck. She rises to greet you.

This is Inala, a succubus who has been waging a psychic war against Lady Selyse. If the party allows it, Inala explains her position to the them:

- She is a devotee of the Red Knight, the Faerûn demigoddess of tactics and warfare. She considers herself a strategist, not a demon or a seductress; she explains that any successful commander must know the mind and heart of her enemy. "After all, what is it they say—all's fair in love… and war?"
- Inala considers the soldiers intruders and brutes. She takes the disrespect they have shown the forest and the civil unrest at Fort Selsmire—despite the fact it is largely her doing—as proof of their evil nature.
- Lady Selyse's deepest desire—as Inala has determined through dreamwalking—is to prove herself and be recalled from her exile.
- Inala wants the party to help her defeat Lady Selyse in the hopes her death will force the military to abandon Fort Selsmire and leave this place.

At this point, the party must make a decision. Do they side with Inala or with Lady Selyse? Make sure the characters understand the ramifications of their decision:

- Lady Selyse is not a good person or commander, but she is the face of authority in the area and responsible for the lives of almost a hundred soldiers. Her goal is to bring civilization and order to this region. She is human, and will pay the party handsomely to defeat Inala.
- Inala is the last member of an archaic order, a soldier still fighting a war that ended centuries ago. Her goal is to protect the forest from being resettled, and to guard the barrows of the soldiers who died here long ago. She promises the party magical items—gifts representing the favor of the Red Knight—if they help her defeat Lady Selyse. She will not specify what these items might be.

If the characters decide to fight Inala:

> The red-haired creature frowns, sending a shiver down your spine. *"Well, that's a pity... And really, this hardly seems fair – so many of you against only me?"*

Any character who dreamt of Inala must immediately succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by her.

Tactics: Inala begins the battle by transforming into her fiendish form and attacking with her claws, or using *draining kiss* against previously charmed targets.

When the party returns to Lady Selyse after defeating Inala, she genuinely thanks them and resolves to be a better commander for her soldiers. She is determined to reform Fort Selsmire and carve out a proper foothold for civilization in these wild lands. She gives the the party the previously promised payment—or, if nothing was agreed upon in advance, 150 gp.

If the characters decide to fight Lady Selyse:

> As soon as you pass through the stone door out of Inala's cave, you are surprised to see Lady Selyse waiting for you on her dark warhorse, accompanied by several of her men. She searches your faces with her sharp, fearful gaze and cries out, "Seize them! Seize them all!"

The party faces Lady Selyse (**bandit captain** with plate armor [18 AC]), her **warhorse**, and two of her soldiers (**bandits**).

When the party defeats Lady Selyse, Inala exits the temple and gives each an item pertaining to their previously stated desire. Use this as an opportunity for roleplaying or a hook for further adventures.

Author's Notes

In the medieval European folklore of their origin, succubi were monstrous creatures who brought death. In modern representations, they tend to be enchanting seductresses—the ultimate male "bad girl" fantasy. *All's Fair* reimagines the succubus as a psychic soldier, using her powers of telepathy, dreamwalking, and shape-changing to get the upper hand by any means necessary. Thematically, *All's Fair* is intended to reclaim this archetype by drawing attention to the commonalities between a good seductress and a good tactician.

About the Author

Jess Waters has a degree in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College. She lives in New Hampshire with her wife, and has been making *Dungeons & Dragons* gayer for the past eight years.



Illustration by Gwendy Bee

LOVE'S SORROW

by Tera Hooper

Creature: *Lady in Red* | **Level(s):** *3-4*
CW: *Mention of sexual harassment*

SYNOPSIS

The night mist hangs low around von Helter Manor. A man and woman share a tender moment on their balcony after the best night of their lives—a flash of red as they fall. Blood begins pooling around them, staining the earth crimson. A mysterious figure grins in the darkness. The Red Lady has taken her next victim. *Love's Sorrow* is recommended for characters of levels 3-4.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters have been called upon to investigate the brutal murder of a newlywed couple on the night of their wedding. The police have come up with no solid evidence and believe the murderer to be the Red Lady.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This is a classic murder mystery/investigation. The characters need to use their wits and skills in order to solve the case.

Throughout this adventure, the Red Lady appears at various moments. If the characters are stuck, she attempts to direct them to the nearest clue. Her help is always vague and cryptic. The Red Lady frequently warns characters in their minds not to speak of their investigation to Luca or his staff members.

CHAPTER 1 – ARRIVAL

The characters are greeted by an officer who directs them to the murder scene. After showing them to the scene, he excuses himself and returns to town. They have the rest of the evening to investigate.

MURDER SCENE

There are various officers shambling about and preparing the bodies to be moved to the morgue in town. The couple has been pushed off of the balcony on the second floor. The players are unable to get a clear view of the balcony from their position on the ground.

- A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the bodies reveals that both appear to have fallen from the balcony. The man appears to have broken his neck and died on impact, but the woman was also pierced through her heart. Crimson blossoms from the open wound on her chest and spills onto the ground around her.
- A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the wound is very cleanly cut and likely made by a bladed object. The stab wound is a singular puncture through the heart. It's not a very large puncture—only about three-quarters of an inch in diameter.
- A DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the couple was murdered during the midnight hour the previous night. The same Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that Liliana was stabbed after falling from the balcony.

POLICE SUSPICIONS

A DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check allows the characters to hear a conversation between the officers about the Red Lady. A few of the officers believe the Red Lady to be the culprit, other officers doubt her existence. The characters can also receive this information by speaking with the officers directly.

A DC 12 Intelligence (History) check reveals that the Red Lady is the ghost that is supposedly haunting von Helter Manor. She is rumored to prey on beautiful, young women. A total result of 18 or higher

reveals that this case is nearly identical to two other murders on the von Helter Manor grounds over the last century. The other two murders were never solved, and the officer that headed these investigations was Lyra Nollyn.

Arrival at the Manor:
The late-autumn chill bites at your skin. An imposing manor rises from the mist as you approach. As you near the iron gates, it comes into full view: alabaster stone has aged over the years and ivy crawls lazily up the side. The two-story manor boasts huge oaken doors at the end of a long drive. Several windows litter the manor walls, and two great balconies loom high above the ground. Rose bushes encircle the perimeter of the house, cloaking it in brilliant shades of red. You hear a murmur of voices coming from the side of the house as an officer opens the gate to greet you.

Murder Scene:
The scene before you is almost like a nightmare—only the coppery scent of blood hanging in the afternoon mist proves it to be reality. Broken, mangled bodies lie on the ground in heaps covered in black sheets.

DEVELOPMENT

A 30-minute timer begins as soon as the characters arrive at the murder scene. When the timer runs out, the first clap of thunder rings out. The characters are urged to head inside, to speak to Deputy Lyra Nollyn and Lord Luca von Helter. The remaining officers take the bodies to the morgue.

CHAPTER 2 – INVESTIGATION

At the door, the characters meet the butler, Isaac Whitley, who greets them and shows them inside to the lounge, where Deputy Lyra Nollyn and Lord Luca von Helter are arguing with one another. Both immediately cease their argument when the characters enter the room with Isaac.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Deputy Nollyn is arguing with Lord von Helter about the murder. Deputy Nollyn is threatening Lord von Helter with arrest. Lord von Helter is insistent that the Red Lady is behind this murder.

THE LORD OF THE MANOR

The characters recognize the first woman as Deputy Nollyn.

Deputy Lyra Nollyn

Lyra Nollyn is a tall high elf woman. She has light blonde hair and soft grey eyes. Her voice is soft and light when she speaks. While she appears generally approachable, there's a hard steeliness in her eyes that takes you by surprise.

Lyra reveals the following when spoken to:

- She believes that the Red Lady is a hoax — it was one of the residents who commited the crime.
- There have been at least two other murders on the premises, both beautiful young women.
- She's been a part of the investigation in all three murders. The perpetrator was never found, but the investigators only found circumstantial evidence in regards to the Red Lady.
- The previous murders were committed in the same fashion. The wounds have all been nearly identical. The victims names were Camille Atkins and Tessa Bennett.

A character making a successful DC 19 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Lyra to reveal that she and Luca are siblings. Luca married into the von Helter family nearly a century ago.

The second man introduces himself as Lord Luca von Helter. Luca fully cooperates with the investigation and allows the party to work their way through the manor as they see fit.

Luca von Helter

Luca von Helter is a classically handsome high elf man: blue eyes, strong jaw, and platinum blonde hair pulled back into a low braid. There's a glint of mischievousness in his eyes. He's dressed head-to-toe in the latest fashions: a well-fitting suit with leather shoes. He also carries a cane with the von Helter raven at the grip. He is very haughty and arrogant.

Luca reveals the following when spoken to:

- If asked about the Red Lady, Luca tells the party about the ghost that has been haunting his manor for the greater part of a century. She is a vengeful female ghost that preys on beautiful, young women. He is unsure of when the ghost initially started haunting the manor.
- If the players inquire as to why Elise left him, he tells them of a note that was left saying that she had found another man, and that she was leaving him for her true love. He is able to produce the note. The note is old, and the handwriting appears feminine.
- If the players ask about the events leading up to the murder, Luca reveals the following: Luca entertained them in the lounge for most of the night, but showed Claude the library at one point. Luca also escorted Liliana to the wine cellar to allow her to pick a wedding gift from his famous wine collection. After escorting her back to the lounge, the couple retired to the guest bedroom with the wine.

Investigating the Manor

The characters have multiple rooms to investigate and staff members to interrogate. If the characters try to stray too far from the pertinent rooms, the waitstaff of von Helter Manor will direct them to the proper investigatory outlets (lounge, library, guest bedroom, master bedroom, and the wine cellar). There are three staff members: Isaac Whitley, Harriette Sturgis, and Sophie Taylor.

Isaac Whitley

- Human male, 80 years old.
- He spends his time in the lounge and library.
- Has been working at von Helter Manor for close to 60 years.
- Grew up on the estate, his father was the previous butler and his mother was a maid, because of this he wishes to believe the best in his master. He provides Luca with an alibi for the night of the murder.

A DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check reveals the following:

- Luca often comes home with young ladies from the tavern, even though he was once married.
- Elise von Helter was the name of Luca's wife.
- According to his father, Elise disappeared one night and was never seen nor heard from again — he believes that she was the Red Lady's first victim.

Harriette Sturgis

- Human woman, 30 years old.
- She is the Primary Housemaid and spends the majority of her time tidying the manor.
- She was hired about ten years ago.
- She knows that Luca was friendly with the Hamiltons—that's why they had their wedding at the manor.
- She protects Luca at all costs and dismisses any negative claims about him.
- A DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check causes her to reveal that Sophie Taylor doesn't enjoy spending time around Luca.

Sophie Taylor

- Human woman, 18 years old.
- She is the chef.
- She is very nervous when Luca's name is mentioned.
- She has been working in the manor for about a year.
- She keeps to herself and cares not for the gossip of the house.

If pressed for further information, she reveals the following:

- Luca has tried to have inappropriate relations with her on more than one occasion.

Guest Bedroom

A large canopy bed sits in the center of the room. Cashmere sheets lay on the bed, and it's overflowing with plush pillows. On the wall to the left of the door, crimson curtains are drawn. There is a chest at the end of the bed. A chest of drawers sits in the corner—inside are the newlyweds clothes. There are two nightstands on either side of the bed. The balcony is beyond drawn curtains.

Lounge

The first thing you notice is a faint scent of smoke filling the air. Standing at 4 feet tall and 5 feet wide, the marble fireplace is the centerpiece of the room. An intricate brass ember screen encases the front, protecting an exotic rug from stray cinders. Several delicate vases sit gracefully upon the mantle. Various foreign baubles litter tables and benches throughout the room. A grand piano sits ready to be played in the far corner - the ivory worn slightly from use over the years. The walls are lined with bookshelves that stretch from the floor all the way up to the vaulted ceiling—a ladder stands at the ready for help with the topmost books. A large painting is above the fireplace. It shows a man and woman standing together outside of the manor.

Library

As you enter the library, you notice bookshelves filled with rare and exotic books. A fireplace keeps the room warm year-round. A singular mahogany desk sits in the center of the room. Candles and paperwork are scattered about the tabletops. Multi-colored moonlight cascades onto the hardwood floors from the stained glass windows. It is the first room that gives the sense that it has been lived in.

Wine Cellar

As you descend the stairs towards the cellar, you begin to feel a chill. It's getting colder with each step. As you continue down, it becomes more difficult to breathe. It's clear that no one comes to the cellar often. Reaching the bottom of the staircase, you are greeted by a single wooden door. Upon entering the cellar proper, you're greeted by a myriad of rugs, chairs, tables, paintings, mirrors, and even a broken statue—it appears as though the wine cellar is also being used for storage. Moving beyond the storage area, a large tapestry covers most of the wall. Wine racks filled to capacity are situated in the back of the cellar.



If the characters attempt to take their gathered evidence to Deputy Nollyn before finding proof, they are told that there is no case without evidence. Charges will not stick to anyone without concrete proof.

ITEMS AND LOCATIONS OF NOTE:

Skeleton Key (Location: Two Possible)

Can be found by succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check of one of the following locations:

- Behind loose stone in fireplace of lounge
- Hidden drawer in mahogany desk of library

Hidden Room (Location: Library)

Can only be found with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check in the library. Behind a bookshelf is a door that is locked. The lock cannot be picked. It is an ancient lock with which the characters are unfamiliar. The door requires the Skeleton Key to unlock.

Once inside the room, the desk contains multiple papers and ledgers relating to Luca's shipping business. The players are able to surmise from these papers that Luca's shipping business also participates in smuggling from time to time. The bookshelf to the left of the desk contains multiple books on necromancy and exorcisms.

Locked Chest (Location: Hidden Room)

A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the chest sitting in the corner.

Chest Contents:

- A silver hand mirror. (worth 50 gp)
- An ivory comb with the depiction of a rose on the handle. (worth 75 gp)
- An old gold wedding ring with two rubies and a single diamond. (worth 500 gp)
- Two vials of holy water. (worth 25 gp each)
- A small scrap of red fabric that has grown musty and faded with age.
- A bill from nearly a century ago from a contracting company for work conducted in the cellar to cover up a cave-in. The bill has been paid in full.

Luca's Journal (Location: Hidden Room)

Can only be found by succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. At first glance, this journal appears to be a detailed account of Luca's day-to-day activity. However, a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the journal is illusioned. The true nature of the journal is a detailed recollection of his affairs with multiple women. The names include Liliana Hamilton, Camille Atkins, and Tessa Bennett. The journal also reveals Luca's slowly-growing obsession with Sophie Taylor.

Painting of Elise (Location: Lounge)

The painting, upon further inspection, shows Luca von Helter standing with a beautiful woman. (If anyone is asked about the painting, they reveal the woman is Elise von Helter—Luca's late wife. If the Red Lady appears to direct the characters towards the nearest clue, they recognize the ghost as Elise.)

DEVELOPMENT

After finding the bill of sale, the players should be encouraged to go investigate the wall that was built in the cellar after the Red Lady calls out to the party member with the lowest Charisma. The voice the party member hears whispers, "Release me from my bindings. You now know where to look."



CHAPTER 3 – DISCOVERY

Upon arriving to the wine cellar, the characters go investigate the wall. A DC 12 Intelligence check reveals that the wall can be knocked down with a large object (for example, a broken statue).

DISCOVERING ELISE

The characters discover an ancient set of bones behind the wall. After the players enter the room, magic begins to swirl to life above the bones.

"HELP...ME.."

As Elise asks the characters for help, her eyes suddenly turn a brilliant shade of red. This will signal the start of combat, but Elise never attacks first. She appears to struggle against an unknown force until attacked. She then lashes out at the party in retaliation.

Elise shares the stats of a **ghost** with one additional action: Love's Sorrow. In combat, she casts Love's Sorrow at whomever she believes is the strongest character.

Love's Sorrow
1/day
Elise casts her gaze upon a target, and it must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw. If the target fails the saving throw, they are charmed and defend Elise to the death as they would their own beloved.

The characters may make a DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check to discover that they can exorcise her. To do so, the characters must perform a small ritual, sprinkle her bones with holy water, and offer a small prayer.

DEVELOPMENT

After defeating the ghost of Elise, Luca's hold over her is broken. She disappears from this world, and her bones turn to dust. The party hears a sigh of relief as a soft white light fades from view. (*Conclusion A*)

After exorcising Elise, she tells the party where Luca keeps the murder weapon (his cane) and details Luca's involvement in each of the murders. She tells the party of his many affairs and how she had planned to leave him. He killed her the night she was packing to leave. He bound her to this world and hid her bones so that she could never move on to the afterlife. She thanks the party once more and fades away slowly. (*Conclusion B*)

CONCLUSION A

After returning to the lounge, the characters have insufficient evidence with which to arrest Luca, but plenty to implicate Elise. The Red Lady is deemed the murderer, and Luca thanks the party for their services. He gives them 50 gold pieces for their assistance in the investigation.

- 1,100 XP for defeating Elise
- 50 gp each for completion

CONCLUSION B

After returning to the lounge to give Deputy Nollyn their newfound information, Luca is in the process of leaving. Should the party engage Luca, he shares the statistics of the **mage**.

After arresting Luca, Deputy Nollyn reconvenes with you and congratulates you on your hard work. Just as you all begin to turn away, a bright white light appears and begins to speak.

"Thank you for saving me from his control. He had been using me to do terrible things for nearly a century. Lyra, I'm sorry you had to see me like this. I wish I had been braver back when they told me to marry Luca. I wish I'd followed my heart. I'm sorry."

The light fades from view as tears roll down Lyra's face. She reveals that she once wished to marry Elise, but her parents thought Luca a more appropriate suitor. She removes a grand diamond from her pocket and begins chanting softly. Another bright flash of light fills the room, and a woman stands before you.

"Perhaps now we will get that chance," Deputy Nollyn says softly as she walks towards the newly revived Elise.

REWARDS

- 1,100 XP for exorcising Elise
- 2,300 XP for defeating Luca
- 2,000 XP for solving the mystery
- 75 gp each for completion
- The characters also receive Luca's sword cane, which contains the sword of betrayal.

Sword of Betrayal

Weapon (rapier), Uncommon

When this rapier strikes a creature that is affected by the charmed condition, it is an automatic critical hit.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I decided to write this story based on the lady in red ghost folktale. In the folklore, many lady in red ghosts are jilted women that were murdered in a fit of passion. They are typically forced to wander the earth in death with no way to move on. In this story, my lady in red has a chance to move on and rest peacefully in the afterlife. However, she also has a chance at redemption and true love.

This story really hit home for me. I latched onto this project in order to give others a sense of hope with this story. I hope you enjoy the story of my lady in red.

I want to give a big shoutout to Gwen for doing the AMAZING art to go along with this adventure! She's awesome.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tera (@LadyCatTho on Twitter) writes D&D content. She has enjoyed playing for the past several years and only recently dipped her toes into content creation. She hopes to create more content in the future.





Illustration by David Markiwsky

VERDANT CORRUPTION

by David Markiwsky

Creature: *Dryad* | **Level:** *4*

SYNOPSIS

A mysterious adventurer stumbles into an inn in the night, looking for an escort to the nearest temple. Before the night is over, he inexplicably disappears, leaving a trail of corruption leading into the nearby woods as packs of twisted forest creatures emerge to plague travellers.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters are traveling to the Donkey's Respite Inn, where rumour has it that a strange creature that has been seen stalking the nearby woods and preying on merchants on the trade road. The owner of the Inn, Danton Buckfield, has offered a sizeable reward to dispose of the creature.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Rennen Starr is an adventurer and a hero. Among the treasure he got from his latest dungeon delve there is a ring of great power—a ring whose curse is slowly killing him and preventing him from removing it. He feels his body giving out when he sees an inn where he can rest.

CHAPTER 1 – THE CORRUPTED TRAVELLER

The story begins as dusk falls and the party arrives at the Donkey's Respite Inn; a small roadside inn built where the trade road passes along the border of the nearby woods. Hunters and trappers living in the forest come here to resupply on basic supplies and to meet with merchants looking to buy their wares.

> The inn is a two-story building with a peaked roof and a large stable built to accommodate the merchant caravans that often travel down the trade road. Warm light and the sounds of lively conversation spill out from behind wooden shutters already sealed up against the night's chill.

Inside, the inn is far from capacity, but filled with a lively crowd of traders, merchants and hunters scattered amidst a dozen tables. The innkeeper, a portly halfling male named Danton Buckfield (LG male halfling **commoner**) is leaning on the bar, chatting with some of his regular customers.

The characters have a chance to order food and drinks and inquire with Danton about the job to deal with the creature stalking the trade road. When they ask Danton about the job, he informs them that the creature, a grizzled werewolf, has long been taken care of, by a hunter named Rowan Ashefall, who slew the beast weeks ago. If the characters ask about Rowan, Danton says that she is a hunter who lives in the nearby woods. She usually comes to the Donkey's Respite every couple weeks and he expects she will come by any day.

THE TRAVELLER

The door to the inn swings open and a lone figure clothed in worn leather armour steps through the doorway. He is tall and gaunt, with pointed ears peaking through his shaggy, flaxen hair and a short sword strapped to his back. His skin is unnaturally pale, his brown eyes ringed in black. As he stumbles a few steps forward, he moves with a weariness well beyond his years.

The traveler's name is Rennen Starr (LN male half-elf **assassin**). He is an adventurer who recently raided a dungeon and acquired a sizeable amount of money and a cursed magical ring—a plain gold band, pock marked with spots of black tarnish—which he is unable to remove despite it slowly killing him.

Rennen takes a table by himself close to the door, but immediately starts studying various patrons of the tavern before settling his eyes on the party. Take this opportunity to further describe the following things:

- Rennen's sickly appearance
- The worn state of Rennen's adventuring gear
- The overstuffed purse Rennen pulls out of his bag to pay for his food and drinks
- The pockmarked ring on Rennen's finger



DM Note: Rennen Starr's Illness

It is plain to anyone who looks at him that Rennen Starr is ill.

- **Identifying the Illness.** A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that Rennen seems to be suffering from the effects of some type of disease, akin to a plague, but without the obvious signs of any known disease (boils, lesions, spots, etc.)
- **Confronting Rennen.** If the characters confront Rennen about his illness, he tells them that he took a wound while exploring a dungeon a couple weeks ago and the wound became infected. None of the usual cures have been working (an explanation he believes, despite the ineffectiveness of normal medicine in treating his developing condition).
- **The Real Reason.** Rennen is ill because of a cursed ring he wears on his finger which he recently acquired in the same dungeon he took the wound. If the characters ask him about the ring, he tells them it was a gift from a friend some years ago. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he is lying.

After a few moments, when the characters have noticed Rennen watching them, he stands up and comes over to their table, introducing himself as a fellow adventurer in between coughing fits. He has noticed whatever weapons or spell components the characters are carrying and wants to hire them to escort him to the nearest city (a three day journey north) where he can find a "proper cleric" to deal with his "infection." He offers the party 150 gp each and is willing to pay 50 gp each up front. He withdraws a handful of platinum coins from his pouch to make the payment —the coins are stamped with an unfamiliar face from a bygone age.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters accept Rennen's request, he thanks them, and speaks with the innkeeper briefly before he retires to his room, asking them to be ready to depart at first light.

Whether or not the characters accept Rennen's request, the story continues in *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 – THE TASTE OF CORRUPTION

Early the next morning, the characters are awoken by shouting and the sounds of a panicked horse outside the inn. Patrons at the inn are crowding to the windows to look out:

> Outside the inn, leading a pack laden horse, a tall woman with corded muscles and a single braid of chestnut hair is surrounded by four hulking elk. Spindly black branches are growing out through the elk's skin in a hundred places, covering their backs like porcupine quills. The woman drops the horse's reins and draws a bow as one of the elk lowers its head to charge.

The woman fending off the four corrupted **elk** is Rowan Ashefall (LG female human **scout**), a hunter who lives in the nearby forest and the one who took the reward for slaying the beasts plaguing travellers in the area. Rowan is a scout with the following change:

- Rowan has 37 hit points.

At the end of the first round, her horse spooks and bolts towards the tree line, disappearing into the forest.

DM Note: Corrupted Animals

Corrupted animals use the statistics for their respective animals found in the *Monster Manual*, but include the following effect:

Corrupted Rage. The creature has resistance to piercing, slashing and bludgeoning damage and gain a +2 bonus to damage rolls on all attacks.

When the characters exit the inn:

> The back of the inn is a wreckage of blackened, rotted wood. A hole has been eaten through the wall into one of the upper rooms, which is overgrown with long, twisted black branches that have spilled out onto the nearby ground. A trail of blackened footprints has been burned into the ground, leading towards the forest.

When the corrupted **elk** are dispatched, Rowan briefly examines them and heads towards the forest to find her horse. The characters can investigate the following things:

Black footsteps form a winding trail from the wreckage of the inn room towards the forest. Each foot print is black and burned into the landscape. Grass and shrubs near each print are dry and withered, crumbling to a grey ash when touched.

- A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that the life has been drained out of the plants.
- A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that there is a strong magical residue in the area.
- A detect magic spell reveals the presence of strong necromancy magic.

Everything in the inn room is stained black and has sprouted long, wiry black branches, reminiscent of those growing from the corrupted elk.

- The door leading from the inn into the room is locked from the inside.
- Rennen Starr was staying in this room the previous night. His *+1 shortsword* is laying in the middle of the floor, abandoned next to his pack. His pack contains the contents of a dungeoneer's kit. His clothes, cloak and coin purse are missing.
- The furniture of the room has turned black and when touched crumbles, as though it had been burned.
- A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that there is a strong magical residue in the area.
- A *detect magic* spell reveals the presence of strong necromancy magic.

ROLE-PLAYING ROWAN ASHEFALL

Rowan Ashefall is friendly, but proud. She speaks freely about her own past and will share any of the following personal information as it comes up in context.

- Rowan has been living in this forest since she was a child.
- Rowan's father taught her how to shoot a bow, swing a sword and live off the animals of this forest before he died.
- Rowan has never been married, but raised two children who are both grown and have moved away to live their own lives.
- Rowan makes a good living from hunting animals in the forest; selling tanned hides and smoked meat.
- Rowan makes her own arrows and blades at her forge. She learned to smith from a traveller after her father died.

DEVELOPMENT

At this point, the characters should have a clear picture that Rennen Starr has disappeared and be proceeding into the forest either in search of him, the source of the strange corruption or to assist Rowan in tracking down her lost horse.

CHAPTER 3 – TRACKING DOWN THE CORRUPTION

Shortly after moving into the forest, the characters notice that the black corruption that they witnessed at the inn seems to have taken greater root here in the forest. Wiry black branches have sprouted from otherwise healthy trees and leaves have turned brittle, crumbling to black ash when touched. The trail of black footprints leading from the tavern is swallowed up by large swathes of blackened landscape.

Without the trail, the party must find some other way to track their way through the forest:

- DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals the tracks from Rowan's horse, leading further into the forest.
- DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check reveals a magical energy, pulsing through the earth and trees, radiating outwards from a point within the forest.

Successfully completing one of these checks advances the party to the next section of the adventure. If the party accumulate two failures in either check, they spend additional time wandering in the forest and must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or acquire 1 level of exhaustion as the corruption in the forest saps their life energy.

DM's Note: Corruption

Corruption Nodes. Tangles of sinewy black branches around a glowing sphere of purple crystal. These are the primary way the corruption spreads through the forest, drawing life from forest animals and the surrounding trees.

When a hostile creature starts its turn within 10 feet of the node or moves there for the first time on a turn, it must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw as the black branches lash out. A creature who fails their save takes 10 (4d4) piercing damage and is grappled. The creature can use an action to make a DC 14 Strength check to escape the grapple. The node has AC 12 and 30 hit points. If it drops to 0 hit points, the node turns to black ash.

Corrupted Dryads. Wiry humanoid figures with coal black skin, eyes like burning coals and a head topped with a crown of gnarled black branches. Each crafted as a pale imitation of humanity. These re-skinned **dryads** are heralds of the corruption, luring prey to be devoured by the corruption nodes. (The alluring aspects of traditional dryads are not present with these dark creatures. Their *Fey Charm* ability should be described as an act of malevolent mind control).

LIFE DRAINING

> A clearing opens before you, revealing a ten foot tall spire of black branches twisting out of the ground. Tangled in their branches is a desiccated form of a horse, blackened and pierced through in a hundred places by the branches. At the center of the coil of branches is a smooth node of glowing purple crystal.

The horse has been tangled up and pierced through by a dormant **corruption node**. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the blackened creature is Rowan Ashefall's horse. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the horse has been drained of any moisture in its body.

If Rowan is with the party, she vows to find and end the source of the corruption, insisting that the characters accompany her. If the characters are hesitant to assist her, she offers her services as a blacksmith and fletcher.

If the characters cut the horse down or try to leave the area around the corruption node, it becomes hostile.

AGGRESSIVE CORRUPTION

An unnatural silence permeates the forest. Birds and insects are strangely silent; even the wind seems to be holding its breath. A tremor shakes the ground. Again and again, like the beating of some massive heart; each beat followed by a strange ringing in your ears. The ground beneath your feet heaves as large black roots snake their way through the soil towards you, tearing loose with a spray of dirt and rotten wood. A hand of blackened wood wrenches itself loose from the roots and a rake thin creature with a crown of twisted branches emerges.

The corrupted **dryad** emerges from the black roots and attempts to convince the characters to turn back, explaining that blight and decay is part of the natural cycle of life. See the DM's Note in this chapter for information about the corrupted dryad.

If combat breaks out, an enormous root, five feet wide and studded with glowing purple crystals, bursts up from the ground in the middle of the party. The root knocks everyone in the area back, splitting the party into two groups on either side of it. Any characters caught in the area must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone. Wiry black branches sprout from the root and four **needle blights** tear themselves from the root and engage the party with the corrupted **dryad**. The terrain within 10 feet of the root has been torn up and is difficult terrain. Any characters attempting to climb over the root must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to cross it and succeed in a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (4d4) piercing damage as the branches lash.



CHAPTER 4 – HEART OF THE CORRUPTION

When the characters find their way to the heart of the forest:

> The steady pulse of magic turns to thunder in your ear as you step into a wide clearing. A large mass of blackened branches stands before you, twisted and woven into a fifteen foot wide tree trunk stretching forty feet towards the sky. Something at the top of the tree catches your eye. An object glinting with reflected light. Then you pick out the shape of a withered hand, your eyes following it to an arm, a shoulder, a ribcage, hip and leg, all stretched and contorted by the black branches woven around them. Surrounding the tree are four glowing corruption nodes, pulsing with the heartbeat of magic as they draw life from forest creatures caught up in their black branches.

The corrupted tree stands at the center of the clearing, covering a 15 foot x 15 foot area. Four corruption nodes surround it (each is 10 feet from the tree) and have various forest creatures impaled in their branches. Four corrupted dryads surround the tree, ready to defend it.

COMBAT

As combat begins, the tree at the center of the clearing grows and shudders with each pulse of magical energy from the corruption nodes.

The characters can end the corruption by either destroying all four corruption nodes or retrieving the ring from the finger of the withered hand at the top of the tree (the glinting object in the description). If the characters fail to do either of these things by the end of the third round of combat, the corrupted tree shudders to life as a **shambling mound**.

Corrupted Tree. Any creature (other than the corrupted dryads) who touches the tree, or starts their turn touching the tree, must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage.

Corrupted Dryads. When a dryad is killed, it reforms from the tree on initiative count 20.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

When the characters have stopped the tree from coming to life, or alternatively killed the shambling mound, the dryads and the black rotted wood crumble and turn to black ash, leaving only the ring, scraps of fabric and Rennen's spilled coin pouch (containing 42 pp and 134 gp).

REWARDS

The Rot Mother's Promise

Legendary ring, requires attunement

While attuned to this item, you have +1 to armour class and saving throws and you can cast the chill touch spell at will. Additionally the ring has 5 charges, which recharge each day at dawn.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the rings charges to cast one of the following spells from it, your spell save DC for these spells is 14: charm person (1 charge), blight (2 charges).

Curse. At dawn, each day, you must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a success, you can choose to break your attunement to the ring. On a failed save, you gain one point of exhaustion and are unable to remove the ring or unattune from it until the next dawn. If you die while wearing this ring, corrupted tendrils of black wood sprout from your body and corrupt the surrounding landscape.

Casting a *remove curse* spell on the ring breaks the ring's connection to the Rot Mother. The ring then becomes a *ring of protection*.



AUTHOR'S NOTES

The idea for this story came from listening to players talk about their D&D adventures dealing with dryads. Each time it was the same story beginning with a forest, then a whole lot of seduction, objectification and innuendo, ending with the dryads dead on a sword or slinking back into the trees. I started by removing the middle of the story. I took away the seductive identity of the dryad and thought about what their mechanics might look like without it. A big shove in the direction of horror and the result was this story.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ARTIST

David is a writer and artist in Edmonton, Canada, with a moderate to unhealthy obsession with horror and all things Fey. You can find all his other D&D content on the DM's Guild and he can be reached on Twitter @DavidMarkiwsky.





THE SCALES OF MELUSINE

by Eleanor Hingley

Creature: *Melusine* | **Level:** *4*
CWs: *Snakes, drowning, mind control, claustrophobia*

SYNOPSIS

When the water source of the city-state of Guerino is poisoned and its citizens enchanted, a group of adventurers must follow the treacherous path deep into Mistfall Mountain and restore balance to the kingdom.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A group of heroes responds to King Elynas' call for someone to free his kingdom from corruption. Their motivations may be the reward, the obligation to do good, or personal links to a city that is slowly dying under the influence of the poisoned wellspring. If this is part of an ongoing campaign, an established NPC may ask the characters to investigate Guerino's troubles or find a relative who has been drawn to the mountain by Melusine.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The enchantress Melusine has long lived in Mistfall Mountain to the north of Guerino. She has maintained an uneasy peace with the monarchy of Guerino for centuries, but she seems to have turned on the kingdom. Rumors abound as to what she might be but she is known to prophesy to those who make the pilgrimage to Mistfall Mountain.

CHAPTER 1 – THE SNAKE'S COIL

In the heart of a fertile river basin surrounded by mountains sits a city that rules over rolling plains. It is a pocket of tranquility surrounded by countries that look to its rich farmlands and extensive forests with greedy eyes. However, Guerino has retained its independence through the canny negotiations of the monarchy. The palace of King Elynas, ruler of Guerino, stands proud from the city's golden stone buildings, a hall made for diplomacy rather than defense.

The party stands in a lavish throne room. King Elynas (NE male human **noble**) offers a reward of 50 gp each to eliminate the source of the corruption that has spread into the town's water supply. The corrupted water is causing ill-health in the city and failing crops in the country. He believes the source of the corruption is the enchantress Melusine, from whose mountain grotto the water flows. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (History) or a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check will inform the players that Melusine is almost certainly some kind of ancient supernatural creature.

The king's most trusted knight, Sir Raymondin, has fallen prey to the enchantress: Raymondin swore to end this corruption once and for all, but has not returned.

THE PALACE OF GUERINO

King Elynas. Ambitious and impulsive, Elynas is a kind ruler to his people but merciless when it comes to threats to his power. He has a good relationship with his younger sister, Sigrid, who has never shown

any ambitions to rule and takes on most of the day-to-day running of the kingdom while Elynas focuses on diplomacy.

One month ago, King Elynas traveled to the mountain of Melusine, whose existence has been an uneasy but unavoidable thorn in the side of the monarchs of Guerino for centuries, to ask her to provide a prophecy for him. The prophecy she gave enraged him and he poisoned the wellspring with a magical copper key, hoping to lessen her power. Instead, he only harmed his own people and made her more dangerous than ever. He has hired disposable adventurers in the hope that they will kill Melusine and solve his problem for him. On a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check, it is clear that Elynas is not telling the whole truth and holds well-concealed disdain for the party.

King Elynas claims not to know why Melusine might have suddenly turned on the city. He readily suggests that the toll of immortality might finally have caused her to lash out at those who lived nearby. He will warn the party that Melusine is a powerful enchantress able to manipulate the will of others. She is at her strongest in her grotto and will not willingly leave the spring that flows from it.

The king's sister, Sigrid (NG female human **noble**), provides maps of the route north to Mistfall Mountain, where Melusine resides. The way to the mountain is treacherous, with the river rising dangerously high despite the summer season and the wildlife becoming abnormally aggressive.

The bodies of Sir Raymondin's companions washed down the river, some with signs of animal attacks and others drowned. Sigrid also mentions that a number of citizens have gone missing from Guerino.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Guerino is a sizable settlement and so a good place to restock on supplies. The locals are willing to speak to strangers and will describe how the missing citizens, all female, calmly walked out one day and did not return. A DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check reveals that they left by the North Gate of the city. Anyone who tried to follow was prevented by unnatural phenomena such as the river overflowing its banks or wildlife attacks. If the party succeeds at a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check, they discover clear footprints on the river bank outside the North Gate that lead towards Mistfall Mountain, in the same direction as Sir Raymondin's expedition.

BRIGHT RIVER

The wooded route to the mountain runs upstream beside the fast-flowing Bright River, which originates from a spring in Mistfall Mountain. Without recent snowmelt or rainstorm, there is no good reason for it to be running this high.

Early along the route, a passive Perception (DC 15) alerts the characters to the **giant constrictor snake** following them. If they fail to spot the snake, it will have the opportunity to attempt to constrict one of them because the party is surprised. The **swarm of quippers** that accompany the snake should be reflavored as a swarm of tiny water snakes that emerge from the river.

Any character who makes a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check will be able to tell that the local wildlife is acting strangely, in a more directed and coordinated way. If the players can speak with the snake, it will praise Melusine as 'lady' and tell them that it was guarding the 'lady's chosen' as they make their way to the mountain.

Where other streams join the river, some must be forded or crossed on rickety bridges. One is particularly treacherous, a crumbling stone bridge covered in slippery moss. If any of the characters have a passive Perception of 15 or higher, they notice a mass of vines moving of their own accord under the bridge and an unnatural flow of the river that seems to bend and twist itself.

The characters must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to cross safely. Any characters who fail will fall in the water and trigger the next encounter where the party is attacked by a **water weird** and a **vine blight**. If they manage to pass the bridge without falling in, they have successfully defeated the encounter.

DEVELOPMENT

They reach the pool at the base of the waterfall that springs from Mistfall Mountain.

CHAPTER 2 – MISTFALL MOUNTAIN

In which the party finds a survivor of Sir Raymondin's adventuring party, resist the charms of Melusine's song and learn what happened to the brave knight.

The riverbanks give way to mountainous terrain and you soon find yourselves at the base of Mistfall Mountain. Where a waterfall crashes into a pool, the water is clouded with a green, inky substance. A male elf in light leather armor sits a little way back from the pool and stands as you approach, supporting a splinted leg on crutches while struggling to ready his crossbow.

THE SURVIVOR

Beside the pool at the base of the waterfall, the party comes across a survivor from Sir Raymondin's party, Vodnik (N male elf **scout**) was too injured to return to town. All but Vodnik and Sir Raymondin died to the dangers on the path. Sir Raymondin persuaded Vodnik to stay here and tend to his injuries while he pressed on up the path to the mountain and faced Melusine alone. A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that the substance in the water is not natural and a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies it as magical.

THE CALL OF MELUSINE

Any female characters hear an enticing song that reminds them of the lullabies they heard as children combined with the most romantic serenade. They must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become enthralled to Melusine's song. They are still capable of making their own decisions but are filled with the desire to go towards the song, as well as the knowledge that they are completely safe. Anything that might cause them to question this state provokes a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. If they succeed, they become aware that their minds were manipulated and are immune to the song.

THE DIAMOND DOOR

A winding path leads up the mountain to a diamond-shaped door nestled in a ravine with steep sides. It is guarded by a man in heavy armour who stands with his hands resting on his sword, ready for battle—the king's most faithful knight, Sir Raymondin.

Sir Raymondin (LG male human **helmed horror**) is famous in Guerino and further afield for his loyalty, chivalry and prowess in serving King Elyas. He is honor-bound to guard this door from all who would seek passage and will slay any person who tries to open it. Raymondin came here with violence in his heart, but Melusine showed him that there are much greater treasures in this place to be protected. It is possible to use social skills to trick him or give him a chance to break the enchantment (he makes a DC 14 saving throw). Because he stands directly before the entrance to the grotto, the party cannot sneak past him.

If the party chooses to fight Raymondin, the enchantment breaks when he reaches 10 hit points. He yields and admits that they have bested him.

When the enchantment is broken, Sir Raymondin is brought back to himself, but admits that given the lingering effects of Melusine's power on him, he does not think he can be trusted to fight alongside you. Instead, he regroups with Vodnik.

DEVELOPMENT

Before leaving, Sir Raymondin tells the party that the way to Melusine's grotto is through the mountain caves, but the route is treacherous, for the enchantress commands everything natural and unnatural within. He is willing to watch over the party for a short or a long rest, though if a member of the party is enchanted, they may need to be restrained or brought out of their enchantment.

If one or more of the party members do escape their companions, they will be found amongst the women from the city, still enchanted but unharmed.

CHAPTER 3 – THE GROTTO OF MELUSINE

The party descends through the mountain and confronts Melusine.

THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN

The path inside the mountain winds down through the natural caves within. Along the way, the party encounters hazards (roll randomly on the following table one to three times or choose). Any party members enchanted by Melusine walk through unharmed.

Roll	Hazard	Effect
1	Swarm of Bats	Drain 1d4 health and risk Sewer Plague
2	Tangling Webs	See DMG, "Adventure Environments"
3	Mudslide	DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or take 2d6 falling damage and take time reuniting the party
4	Poisoned Moss	DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take -2 on Strength saving throws until a long rest
5	Cave Monsters	1 darkmantle and 3 gray oozes attack from stealth. Roll Dexterity (Stealth) checks of +3 and +2 respectively against passive Perception
6	Strange Mists	DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take -2 on any non-combat checks requiring concentration

THE WELLSPRING

You reach the vaulted grotto of Melusine, a natural cavern in the centre of the mountain lit by bright moss spread across the roof like stars. A huge fountain bubbles and gushes in the center of the chamber, the outlet for the wellspring with a beautifully-carved stone setting around it. Six women move around the cavern tending the moss. They all move with a certain uniformity, seeming to follow unheard orders rather than their own decisions. An older woman appears to be instructing them.

The women from the town are under Melusine's control. The older woman, who has a green scaled cast to her skin, is the priestess Melior (TN female **yuan-ti priest**), keeper of Melusine's grotto. She is initially suspicious of the party but a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check cajoles her into telling the party that she is concerned. Melusine has never exerted her influence like this before. It all started when King Elynas sought out a prophecy from Melusine, though Melior does not know what passed between them. She cannot be persuaded to fight Melusine and pleads for her Lady's life, but agrees to shepherd the enchanted women out of the room, triggering the next encounter.



If the party attempts to break any of the cultists out of their enchantment or harm them, the remaining cult members run to one of the side rooms, and a group of water elementals forms around the cavern, attacking the party with entangling water whips, raking ice teeth and malleable bodies. Four are smaller and more viscous (three **kuo-toa**) and two are larger antd have long ice-studded tendrils (one **kuo-toa whip**). When this encounter is defeated, Melusine (CG female **couatl**) herself appears to defend her cavern.

> Thrashing serpentine tails emerge from the bubbling water of the fountain. Melusine's torso is that of a beautiful woman with batlike wings and a scaled lower body splitting into two snake tails. She is in a frenzy, lashing her tail in the water of the fountain and barely coherent, very far from the wise figure of legend. The water is clouded with that same green inky discoloration you saw in the waterfall earlier, though more concentrated here. Green stains like corroded copper marr Melusine's scales and skin and her eyes glow a sickly green.

Cleansing the Corruption:
The corruption is coming from the spring rather than Melusine. If the players seem intent on killing Melusine, give her a moment of clarity when she is down to 15 hit points or is physically removed from the spring to beg them for help in cleansing the corruption before she becomes enraged again.

To cleanse the spring, the party must succeed on a DC 15 check with one of the following Intelligence skills: Religion, Arcana, or Nature. Other characters assisting with a different skill from the list give advantage on the check.

The copper key King Elynas threw into the spring to curse Melusine becomes clear for all to see.

When the fountain is cleansed, Melusine will stop struggling and the fight will end but the corruption remains. As soon as the corruption is gone or Melusine is dead, the mind control drops from anyone affected by it.



If the party does not kill Melusine:

Melusine tells the adventurers that Elyas came to visit her asking for a prophecy about his kingship and flew into a rage when she related her vision. The copper key Elyas dropped into the fountain brought a curse of corruption and fury upon Melusine. While Melusine believes that the king did not intend to hurt his people, his actions led to great harm. She is deeply apologetic to those she enchanted and explains that the curse robbed her of control over her actions.

Melusine wants the King's treachery revealed to his people and the prophecy she told him to be widely known. She asks that the adventurers return to Guerino to tell the truth and rebalance the scales. If they agree to do so, she bestows the following items upon them as a reward (found in *DMG*, "Treasure" unless otherwise noted):

- *Mariner's Armor*
- *Cap of Water Breathing*
- *Cloak of the Manta Ray*
- *Gloves of Swimming and Climbing*
- A common *potion of healing* each

Melusine's prophecy to King Elynas is:
"Your ambition will bring your kingdom low;
By your own hand will the crown be struck from your head."

If the party kills Melusine:

Melior emerges from hiding and mourn her mistress. She tells the party about Melusine's daughter and begs them to spare the egg, charging them with bringing Melusine's prophecy to the kingdom.

Melusine's daughter, Palatyne, sleeps in an egg in the wellspring, ready to hatch and inherit Melusine's powers of prophecy. The egg glows with an inner light, revealing a two-tailed snake humanoid girl inside who is just starting to move.

Development

Melusine or Melior asks the party to travel to Guerino and reveal the king's treachery to his people.

Conclusion

When the adventurers return to Guerino, they are taken straight to the palace. If the adventurers choose not to reveal King Elyas' treachery, they can blackmail him into giving them additional rewards: 100 additional gp split between them. If they choose to reveal the king's corruption, he tries to have them arrested, but they can speak the words of Melusine's prophecy or make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince the king's council that they are telling the truth. If Sir Raymondin is still alive, he will back up their claims, even going so far as to denounce the king for his callousness and cruelty.

If the players wish to put an NPC in power, the most suitable candidate is the king's younger sister Sigrid, who has been managing the kingdom during the time of crisis.

Some suggestions for how you could use this adventure to kickstart or continue a campaign:

- Melusine gives each of the characters a prophecy about their futures as an additional reward, which can be used to sow personalized plot hooks.
- The copper key King Elynas used could have been custom made for the task by a corrupt arcanist or an ancient cursed object he sought out. Either way, investigating its origin could be a great adventure.

Rewards

ENCOUNTER	*XP*
Giant constrictor snake and swarm of quippers	975 xp
Water weird and vine blight	1200 xp
Helmed horror	1100 xp
Darkmantle and gray oozes	800 xp
Koa-toa and koa-toa whips	700 xp
Couatl	1100 xp

ACTION	*REWARD*
Cleaning the well and saving the city	50 gp
A selection of magic items if they agree to expose King Elynas's actions to his people	100 gp split between party
Accepting the King's bribe	



AUTHOR'S NOTES

Thank you to my excellent playtest group: Robin Farndon, Philip Hanley, Seph Steel, and Jessica Waters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eleanor Hingley is obsessed with stories and tells them through novels, role-playing games and interactive fiction. She reviews RPGs and muses on gaming culture as The Anxious Gamer (theanxiousgamer.wordpress.com/). Nerd out with her on Twitter @Magpie_Elle.




TIER 2



Illustration by Samantha Darcy

OUR FAIR MAIDENS

by Paige Ford

Creature: *Rusalki* | **Level(s):** *4-6*
CWs: *Mentions of domestic abuse, drowning, murder, regurgitation, suicide*

SYNOPSIS

In this level 5 adventure for three to five players, a suspicious death brings our adventurers to the village of Degorod on the night of an annual festival. Celebrations turn into chaos as an unknown force abducts villagers from above. The group must investigate the cause and, in the end, decide who to help.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Before the adventure begins, Vasili, a retired constable, sends a letter seeking assistance in investigation an unusual death. The receiver of this letter might be a character with connections to law enforcement or military as Vasili's a retired constable. If that isn't fitting, Vasili reaches out to a city official who has hired the party as mercenaries.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure takes place during Rusalka Week, the one tenday every fifty years that allows for a rusalki to avenge their death. A rusalka (plural: rusalki) is a woman driven to suicide or murdered in the local waterways by a romantic partner. The woman turns into a rusalka, a creature doomed to a corporeal confine until their death is avenged. This Rusalka Week happens to be the week that the night of the 30th Annual Festival of Health & Harvest is scheduled.

There are four rusalka in this module, and, before the adventure begins, one of the rusalka has already been avenged. If any of the former partners of the rusalki face combat, use the **commoner** stat block. This being a module heavy with investigation, the DM may have to improvise areas that are not mentioned in this module (e.g. Dimitri's farm).

CHAPTER 1 – THE FESTIVAL RUNS AFOUL

Having received Vasili's letter, the party begins their travel to Degorod. During this time the party re-reads the letter:

(Insert Name),

I wish I was contacting you about a joyful matter, alas it's quite serious. A local villager died recently, an old farmer named Dimitri. While he lives alone on his farm, his body was found still fresh by someone passing by. It appears that Dimitri had a stroke and proceeded to fall and drown in a water trough. While this may simply be an unfortunate event, there were some suspicious aspects to his death. After inspecting his body, I found fresh clay on his shoes. This type of clay is found at the river bank. Dimitri lives an hour away from the river, how was it fresh? Please, I need your assistance.

Your Friend,
Vasili

The sun is setting when the party arrives to Degorod. Unusual for the late hour, people rush about, laughing and calling out greetings. A large bonfire is being set-up in the middle of the village center as people rush around completing their preparations for the festival. Multiple tables line the edges of the village center and a hut stands to one end where a couple of people are rolling in the last of the kegs for the festival.

Villagers provide the following information if asked:

- It's the night of the 30th annual Health & Harvest Festival. We gather here in Degorod to celebrate our good health and the harvest of the season.
- Vasili is helping set up the food table.

When found, Vasili, a human man in his late sixties, welcomes the party and says how glad he is that they came. Vasili pulls the group aside and tells the group what he knows about Dimitri's death after investigating the body and asking around:

- Dimitri was a seventy-year-old farmer.
- Widowed six months after getting married and lived alone since then.
- Vasili found a long red hair wrapped around Dimitri's left ankle with a matching bruise under it.
- Vasili says the festival is starting and that the party should join. Pointing out the food tables, keg table, benches and a tea-reading tent, Vasili hurries the party towards the bonfire.

A string band strums as the villagers of Degorod begin to dance around the growing bonfire. The last traces of sunlight fade away as the wood blazes and the song comes to an end.

A loud cheer fills the air as the band strikes up the next song. People scatter a bit more, many dancing, some heading off to the various tables. Allow the party as much "free-time" as wanted at this moment. Refer to the *Festival Villagers* chart for information on some some of the villagers' and their opinion of Dimitri. There's also a *Tea Reading Results* chart for those who have their tea leaves read by Zorina and Kotinka.

FESTIVAL VILLAGERS

Name	Age	Location	Personality & Relations	Opinion of Dmitri by Age Range
Gayla (she/her)	8	Harvest Table	Daughter of Gorshkov; confident, adventurous	
Raya (she/her)	15	Bonfire Bench	Sister to Tatiana; shy, sweet	Mean old man who kept to himself.
Tatiana (she/her)	18	Bonfire Dancing Area	Sister to Raya; intelligent, natural leader	
Maritza (she/her)	20	Keg Table	Lively, life of the party	
Konstantin (he/him)	25	Keg Table	Cocky, ladies-man	
Gorshkov (he/him)	30	Dining Bench	Gayla's doting father	Widowed older farmer who gave steep prices.
Boris (he/him)	35	Dining Bench	Drunkard, boisterous	
Pashkov (he/him)	45	Keg Lean-To	Quiet, quick to anger	Those towards the older end of this age range were kids at his wife's funeral; Dimitri was so mean, he didn't even cry.
Alena (she/her)	58	Food Table	Matriarch; stern, forgiving	
Ora (she/her)	60	Bonfire Bench	Married to Darin; sweet, in-love	
Darin (he/him)	70	Bonfire Bench	Married to Ora; goofy, in-love	This age range was his school peers; they remember him as a bully. They're not surprised he died alone, even the matchmaker wouldn't work with him twice.
Zorina (she/her)	80	Fortune-Telling Tent	Twin to Kotinka; serious	
Kotinka (she/her)	80	Fortune-Telling Tent	Twin to Zorina; bubbly	

TEA READING RESULTS

D10 Result	Fortune Description
1	Axe: Strength—you have advantage on one attack roll.
2	Fire: Change will burn away the old soon.
3	Anvil: Endurance—you have resistance against the next attack made against you.
4	A Wing: Death—you automatically succeed on your next death saving throw.
5	Candlestick: Change your perspective—You have advantage on your next Wisdom (Perception) check.
6	Clenched Hand: Righteous anger.
7	Clover: Lucky—you gain Inspiration.
8	Dagger: Danger—The next opportunity attack made against you is made with advantage.
9	Ear: Shocking information comes your way—you have advantage on your next Intelligence (Investigation) roll.
10	Gavel: Justice is near.

PARTY-CRASHERS

When the time is right, a scream comes from the crowd. Chaos ensues as people stampede, screams and cries filling the air.

The tone of this chapter is chaos, disruption and horror. The rusalki are crashing the festival to kidnap Boris and Konstantin and kill Pashkov.

The crowd of people is running, families are trying to find each other. Eventually people run into their homes or to their wagons. As the chaos calms, another scream is heard, this time it's coming from the keg hut.

If someone runs over, they'll find Maritza staring ahead in silent horror. Laying on his back, mouth open, and staring blankly at the ceiling is Pashkov. A keg above his head continuously pours into his mouth, forming a frothy pool around his body.

A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a red hair wrapped around his throat with a bruise appearing beneath it and that the vessels in his eyes have all popped. These are signs of being choked.

Vasili rushes over and pulls Maritza away, gently suggesting she sit down on a nearby bench. If the party failed the skill check regarding Pashkov's body, Vasili reveals these now. Listed below are conversation notes possible for the villagers available.

- **Maritza:** A successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check calms Maritza and she tells the characters that she was talking to Konstantin when suddenly something red grabbed him from above.
- **Vasili:** Vasili was caught in the rushing masses, but he saw Boris lifted in the air by something red.

After the party converses with Maritza and/or Vasili, Maritza exclaims through tears:

> *"How awful, murdered and left in his dead wife's ale!"*

If asked about that, she explains that the ale was one of Eristova's recipe. Alina runs up, breathless, and pants out:

> *"Boris, I saw it take him to the river. Quickly, please help him."*

Vasili shows the party the trail to the river but stays back to help those injured in the chaos.

DEVELOPMENT

The party goes to find Boris and encounters their first rusalki.

CHAPTER 2 – THE RUSALKA

LILOVA AT THE RIVER

Following the path, the party hears rushing water ahead of them. When the party gets closer, they hear a voice and what seems to be muffled screams. Across the river bank, Lilova, a **rusalka** and the deceased wife of Boris, has Boris wrapped up to his nose in her long red hair. Boris stares at his former wife, terrified. Gaunt and with her skin tinted a light blue, as if she has a lack of breath, water pours from her mouth as she speaks. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check allows a character to hear what Lilova is saying, which is that it's Boris's fault that she and their children died and that she can't wait to see them again.

When the party is in sight, Lilova stiffens and tells them to leave her alone: Boris must die. If the party tries to intervene, Lilova calls forth two river-clay snakes to keep the characters away as she attempts to drown Boris. These are constructs made of river-clay that attack the party. The snakes use the same size, ability scores and attacks as a **giant constrictor snake**.

Lilova continues to use her hair to keep Boris wrapped up as she attempts to drown him. If dropped to 0 hit points, Lilova melts into a puddle of water and river grass. If Lilova is dispatched, she won't be in the final battle.

If Boris is saved and questioned, a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check loosens his lips. Boris tells the party that he used to get a little heavy-handed with Lilova when drunk. One night, five years ago, Lilova took their two children and ran away in the middle of the night. They must have gotten caught in rushing waters and drowned.

At this point, the party hears something from the trail. A slow shuffling heading towards the party. After a minute, Zorina and Kotinka make their way into the clearing.

If Boris still lives, their eyes lock onto him with a steely glare for a moment. Looking back to the party, they speak in unison:

> *"We have an idea of what's going on. Come, follow us."*

THE TWINS

It's early in the morning after the chaos of the festival, as the party follows two short, bun-topped heads to a cottage on the outskirts of the Degorod.

Entering, Kotinka starts the kettle and unwraps a plate of small cakes for the party. Urging them to sit and eat, she tends to any wounds the party may have. At the same time, Zorina drags a chair over to the bookshelf, stands on top of it, and starts grabbing books.

Shuffling over, Zorina sets them on the dining room table and stands on a chair to quickly flip through them.

Kotinka and Zorina start to speak rapidly, completing each other's sentences:

> Kotinka: *"We didn't know what was going on at first."*
> Zorina: *"Until we saw her!"*
> Kotinka: *"Inna!"*
> Zorina: *"Which should be impossible..."*
> Kotinka: *"Inna died 45 years ago!"*

At this point Zorina has found what she was looking for in one of their books and plops it down on the table in front of the party. The party sees an illustration of a gaunt women with long hair that trails down their back into a pile on the ground.

From that text the party finds out:

A rusalka (plural: rusalki) is a creature born from the need for justice. Sometimes if a woman is driven to suicide or murdered in the local waterways the woman turns into a rusalka, a creature doomed to a corporeal confine. During Rusalka Week, the rusalki can leave their watery graves to begin their week of retribution. If they are avenged by the week's end, the rusalks finds peace. It is rumored that a rusalka cannot be killed, only temporarily displaced.

The following is what the sisters know of the men taken and their partners:

- **Dimitri & Inna:** Inna supposedly died by falling and hitting her head. There were suspicions, but no proof to take it further with.
- **Pashkov & Eristova:** Eristova was a healthy woman; it came as a shock when she died in her sleep. Pashkov kept to himself after that, but eventually continued with Eristova's business.
- **Boris & Lilova:** Boris can be explosive when inebriated, which he usually is. Lilova came to town with a large bruise once, but blamed it on her own clumsiness.
- **Konstantin:** Kotinka calls him a crowing rooster, while Zorina calls him a little shit. Wasn't he courting that one girl who died last year, Selinka Yanovna?
- **Selinka Yanovna:** There were rumors she killed herself, but her family moved away quickly afterward and the whispers quickly died. Selinka was friends with Raya, she might be able to help. Usually she can be found underneath the poplar tree just outside the village.

Kotinka seethes and slams her tiny wrinkled fists on the table. Finding it despicable, Kotinka and Zorina beseech the party to bring these men to justice to help prevent any more of their women from becoming rusalki.

DEVELOPMENT

Characters learn that Raya has information on how to find Konstantin and the rusalki.

CHAPTER 3 – LARKSPUR FIELD

Going to where the twins said Raya would likely be, they find her under the poplar tree, writing in her journal.

When the party walks up, she visibly clams up and blushes bright red as she stutters out a greeting.

When Selinka is mentioned, a look of grief settles on Raya's face and tears well up in her eyes. A successful DC 14 Charisma check allows a character to draw information out of Raya.

- Selinka's relationship with Raya was that of a mentor, both assisting in school work and trying to help Raya build up confidence.
- Selinka became too busy to see Raya as often. Raya saw her arguing with Konstantin once, and she stormed off into the woods towards Larkspur Field. It's where Selinka would go when she wanted to be alone.
- Selinka died before Raya could ask what was wrong.

If asked or if it's made clear that the party needs to find Selinka, Raya points the way to Larkspur Field.

THE CHOICE

Arriving at Larkspur Field, and they find Konstantin in a compromising position. In the center of the field, he lays wrapped up in a mass of red hair with a bleeding head wound. Selinka has Konstantin entangled in her hair as Inna, Eristova, and Lilova (if not displaced) hold hands in a circle around him.

As the party steps into the clearing, water flows from Selinka's mouth as she tells them to stop.

If the party speaks to the rusalki, they'll be able to discover:

- Inna was drowned in their horse's trough by Dimitri in a fit of rage.
- Pashkov killed Eristova out of jealousy. He chased her to the river one night on their way home from an out of town delivery.
- Lilova died trying to escape her abusive alcoholic husband. She got caught in a rushing part of the river and drowned, along with her two children.
- Selinka killed herself when Konstantin threatened ruin and physical harm after she got pregnant with his child.
- Those who kill the one responsible for their death find peace at midnight, whether they are dispatched or not.

The party must decide now if they side with the rusalka's retribution or with judicial justice.

If the party decides on judicial justice, the rusalki fight the group with the intent to get them out of their way using non-lethal force. Before releasing Konstantin from her hair, Selinka breaks his ankle so he can't get away. The fight either ends after 10 rounds or when the rusalki have been displaced. When displaced, the rusalki melt into a puddle of water and river grass.

DEVELOPMENT

The party's choice determines what happens next. See *Conclusion A* if the party decides to let the rusalka avenge themselves. See *Conclusion B* if the party tries to save Konstantin so they can bring him to trial.

CONCLUSION A

If they side with the rusalki's retribution, it's simple: Selinka suggests that they look away before she leans in towards Konstantin. For a moment it looks as though she might kiss him before she pries his mouth open and water pours from her mouth to his. In less than a minute, the deed is done, and Konstantin is dead. While these rusalka have found their peace, the party might work with the Zorina and Kotinka to educate and prevent more Rusalka from being created.

CONCLUSION B

If the party chose judicial justice, they must fight the rusalki to bring in Konstantin.

- Selinka attempts to drown Konstantin, see *Conclusion A* for description.
- The other rusalki attempt to keep the party away via non-lethal means.

If the party succeeds in displacing the rusalki and saving Konstantin, they bring him back to the Capitol to try him for manslaughter. With the political power of the Capitol assisting them, the party, along with Zorina and Kotinka, can successfully push for laws protecting survivors of domestic abuse.

REWARDS

Use this XP chart if any of the creatures or people mentioned in the chart are killed or displaced:

OBSTACLE	***XP***
River-Clay Snake	450
Rusalki	700
Commoner	10

This module isn't intended to have traditional awards outside of the party being, potentially, mercenaries. If they are, each player receives 20 gp for checking in with Vasili. The reward of this module is the societal changes that are mentioned in the conclusions.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

After reading about the rusalki, it didn't settle well with me that, even in death, women were being punished for not dying "properly." I wanted to write a story to change this myth into a warning for mistreating the women in your lives instead of a warning for men. In this story, I wanted the rusalki to seek their justice instead of simply purposeless death.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paige Ford discovered *D&D* as an adult and quickly fell head-over-heels. Besides playing various TTRPGs, she also DMs/GMs them and has begun writing modules for them.

Rusalka

Medium monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class	13
Hit Points	58 (9d10 + 9)
Speed	30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)

Damages Resistances	Fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damages Immunities	Poison
Condition Resistances	Exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, poisoned, restrained, prone, unconscious
Senses	Blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages	Common
Challenge	3 (700 XP)

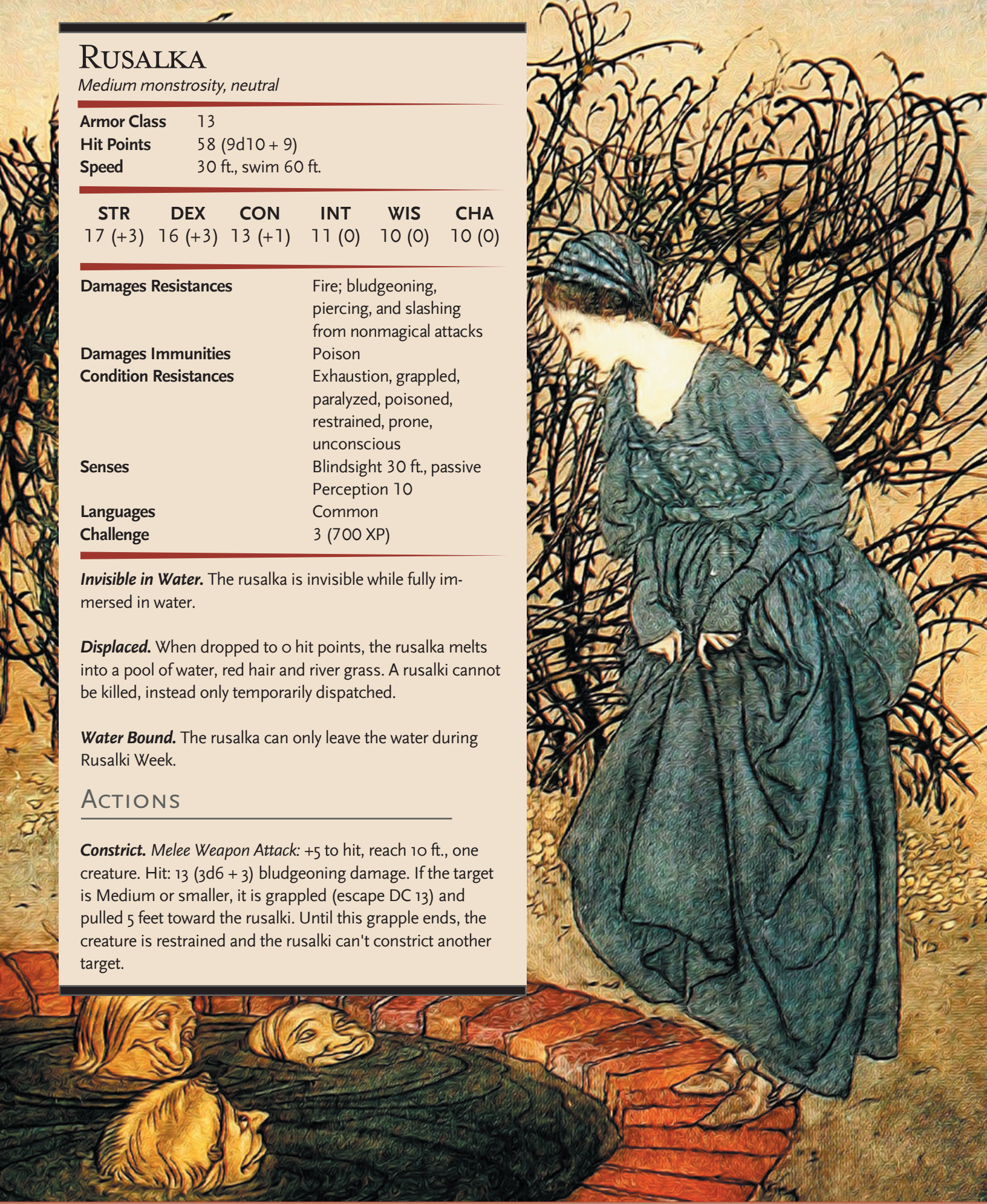
Invisible in Water. The rusalka is invisible while fully immersed in water.

Displaced. When dropped to 0 hit points, the rusalka melts into a pool of water, red hair and river grass. A rusalki cannot be killed, instead only temporarily dispatched.

Water Bound. The rusalka can only leave the water during Rusalki Week.

Actions

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 13 (3d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 13) and pulled 5 feet toward the rusalki. Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the rusalki can't constrict another target.





A RAW REPRISAL

by Amy and Tim Dziewit

Creature: *Bheur Hag* | **Level(s):** *5-10*

SYNOPSIS

The party visits the village of Bellmare, where a hag has recently been slain, and which has since been plagued with deadly wintery weather during the Summer Solstice. The party meets the head of the village, who asks them to find the cause. When the party reaches a small hut in the mountains, they encounter a hag. Rather than attack them, she offers them information to help stop her sister from enacting revenge upon Bellmare.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party learns of Bellmare—a village that is suffering from blustery, snowy, wintery weather during the Summer Solstice. This radical change in weather has resulted in the destruction of crops, the death of livestock, and an exodus of residents.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In Part 1, the party visits the village that is being plagued by unseasonable weather. In the village, they meet Hlin, a prominent figure in the village. Here they learn that the winter weather began after a bheur hag was killed by villagers. Hlin asks the party to go into the mountains to find the cause of the wintery weather.

In Part 2, the party traverses the mountain. In the mountain, they encounter an avalanche and an abominable yeti.

In Part 3, the party finds a run-down shack and encounters a bheur hag named Vistra Itchy Bones. They learn that she has caused the wintery weather to slow down her sister whose rage turned her into a bheur slithering tracker.

In Part 4, the party returns to the village to find and stop the bheur slithering tracker.

PART 1 – THE VIRTUOUS VILLAGE

The village of Bellmare is divided into three sections by wide dirt roads. One has farmland, barns for livestock, and stables for their prized horses. The next contains a few dozen modest residences. The third contains small businesses, a general store, and the Switchback Inn & Tavern. Bellmare is highly regarded in the area because of the fine stock of horses bred there. The inhabitants are mostly humans, halflings, and dwarves. Read the following aloud:

> As the sun dips behind the nearby Innisfail Mountains, a bone-chilling cold runs through you as you enter the village proper. Trudging along the wide, snow-covered field, stepping on and over frozen crops, you realize this is actually farmland. You pass several small barns and a large stable, where animals covered with blankets shiver in their stalls.
>
> Small, simple houses are scattered throughout the village. In the distance, a group is picking up and carrying off a frozen body that lay in the snow. Nearby, two oblivious dwarven children run and toss snowballs at one another.
>
> You eventually reach the village center. People bundled up in winter clothes walk through the blustery wind, past a general store, toward the largest building in the village. You follow them inside and a welcome warmth rushes over you. The tavern is so packed that the mass of people dim the light from a roaring fire. A female dwarf stands on a table addressing a scared and angry crowd. A few minutes later, the crowd disperses, with a majority of them exiting the building.

The female dwarf woman is Hlin (**veteran**), and she is the head of the village of Bellmare. The barkeeper and all other patrons are friendly enough, but direct the party to speak with Hlin. Desperate for any help in this situation, Hlin will offer the adventurers the following information:

- About a month ago, dark clouds formed high in the Innisfail Mountains. Soon after, snow came and blanketed Bellmare. The weather continued to get colder and snowier by the day.
- About a week before that, screams of a small halfling girl named Pennie (non-combatant) came from the edge of the village, as an old crone feasted on the girl's fingers. Hlin along with other residents came to Pennie's aid.
- The crone was slain. Pennie survived, though she was maimed. Four villagers perished in the fight from the crone's magic, which froze them.
- Fearing some restorative magic, the villagers built a pyre and burned the body.
- Bellmare has lost most of its crops, and livestock are dying. Hlin cares for the horses and describes how difficult it has become to keep them healthy and fed. Several of the prominent villagers and their families have decided to leave. Others have nowhere else to go.

Hlin asks the party if they are willing to investigate the source of the snowy weather. The village has very little to offer in exchange. Hlin personally offers a potion of greater healing and a potion of heroism as an incentive. Hlin then reveals:

- The crone carried a long gray-colored staff. She also had a satchel; in it was a glass jar containing a weird bit of flesh floating in pickling liquid. All of these items are now kept in Hlin's home. She insists that the party take these items with them.

Role-Playing Hlin

Hlin is strong, stout, pure of heart, and honest. Hlin is a hard-working dwarf who takes care of the horses of the village in addition to caring for her daughter. She wants nothing but the best for the community. Yet she fears the village won't survive this difficult time, leaving Bellmare a frozen ghost village.

Preparations

The party has already felt the cold of the area. If the characters do not already have cold weather gear, resistance or immunity to cold damage, or natural adaptations to cold climates, Hlin warns that a frigid death awaits them.

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check can allow a party member to scrounge together scraps of clothing to create temporary cold weather gear.

Development

Hlin provides food and drink, and offers the home that she shares with her daughter, Morena (non-combatant), for the night's rest.

Part 2 – The Wind and the Wild

As the party sets off, read the following aloud:

> The path from the village to the mountains is difficult to travel, slick with ice and snow. In milder weather, it would be a picturesque and enjoyable trip. However, in this weather, it is extremely cold and requires much attention to keep from slipping back down the trail or onto protruding rocks.

Through the Pass

A strong wind blows snow around and through the mountain pass, dropping the temperature below 0 degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature continues to drop the farther up the party travels.

Extreme Cold & Strong Winds

Whenever the temperature is at or below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, a creature exposed to the cold must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or gain one level of exhaustion. Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed on the saving throw, as do creatures wearing cold weather gear (thick coats, gloves, and the like) and creatures naturally adapted to cold climates. A strong wind imposes disadvantage on ranged weapon attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing. A strong wind also extinguishes open flames, disperses fog, and makes flying by nonmagical

means nearly impossible. A flying creature in a strong wind must land at the end of its turn or fall.

AVALANCHE!

As the party traverses the mountain pass, have them make a DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a success, they notice unstable snow, high atop the surrounding hills and cliffs. A short time later an avalanche occurs. Read the following aloud:

> As you walk, a patch of snow shifts just ahead of you. An intense vibration comes from above. You look up and see ice and snow careening down the hill. "Avalanche!"
>
> You hear a loud thud, followed by a massive roar. A huge, white creature comes with the wave of snow filling the path in front of you.

Each creature must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw, taking 17 (3d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A party member that succeeded on the previous Wisdom (Survival) check can roll with advantage. If a creature fails the saving throw by 5 or more, they are buried in the snow and are blinded, restrained, and are unable to breathe. Regardless of success or failure, each creature is also knocked prone.

The avalanche was unintentionally caused by an **abominable yeti** who inhabits these mountains. The abominable yeti crashes down, landing prone 30 feet from the party with the following changes to the standard stat block:

- The abominable yeti has 120 hit points.
- The abominable yeti's multiattack can use its chilling gaze or make two claw attacks, not both.
- The abominable yeti's cold breath has been expended, but can recharge.

A buried creature can be located with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. Freeing a creature covered by the snow requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

THE CAVE

Past the site of the avalanche, the path forks. One path is blocked by a wall of snow and ice, a result of the recent avalanche. The other path leads to the mouth of a cave.

This completely dark cave twists and turns for a short distance. The height and width of the cave varies, but at its apex it is 8 feet tall and 5 feet wide.

DEVELOPMENT

The party can take a short rest inside the cave.

PART 3 – A HELPFUL HAG

As the party exits the cave, read the following aloud:

> Leaving the tunnel, you walk out into a flat area of snowy ground. Spikes of ice jut up around a dilapidated shack located a short distance from the entrance to the cave.
>
> Drops of bright red blood on the ground lead toward the shack. It is still wet and appears to be fresh. Following the drops and smears of blood leads you to the side of the rundown shack, where a pale-blue-skinned, white-haired woman is disgustingly feasting on a large elk. Her abnormally long, pointed fingers and face are stained red as she dismantles the carcass.

MADDENING FEAST

The woman is Vistra Itchy Bones (**bheur hag**). Use the bheur hag's *Maddening Feast* ability, affecting the entire party, and then read the following aloud:

> The woman looks up at you, her face slick with blood. She quickly stands, and as she does, a chunk of flesh falls from her mouth and splats in the snow near her feet.
>
> *"I'm sorry you had to see that!"* she says while wiping her hands across her ragged clothes, making the already filthy material even more soiled.

Vistra Itchy Bones has no intention of harming the party. The icy spikes are the hags' minions: 3d12 + 6

ice mephits using their false appearance ability. If Vistra is attacked, the **ice mephits** come to her aid.

Vistra parlays, assuring the party they will perish if their actions continue. She offers the following information.

- Vistra freely admits her *control weather* magic is the cause of the wintery weather.
- Vistra and her sister Valthaea the Drippus, could sense her mother's death as the coven broke.
- Their mother, Valna Fingerbiter, enjoyed visiting the village, hoping an easy snack would present itself. Later, the sisters went and found the immolated corpse of their mother.
- Valthaea did not handle their mother's death well. Distraught and full of rage, Valthaea turned to weird and dark magic. She is obsessed with finding the necessary reagents to perform a ritual that would take the essence from her body, coalesce it, and transform her into a creature, a bheur slithering tracker, whose sole focus is to seek revenge.
- Vistra used *control weather* to cause the cold, snow, and wind. It was not her intention to harm the villagers, but rather to slow her sister's endeavour. Knowing only a few details about this weird and dark ritual and Valthaea's new form, Vistra reveals that this new form is vulnerable to the cold.
- Vistra is sure that Valthaea will kill every last one of the villagers.
- Vistra feels that Bellmare is merely collateral damage in her attempt to thwart any of her sister's plans.

A success on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Vistra had very little love for her mother and has complete disdain for her sister.

ROLE-PLAYING VISTRA ITCHY BONES

Vistra is very obvious about her disgust for her family. She is shrewd despite her curiosity and willingness to help the party. She craves the power that comes along with her mother's graystaff and pays particular attention to the party member carrying it. She thinks very little of the party's ability to stop her sister, but sees no downside for herself if they try.

Vistra invites the party into her hut to rest. As the party enters, read the following aloud:

> A small mummified hand serves as the door handle to her hut. The entrance is decorated with the skulls and bones of various creatures.
>
> On a shelf near the door is a jar of eyes that shift about, following as you move around. On another shelf is the stuffed body of a raven next to some humanoid teeth arranged in a pattern. Hanging on a wall is a rope necklace with dried elf fingers. *"Ah, those were mother's favorite,"* Vistra says.
>
> A shrunken and shriveled corpse of a woman lays in the back corner of the hut.

The hut is roughly 20 feet by 20 feet. However there are no right angles, from years of the wood warping. One of the eyes in the jar is the former coven's hag eye. Since the death of Valna, it is no longer magical.

The body at the back of the hut is Valthaea's abandoned original form. If the body is investigated, the party can easily ascertain that all of the moisture in her body is gone. There is a large hole in the top of her head. Her brain is absent, leaving a smooth, empty vessel behind.

THE BARGAIN

Vistra is curious as to what the party will do with this information. If the party expresses interest in stopping or killing Valthaea, a subtle grin shows on Vistra's face. Vistra offers something to aid in tracking down her sister, a *wand of enemy detection*. However, she does not offer it without requesting something in return. Read the following:

> Vistra begins rummaging through the piles scattered about the hut. Eventually she yells *"Aha!"* and raises her hand in the air. In it, she holds a twisted white twig with a crystal triangle affixed at one end.
>
> *"I am willing to make a deal with you. I will give you this to help you find Valthaea."* Vistra holds it just out of reach. *"However, you must return my mother's staff to me. The staff you carry now."*
>
> *"Do we have a deal?"*

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a scroll of *ice storm* hidden amongst the debris. If discovered, Vistra asks for something in trade. It is up to the DM's discretion if the trade is acceptable to Vistra. If the party rejects the deal for the wand, Vistra adds the scroll to the bargain.

DEVELOPMENT

The party can use Vistra's hut for a long rest.

PART 4 – A SNEAKY SLITHER

As the party departs from Vistra's hut, read the following aloud:

> You backtrack your way down the mountain. It is night by the time you reach the base of the mountain pass. Firelight exudes from the windows of homes, illuminating an otherwise dark night. Dim oil lamps can be seen in the barns and stables as villagers make sure the animals survive the night. Smoke billows from the chimneys of the inn.

THE SEARCH

The village has three sections: 1.) the farm; 2.) the residences; and 3.) the commerce area. Select one of these sections ahead of time. Hlin and the **bheur slithering tracker** will be there.

Allow the party to choose the order of sections to search. For each section where Hlin and the bheur slithering tracker are not located, any Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal the dead body of a villager with a gnarled hole in their chest and their body leached of all moisture. The *wand of enemy detection* reveals nothing.

If Hlin is in the farm section, she is in a stable stall. Hlin's daughter Morena is here, dead.

> Dim light escapes through the partially open door of the barn. From inside comes the anxious sounds of disturbed animals in their stables. A horse lays dead in one stall. Next to it, the body of a young, familiar dwarven girl.

If Hlin is in the residences section, she is in her home tending to a pot of stew. No one else is home.

> Windows glow orange. The smell of dinner permeates the air. Inside the homes, families are trying to keep warm by the fire. Outside one home near a stack of firewood, a burly human man lies dead in the snow.

If Hlin is in the commerce section, she is in the general store.

> Only a few patrons are in the tavern, most asleep by the brightly glowing hearth. It is eerily quiet inside the large general store. Slumped over the main counter is the body of a halfling woman.

When the party reaches the predetermined location, the bheur slithering tracker already has Hlin grappled using its life leech ability. Additionally, there are five **ice mephits** ready to defend Valthaea.

> The stout dwarf woman lies on the ground. An amorphous, blue-liquid form is latched onto her chest. The creature is sucking blood and other fluids from the body. Small white imp-ish creatures are flying around, watching this scene.

If the wand of enemy detection is visible to the bheur slithering tracker, it will focus its attacks on the target holding the wand.

CONCLUSION

After several days, the snow stops, the temperature rises, and the snow melts. Smiles of relief are on the faces of the people of Bellmare.

Hlin, or surviving residents of the village, gather the party together to thank them for their rescue. Read the following aloud:

> *"You saved this village. We will be forever grateful to you all. If you ever make your way back, you will always have a home in Bellmare."*

As the weather improves and life in Bellmare gets back to normal for this time of year, Vistra can be seen flying around the mountain on her graystaff, cackling.



REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

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

Creature	XP
Abominable Yeti	5,000
Ice Mephit	100 each
Bheur Slithering Tracker	2,900

TREASURE REWARDS

Item

Greater Healing Potion
Potion of Heroism
Scroll of Ice Storm
Wand of Enemy Detection

About the Authors

Amy Dziewit

Amy is a newcomer to D&D, but has quickly grown an affinity for forest gnomes, druids, and hags. She is an avid reader and works for a public library.

Tim Dziewit

Tim has played D&D off and on since middle school and has created more characters than he knows what to do with. He works as a graphic designer for a textbook publishing company.



Bheur Slithering Tracker

Medium ooze, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16
Hit points 74 (12d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft., , climb 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (0)

Skills Stealth +10
Damage Vulnerabilities Cold, Fire
Condition Immunities Blinded, Deafened, Exhaustion, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Prone, Restrained, Unconscious
Senses Blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands languages it knew in its previous form but can't speak
Challenge 7 (2,900XP)

Ambusher. In the first round of combat, the bheur slithering tracker has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it surprised.

Damage Transfer. While grappling a creature, the bheur slithering tracker takes only half the damage dealt to it, and the creature it is grappling takes the other half.

False Appearance. While the bheur slithering tracker remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a puddle, unless an observer succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Keen Tracker. The bheur slithering tracker has advantage on Wisdom checks to track prey.

Liquid Form. The bheur slithering tracker can enter an enemy's space and stop there. It can also move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

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

Watery Stealth. While underwater, the bheur slithering tracker has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide, and it can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. The bheur slithering tracker makes two slam attacks, or one slam attack and can use Life Leech.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Life Leech. One Large or smaller creature that the bheur slithering tracker can see with 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and unable to breathe unless it can breathe water. In addition, the grappled target takes 20 (4d10) necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns. The bhuer slithering tracker can grapple only one target at a time.



Bheur Hag

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (Natural Armor)
Hit points 91 (14d8 + 28)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wisdom +4
Skills Nature +4, Perception +4, Stealth +6, Survival +4
Damage Immunities Cold
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Auran, Common, Giant
Challenge 7 (2,900 xp)

Graystaff Magic. The hag carries a graystaff, a length of gray wood that is a focus for her inner power. She can ride the staff as if it were a broom of flying. While holding the staff, she can cast additional spells with her Innate Spellcasting trait (these spells are marked with an asterisk). If the staff is lost or destroyed, the hag must craft another, which takes a year and a day. Only a bheur hag can use a graystaff.

Ice Walk. The hag can move across and climb icy surfaces without needing to make an ability check. Additionally, difficult terrain composed of ice or snow doesn't cost her extra movement.

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

At will: *hold person, ray of frost*
3/day each: *cone of cold, ice storm, wall of ice*
1/day each: *control weather*

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) cold damage.

Maddening Feast. The hag feasts on the corpse of one enemy within 5 feet of her that died within the past minute. Each creature of the hag's choice that is within 60 feet of her and able to see her must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of her for 1 minute. While frightened in this way, a creature is incapacitated, can't understand what others say, can't read, and speaks only in gibberish; the DM controls the creature's movement, which is erratic. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the hag's Maddening Feast for the next 24 hours.



Illustration by Vagelio Kaliva

THE RED WOLF

by Maggie Harbison and Arras Wiedorn

Creature: *Banshee + The Morrigan* | **Level:** *5*

SYNOPSIS

The village of Bad an Fithich is besieged by a monster and the villagers offer a reward for its head. Thus far none have succeeded, but the tales tell only of a large wolf, which seems like an easy bounty. The party's first night in the village is marked by the cry of a banshee proclaiming their inevitable doom, but if they listen closely they may hear another story.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Red Wolf is intended for four characters of 5th level. It can be played as a standalone adventure or inserted into most campaigns. The party can find fliers advertising a bounty on a large wolf that terrorizes the village of Bad an Fithich by night. Interested parties are instructed to arrive during the daytime and enquire after Fergus at the village's only inn, The Broken Thorn.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Bad an Fithich is a typical small village surrounded by farmland. It's quiet and apparently unassuming, but an enormous wolf has been killing anyone it finds outside at night.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Fergus (LG male halfling):** Village head.
- **Iona (NG female dwarf) and Davina (NG female half-elf)**: Innkeepers at the Broken Thorn.
- **Lyall (N female human):** A guest at the inn. Everyone knows her, but no one knows her well. She visits rarely and tells stories by the fire when she does.
- **Ailith (LN female human):** Caretaker of the cemetery. She's ancient and keeps to herself.
- **Greer (CG, female undead;** The Banshee): Once an innkeeper's teenage daughter, she was cursed by the Morrigan to live on as the banshee. She warns adventurers of their doom, and only those who listen may escape.
- **The Morrigan (CN):** Ancient goddess of valor and death. She appears in many guises.

The villagers are anxious to see the wolf gone. Several groups of adventurers have tried to kill it already, but all have failed.



CHAPTER 1 – THE VILLAGE

The party arrives in the village in early evening. In the Broken Thorn common room, they are greeted by the innkeepers, Iona and her wife Davina. Iona tells them room and board is free for adventurers hunting the wolf, and that she'll send a message to Fergus to meet them here in the morning. She warns the party to stay inside at night; the wolf appears if anyone is outside when it's dark.

Everyone is already home except one other guest at the inn: Lyall, a rough-looking woman of middle age. If asked, the innkeepers explain that she's a local trapper who lives in the nearby forest. Since the wolf's arrival, she's taken to staying in town at night.

Iona and Davina bring food and ale. They inform the party that the village has had few visitors since the wolf appeared, and that all adventurers who came before them have died.

Immediately after they walk away, there's a horrible keening from outside. (If the party speaks to Lyall first then this will happen immediately after they engage her, before she can respond.)

> *"You come to hunt the wolf, but you will fall like the others before you!"*

The innkeepers seem frightened and a little sad, but not surprised—as if they have seen this before.

Lyall chuckles darkly from her spot by the fire and informs the party that the voice they heard is the **banshee**, a terrible specter that haunts the village with eerily accurate predictions of death.

If anyone goes outside, they find nothing. The **banshee** is long gone. Lyall convey the following information to the party:

- The **wolf** has appeared before, long ago. Those who have seen it describe it as massive, with fur the color of fresh blood.
- The first time it appeared was soon after the village's founding. It was driven off multiple times, but always returned. Finally, a group of hunters decided to go kill it.
- The innkeeper's daughter Greer tried to convince the hunters not to go, but they wouldn't listen and never returned.
- Greer eventually went after the wolf herself. She also never returned, but the wolf disappeared for several generations.
- The villagers dug a grave, but Greer's body was never recovered and the grave lies empty ("a cairn built over nothing"). They later raised a monument to her. Lyall is uncertain, but thinks the monument reads, "To those we lost to wolf's fell bite, a hope that soon no more will fall." If they go to the cemetery, old Ailith shows it to them.

If any party members stay outside after dark, the **red wolf** appears from the forest. It attacks until anyone outside is either dead or has retreated inside, after which it leaves.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party decides to stay, Fergus will come in the morning to meet them and tell them more.

CHAPTER 2 – INVESTIGATION

Come morning, Fergus is waiting downstairs. The man is old, wrinkled with age and work but still fit. He is weary and nervous and doesn't smile, greeting each adventurer gravely. He offers them a bounty of 100 gp and a handmade cloak. Fergus does not know the power of this cloak, but a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies it as a *Cloak of Protection* (*DMG*, "Treasure").

If they accept the bounty, Fergus offers to lead them to where the previous group confronted the wolf, about an hour walk from town. On the way they pass a path leading to the cemetery and a dry, abandoned well, both of which Fergus points out. If they choose to investigate the cemetery, continue to "The Cemetary." If they choose to investigate the well, continue to "The Dry Well." If they choose to continue following Fergus, continue below with "The Forest."

(The following three locations may be visited by the party in any order.)

THE FOREST

Fergus leads the party into the woods. Although it's daytime, it's dark in the forest. The bodies have been removed but there's obvious signs of a fight: charred, broken trees, uprooted undergrowth, churned dirt. It's more damage than you'd expect from a fight with even a dire wolf.

Fergus is clearly uncomfortable. He tells the party to return before nightfall and leaves. If a character makes an Intelligence (Investigation) check, they find:

D20 result	Description
0-12	Enormous wolf tracks all around and heading into the forest
13-16	Giant wolf tracks, pieces of a broken sword, scraps of fabric stained with dried blood
17-20	Giant wolf tracks, sword pieces, and fabric, plus several sets of dire wolf tracks, which are fresher than the other tracks

As they search, the party member with the highest passive perception notices an ancient doe walk out from the forest, supporting an equally ancient woman. In a mocking tone, she says:

> *"Another pack of fools, come to test yourselves against our wolf? You must know some secret, if you think you'll succeed where others failed. But I wager you won't. Dead in the dirt or filling our blood-soaked wolf's belly, that's where you'll be!"*

A sudden wind shakes the trees, sunlight slashing across the party's eyes. The trees and shadows settle back quickly, and the old woman and the deer are gone.

The party may make a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check to follow the wolf tracks into the forest. On a success, they follow the huge tracks easily. On a failure, they follow them a ways before losing the trail, but will still end up at the waterfall while trying to either find the trail again or leave the forest. If the party chooses not to follow the tracks, they will get lost on the way out of the woods (or take a slightly different path) and still end up at the waterfall.

The tracks end at a stream that runs through the forest. Nearby is a small waterfall. The party may make another Wisdom (Survival) check to continue following the tracks, but even on a success they do not find any more.

Even without a check they find a piece of red ribbon near the edge of the stream. It's simple fabric, a peasant's trinket. They then notice a woman sitting under the waterfall, weeping, voice muffled by the water. Her voice suddenly clear above the rushing stream, the woman cries:

> *"Brave hunters, your fate is no different than those who came before you. They never listen. They never listen...!"*

The **banshee** disappears. Immediately after, one **dire wolf** rushes out of the forest and attacks, followed soon after by two **will-o'-wisps**.

On their way out of the forest, the party hears tuneless humming coming from the woods and see Lyall, two hares slung over her shoulder. She greets them and asks if they've been to see Ailith. She says the older woman is the only villager who was alive the last time the wolf came, and she might know something.

DM tip: If the party is getting stalled, you can interrupt them with Lyall at any point to help give them some direction.

The Cemetery

If Fergus is with the party, he tells them he will wait outside the cemetery. It's as old as the village, but well kept. The party hears the sound of humming and can follow it around the small temple to find an elderly woman tending graves. This is Ailith.

On a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check, the temple is identified as honoring the Morrigan. On a failure, the party only notices the symbol of a raven sitting on two crossed spears, but doesn't recognize it.

The graves Ailith is tending stand out, because they are clearly new compared to the others. If they ask about the fresh graves, Ailith says they are the previous group that came for the wolf.

If they ask about the wolf, she tells them:

- The last time it came she was a child. Even that wasn't the first time; the village is far older than Ailith.
- She doesn't remember it well, but her parents told her that many heroes came. They all heard the cry of the banshee, but dismissed her warnings and died.
- One member of the final group tried to convince his party to give up. Although he wanted to leave, he didn't abandon his companions, and was the only one who came back alive.

- The survivor refused to say what happened, wouldn't take the bounty, and simply left. The wolf disappeared until just recently.

If they ask about the monument, she takes them to a quiet corner where there is a small cairn and an old rowan tree. The tree is a memorial to Greer, who is said to have loved rowan trees and would decorate them with ribbons during festivals. The cairn has a plaque, the inscription worn with age but still legible:

To those we lost to wolf's fell bite,
Do not fear the dark of night.
A rowan tree to see you through,
Until the day we are as you.
A ribbon tied, reminds us all;
A hope that soon no more will fall

A closer look reveals that there aren't any ribbons tied on the tree. (If the party ties a ribbon to the tree, continue immediately to section "The Banshee.")

If the party attempts to exhume the recently fallen heroes and question them (via *speak with dead*, etc.), Ailith protests. If they do so anyways, the corpses only express terror, and give no useful information.

When the party leaves, Ailith returns to her work.

THE DRY WELL

The first time the party passes by the well, there is nothing there. Either the second time they pass or if they decide to investigate, they see a woman washing clothes and singing quietly. Have one or more party members make a DC 6 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a successful check, they notice that the clothes are torn and bloodstained. On a 10 or higher, they notice that the clothes are the same ones that they're wearing. As they watch her work, she throws her head back and sings loud enough so they can hear:

"I am come to weeping,
The hunters come again.
Their fate mine for the keeping,
Not one shall leave the glenn!
Pause and speak a moment, friend,
Before the grave that claims you.
You hasten ever to your end.
What other fate awaits you?"

Tactics: If they walk away without approaching, the banshee disappears; if they look back, she and her washing are gone. If they attempt to speak to her, she laughs and disappears. If the party engages in combat, she fights a few rounds before casting *dimension door* to escape before they can defeat her. Any attempts to follow the banshee via magic fail.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party decides to fight the wolf, continue to *Conclusion Part A*. If they decide to heed the banshee's warnings and not confront the wolf, continue to *Conclusion Part B*. If they decide to seek out the banshee, continue to "The Banshee" (below).

CHAPTER 3 – THE BANSHEE

If the party decides to try and talk with the banshee, they need to tie a ribbon to a rowan tree. Rowan trees are rare around here. They know where one is; to find another in the forest requires a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check. The banshee appears immediately. (If Fergus, Ailith, or Lyall are with the party when the banshee appears, they will run away.) She conveys the following information:

- The wolf is a curse from a powerful fairy.
- If they ask why she wasn't more straightforward, she indicates that she's cursed as well but won't say it outright (i.e. "curses are tricky things").
- The wolf can only be defeated with certain items, which she'll lead them to if they agree to follow her.
- If they defeat the wolf, they may keep the items as a reward.
- Once they are ready, they must immediately head to the edge of the forest, where the wolf will appear.

If the party agrees to follow, the banshee leads them to the well, where a shortsword and a silver raven amulet are buried. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies them as a *sword of wounding* and a *figurine of wondrous power, silver raven* (*DMG*, "Treasure"). There does not seem to be anything particularly special about these items, but the banshee insists they are necessary.

When the party heads to meet the red wolf, continue to *Conclusion Part C*.

CONCLUSION PART A

Should the party decide to confront the wolf unaided, they must wait for nightfall. The fight can take place anywhere; so long as the party is outside, the wolf finds them. When the enormous red wolf arrives, the fight may initially go well, but just as the banshee warned, they are doomed to fail.

Tactics: Ignore hit points; this version of the red wolf cannot be defeated. The wolf lets the party get in a few good hits before going all out to take them down quickly.

Before the final member of the party is killed, the wolf transforms first into Lyall, then Ailith, and finally the Morrigan, a tall young human woman wearing a long black dress covered in raven feathers. A breastplate covers her torso and black hair hangs in wild, loose curls around her face. She holds a bloodstained shortsword.

As the Morrigan takes her final form, the banshee appears at her side and addresses the remaining hero:

> *"You heard my warnings but would not heed them. You heard my words, but never really listened. Are you pleased with the result? So sure were you in your own skill that you never stopped to consider that things are not always as straightforward as they seem. Or perhaps you did, and decided it was not worth your time. And now your companions lie dying around you. Is this what you wanted?"*

At this, the Morrigan steps forward and kills the final hero.

CONCLUSION PART B

Should the group decide to heed the banshee's warnings, they will move on from the village without confronting the red wolf. The villagers are understanding; many heroes have fallen already, and although the wolf always returns, it is always eventually defeated. The people of Bad an Fithich will wait a while longer.

CONCLUSION PART C

When the party arrives, the enormous red wolf appears from the forest and immediately attacks.

Tactics: The red wolf appears fearful of the sword and raven amulet. It doesn't focus its attacks on any one character, instead attacking whoever is most convenient. It does not use any of its legendary actions.

When the wolf has been reduced to 0 hit points it laughs, a delighted sound that doesn't sit well in the monster's mouth. It then transforms first into Lyall, then Ailith, and finally the Morrigan, a tall young woman wearing a long black dress covered in raven feathers. A breastplate covers her torso and black hair hangs in wild, loose curls around her face.

As the Morrigan takes her final form, the banshee appears at her side. The Morrigan smiles, and introduces the banshee to them as Greer. The Morrigan and Greer convey the following:

- The village was built on sacred land. The Morrigan warned the villagers to relocate, but was ignored. The wolf is their punishment.
- The Morrigan sent a dream to Greer, telling her that if she stopped the hunters, the wolf would leave.
- Greer went to find the Morrigan, not to fight the wolf. She begged for another chance to convince the village. The Morrigan gave her what she asked for in the form of a curse, to live on as the banshee and continue to give warning.
- Now that someone has finally listened, Greer's curse is broken and she is free.

When the party returns to town, the villagers are at first shocked, then grateful and relieved. If the party tells the villagers the truth, they get mixed reactions. Some are distraught, some don't seem to believe, some are angry. Fergus seems troubled, and promises to fix up the old temple to the Morrigan and make an offering.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

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

Obstacle	XP
Dire wolf	200
Will-o'-wisps	450 per will-o'-wisp (900 total)
The Red Wolf	3,900
Solving the riddle of the monument	50 per person

TREASURE REWARDS

Bounty: 100 gp
Cloak of Protection (*DMG*, "Treasure")
Sword of Wounding (shortsword) (*DMG*, "Treasure")
Figurine of Wondrous Power, Silver Raven (*DMG*, "Treasure")

AUTHOR'S NOTES

When we first talked about pitching for this project, we both knew we wanted to do something with Celtic mythology. The banshee appealed to us because, despite being a relatively neutral creature (after all, she only heralds death, she does not cause it), she ends up as an evil figure in a lot of popular media—including *D&D*. It was Maggie who originally thought we could play with the idea that if someone would just listen to the banshee, maybe they could escape their fate. Many of us have experienced what it's like to be ignored, even when you have something important to say.

The Morrigan appealed to us as a sort of fey figure who might "reward" our heroine for her belief in the villagers with a curse. We decided to make her more neutral than evil for this adventure, but thought she might get a certain amount of amusement from watching what the humans get up to. As for the wolf, the Morrigan is one of many Celtic mythological figures known to shapeshift; there is one legend that tells of her turning into a bloody wolf in the middle of battle, an image we found very appealing.

We also love to play around with the meanings of names: Bad an Fithich means something along the lines of "knoll of the ravens." Fergus means, appropriately, "leader," Iona is "dove," and Davina is her "beloved." Greer means "watchful" and "alert," because of course, she was the one paying attention. The Morrigan's two human guises are Lyall, the "wolf" woman (who also came from the woods), and Ailith, the "seasoned warrior"—a proper name for a goddess of war!



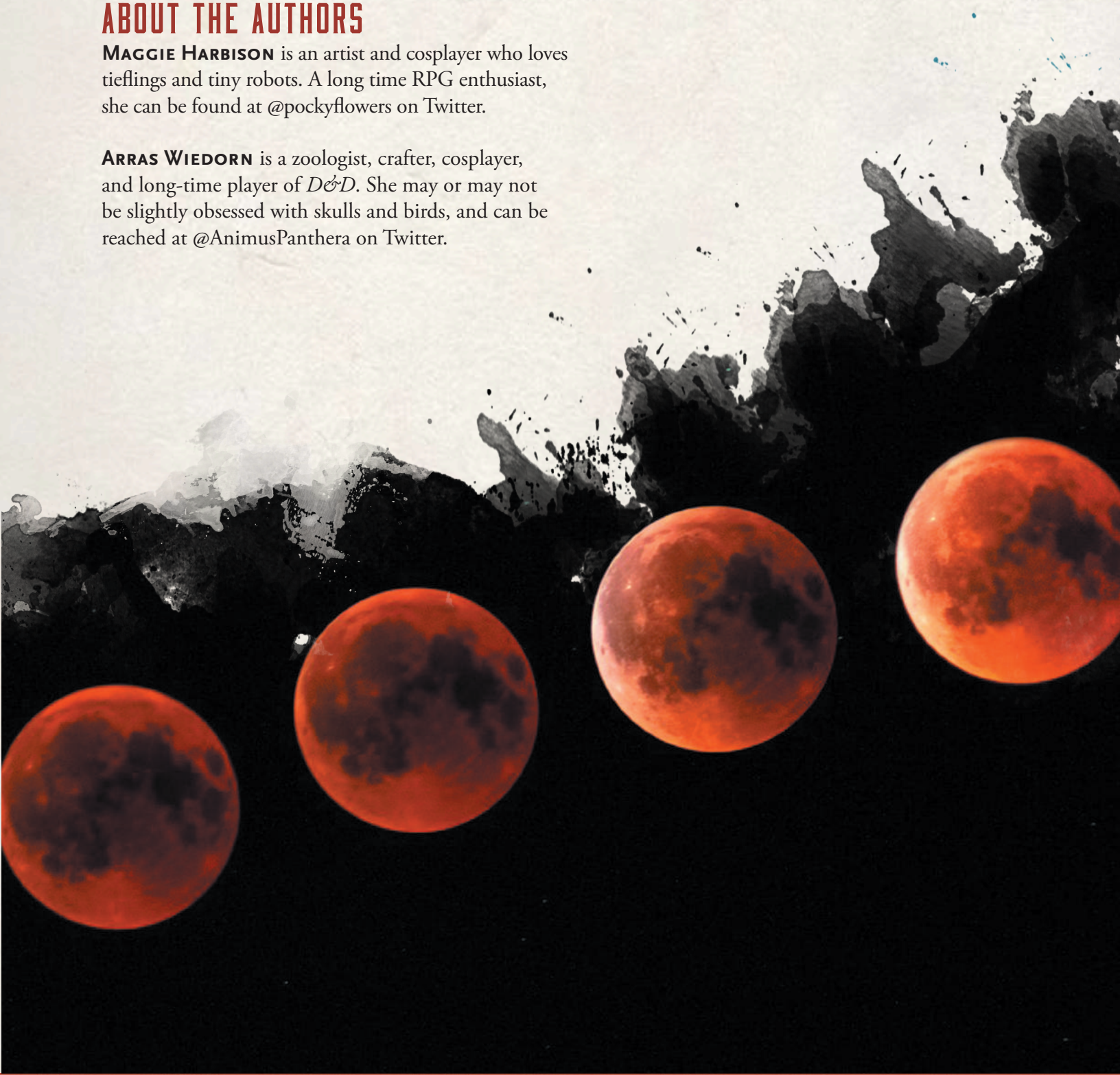
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Maggie Harbison is an artist and cosplayer who loves tieflings and tiny robots. A long time RPG enthusiast, she can be found at @pockyflowers on Twitter.

Arras Wiedorn is a zoologist, crafter, cosplayer, and long-time player of *D&D*. She may or may not be slightly obsessed with skulls and birds, and can be reached at @AnimusPanthera on Twitter.



The Red Wolf

Legendary monstrosity, chaotic neutral
An enormously large wolf, with fur the color of fresh blood

Armor Class	19 (natural armor)
Hit Points	136 (13d12 + 52)
Speed	50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills	Perception +5, Stealth +4
Condition Resistances	Charmed, frightened
Senses	darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages	Common, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge	8 (3,900 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The red wolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Actions

Multiattack. The red wolf makes two attacks: one with its teeth and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (2d8+6) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d6+6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Legendary Actions

The red wolf can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The red wolf regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Bite Attack. The red wolf makes one bite attack.

Legendary Resistance (Max 3/Day). If the red wolf fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Summon undead (Costs 2 actions). The red wolf can summon one fallen hero from their grave to aid it. (These are the three recently fallen heroes that fought the wolf before the current party. If the party is in the cemetery they will see them emerge from their still-fresh graves.) Use the stat block for **skeletons**, though visually they appear as relatively fresh corpses.



The Banshee (Greer)

Medium undead, chaotic good

Appears in 4 forms: the banshee at the inn, the deer woman in the forest, the waterfall weeper at the stream, and the washerwoman at the well. Characters have the opportunity to engage in combat with the washerwoman.

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 58 (13d8)
Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	12 (+1)	11 (0)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +2, Cha +4
Damage Immunities Cold, necrotic, poisoned
Condition Resistances Charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Damage Resistances Acid, fire, lightning, thunder, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Actions

Innate Spellcasting. The banshee can innately cast the spell Dimension Door at will (self only).

Incorporeal Movement. The banshee can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object

Corrupting Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. one target. Hit: 12 (3d6+2) necrotic damage.

Horrifying Visage. Each non-undead creature within 60 ft. of the banshee that can see her must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the banshee is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the banshee's Horrifying Visage for the next 24 hours.

Wail (1/day). The banshee releases a mournful wail. This wail has no effect on constructs and undead. All other creatures within 30 ft. of her that can hear her must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage. On a success, damage is halved.



WINDING PATHS

by Blinne Emersyn

Creature: *Lilitu* | **Level:** *5*

SYNOPSIS

Not every journey follows a simple road, and some groups find themselves needing to take the path entirely untraveled to reach their next destination. There are rumors of a treasure deep within the forest, but no one has made it out alive to recount their tales. Compelled by the prospect of a quick journey and the chance of treasure, the party decides to risk a journey through the forest. Little do they know that their chosen route is ruled by a trio of lilitu, who are eager to play with the new toys walking willingly into their grasp. Wits, wiles, and wind hide in the forest, and the lilitu are eager for amusement.

This adventure is intended for 5th level characters but can be scaled up or down. It is setting-neutral, and can fit into any published or homebrew location. This is intended as a puzzle-based adventure but could be used as a combat encounter.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Every party must travel from place to place in some manner, and these routes are not always conveniently marked on a map. Here are some ideas to set the party on the path to this adventure:

- A tavern drunkard haughtily assures the party that no one goes into the dangerous forest and makes it out alive. Deep in their cups, they bet 100 gp that the party can't make it through the forest and back to the tavern with proof.
- A child with starry eyes asks if the party knows what sort of creatures dwell in the forest. None of their books tell of what lives there, only that it is ancient and powerful. It is a difficult thing to disappoint a child, and returning to them with a story just might buy some good will with their mother, the mayor of a wealthy town.
- A skittish teenager has been dared by their friends to search for the treasure rumored to be hidden in the forest. Too scared to venture amongst the dark trees, they beg the party to find the treasure so that they can show it to their friends. They promise that after they impress their friends, the party can keep whatever they find.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Lilitu are female wind and storm demons originating from ancient Sumerian myth. In this adventure, they are tricksters who use their elemental powers to lure beings into their realm—from animals to monsters to unsuspecting adventurers.



CHAPTER 1 – THE PATH UNRAVELED

When the characters reach the forest, read or paraphrase the following:

> You stand at the edge of the forest, feet brushing the late afternoon shadows cast by the towering trees that reach towards the sunlight. At a glance, it almost seems as if they are reaching towards you instead, branches outstretched and crooked in beckoning gestures to wander beneath their boughs. That is, if trees could do such a thing. As you take your first steps into the forest itself, you notice that there is no path, marked or foot-worn, to follow, only a bed of leaves that occasionally swirl in a gentle wind. Nevertheless, you push forward, and amidst the sounds of the rustling wind you think, just for a moment, that you can hear soft laughter mingling with the distant rumble of an approaching storm.

THE FOREST

After entering the forest, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that there are five **myconid adults** waiting to ambush the party. The myconids see the party as a tempting target, and attack as soon as the party is visible within 20 feet.

By the time the myconids are defeated, the sun is setting. Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check know that they have made it about a third of the way through the forest.

> As night falls, you almost feel as if the trees are bending down to surround your camp, creating an even more foreboding darkness. Even the moon and stars are covered by storm clouds, and the backs of your necks begin to prickle. You cannot see what, but you know something is watching you.

DEVELOPMENT

When the second day dawns, the party has garnered the attention of the **lilitu**.

CHAPTER 2 – THE LIVING WINDS

Read or paraphrase the following:

> At dawn, you are woken not by sunlight, but by the earth shifting beneath you. As if on the belly of a gargantuan beast, the very ground rises and falls in a rapid rhythm, sending ripples throughout the forest. The rise and fall becomes faster as you are torn away from your camp in a terrible gust of wind and dumped into a clearing. Before you hover three feminine humanoid figures made out of swirling winds and lightning-laced storm clouds. *"Welcome to our forest,"* the middle creature intones, with a grin stretching across her face. *"I am Delondra."* She motions to her right, then to her left. *"This is Irkalla, and this is Lugalme. We would like to play a game with you."*

THE CLEARING

Share the following information with characters who succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check:

> The figures before you are lilitu, elemental manifestations of wind and storms. Unlike air elementals, they tend to gather in trios and claim a territory. Their connection to the elements allows them to cast powerful spells.



The liltu are inherently curious creatures and answer polite questions. After a few minutes of interaction, read or paraphrase the following:

> *"We have been so lonely,"* says Irkalla. *"No one comes to visit us anymore, and they all call us mean and nasty names like 'monster.'"* The three of them draw closer and begin to circle you playfully as Lugalme giggles, *"But since you are here, we should have some fun! All you have to do is solve our puzzles, and then you'll be free to go."* Floating only a few feet away now, they say in unison, *"What will it be? Are you going to play along? We just might give you something special if you do."*

TRICKS OR TRIALS

The characters have two choices; they can use either their wits or their fists to escape the forest.

If asked about the puzzles, the lilitu will only give vague hints and allude to parties that have failed and perished previously. If the party asks what they could gain, the lilitu continue to give cryptic answers about rewards that only they could bestow. If the party agrees to play, proceed to *Chapter 4 — Wits and Wiles*.

Tactics. Given their nature, the lilitu will not initiate combat, but if the characters become hostile, the lilitu prioritize protecting one another over damaging the characters. If one of the lilitu is killed or reduced to 5 hit points, they try to flee, using their *into thin air* ability. If combat ends and any of the lilitu survive, they take the opportunity to take a short rest and regain 5d8+15 hit points each before resuming the hunt for their prey. If they are killed before escaping, proceed to *Conclusion, Part A*. If they escape, proceed to *Chapter 3 — Escapes and Endings*.

CHAPTER 3 — ESCAPES AND ENDINGS

If the characters attack and the lilitu escape, read the following:

> In a flash of lightning, the lilitu vanish from your sight.

Depending on the party's plan, proceed to the appropriate section below.

HUNTING THE LILITU

With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, the party finds the lilitu quickly. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check, it takes them an hour to find the lilitu, and each lilitu has regained 5d8 + 15 hit points. If they move quietly with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check, the party gets a surprise round.

ESCAPING THE FOREST

On a successful group DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check, they avoid detection by the lilitu. If they fail the check or choose not to move quietly, the lilitu return to attack the party. The characters are surprised unless any of them have a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or higher.

To escape the forest, the party must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a failure, they are lost in the forest for 1d4 hours and must repeat the check to escape, risking another attack from the lilitu.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party defeats all the lilitu, proceed to *Conclusion A*. If the party evades the lilitu, proceed to *Conclusion B*.



CHAPTER 4 – WITS AND WILES

This chapter is highly puzzle focused. If at any point the party chooses to pursue an aggressive option and abandons the puzzle game, refer to the lilitu stat block and "Tactics" provided and proceed accordingly. If the players are stuck, you can give hints via nature omens, such as wind blowing through leaves to make shapes or highlight an object. The lilitu crave amusement, and can also offer hints in exchange for stories, riddles, trinkets, or impressive feats. You can also repeat or rephrase the puzzle to help the players.

DELONDRA'S RIDDLE

When the characters agree to the puzzle game, Delondra stays behind while the other two disappear. Read or paraphrase the following:

> *"It has been so long since we've gotten to play,"* she says. *"I do hope you'll have as much fun as we will, but be careful not to go astray."* Beginning to weave between you, she whispers in your ears, *"From mountain high to valley low there is no place I cannot go. Your skin I bite, no fires alight, and ships I sail on oceans bright. In your ears I whisper, forever a drifter, chills on your back I make you shiver. What am I?"*

Once "wind" or an equivalent is given as the answer, read the following:

> Smiling, Delondra calls out, *"They have passed the first test, sisters!"* Then she murmurs to you, *"Now Irkalla will see what you are truly made of."* She raises her hand and the ground turns into waves once more. You are pushed out of the clearing by a gust of wind, only stopping when you reach a riverbank where you see Irkalla lounging.

IRKALLA'S RIDDLE

When the characters reach Irkalla, read or paraphrase the following:

> *"My turn!"* Irkalla reaches a hand to the sky, which begins to darken, and summons a lightning bolt that strikes the ground before you. *"I am large without form, making sailors forlorn. With one eye, I strike, tomorrow, farmer's delight. See me coming from far away, you cannot make me leave, no matter what you say. My name you know, so place it below."* Irkalla motions to the space where lightning strikes again. *"One piece at a time this puzzle in order you solve, so long as in lightning the solution dissolves."*

The party must either find or create objects that bear the letter that they are using to spell their word. This can be a piece of paper with the letter "s" written on it, or something that begins with the letter they seek, such as a stone for "s." If the party wants to search for these items instead of writing the letters on parchment a successful DC 12 Investigation (Intelligence) check is required to find each object.

The lightning strikes the same place once per round, and one item can be placed there to be destroyed each time. A creature who places the object must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the lightning strike. On a failed save, the creature takes 1d6 lightning damage. If the object or letter is incorrect it remains behind and the DC to avoid the lightning increases by 1. This is compounding, but resets to 10 with a correct letter. Once objects that spell out the word "storm" or an equivalent are destroyed in order, read the following:

> Irkalla slowly claps as your answer is completed. *"It's a good thing that you solved that one! If you hadn't, there's no way that you would understand Lugalme's."* With a flourish, you are enveloped in a storm of leaves and find yourselves at the base of a towering oak tree. You can hear the river nearby as you look up to see Lugalme sitting on the branch above you. Silently, she winks and knocks on the trunk next to her.

LUGALME'S RIDDLE

The tree is actually an **oak tree mimic**. Once any character comes within ten feet of the tree, Lugalme disappears and the oak tree mimic attacks. The target is surprised unless they have a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher.

Once the mimic is defeated, the riddle is revealed:

> The wood of the oak tree shimmers, revealing a verse carved into the wood.
>
> *Ancient we three*
> *How clever can ye be?*
> *For with normal sight*
> *Answer you cannot see*
>
> *On tower of wood*
> *Hidden key your prize*
> *Reveal me with only*
> *What in the river lies*
> *Or falls from skies*
> *Or wells up when saying goodbyes*

When the bark becomes wet, read the following:

> As water runs down the tree, the very bark seems to push outwards, removing the riddle, and then recess once more to show three names carved into the wood.
>
> *Lugalme*
> *Delondra*
> *Irkalla*
>
> The wind rises once more as you turn to see the three lilitu materialize behind you. Holding hands, they speak in unison, *"Congratulations, adventurers. We have not had any as clever as you in our forest for an age. We release you from our realm, but please take this with you."* With a wave of Delondra's hand, leaves are swept into a pile by a gust of wind, then blown away again to reveal a leaf-bound package at your feet. "May the blessings of the wind guide you." With one final grin, Lugalme, Delondra, and Irkalla's forms swirl together and then vanish.

DEVELOPMENT

After solving the puzzles, proceed to *Conclusion C*.

CONCLUSION A

If they defeated the lilitu, the party can leave the forest. Read or paraphrase the following:

> As the final lilitu vanishes in a howl of wind, the entire forest becomes still and quiet. No movement, no rustling of trees, no animals in the bushes. Just silence. Emerging from the forest, you see the sun bleeding into the horizon to the west and the first stars twinkling in the east. When you step onto the path, you kick through a pile of leaves and your foot hits something. As you brush away the foliage, you uncover a package wrapped in leaves, with the letters L, D, and I scrawled on top.

Refer to *Rewards*, "Treasure Rewards," to determine what item the party receives.

CONCLUSION B

If they evaded the lilitu's clutches, the party escapes the forest. Read or paraphrase the following:

> As you finally exit the forest you keep looking back to see if you've been caught once more by the lilitu. Each passing moment grows more tense until suddenly you break through the tree line and into the light of the setting sun. You realize that out here the wind is quieter, less active, and the air is no longer electric with the beginnings of a storm. You are beyond the reaches of their realm. You've escaped from the lilitu.

CONCLUSION C

If they complete the lilitu's puzzles, the party is led out of the forest. Read or paraphrase the following:

> Bending down to retrieve your gift, you hear a rustling behind you and turn to see the ground rippling once more, except this time it is a softer movement that is shifting the bushes and trees apart to clear a path for you. Following it, you find it leads you directly out of the forest just in time to see the setting of the sun.
>
> Looking back into the forest, it seems far less foreboding now than it did when you first entered it. As the path reforms into its natural state, you remember the gift that Delondra, Lugalme, and Irkalla offered you sitting in your arms. This foreboding forest wasn't so bad after all.

When the party opens their gift, refer to *Rewards*, "Treasure Rewards" below to describe their new item.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Use either the table below or milestones to determine experience.

Obstacle	XP
Per Myconid Adult	100
Per Lilitu	700
Oak Tree Mimic	1,100
Per Puzzle Answer	300

TREASURE REWARDS

If the party kills all three lilitu or solves all three puzzles, roll 1d4 to determine what they receive.

1d4	Treasure
1	*Wind fan*
2	*Broom of flying*
3	*Javelin of lightning*
4	*Blue sapphire elemental gem*

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I was inspired by the lilitu given their history as predecessors of Lilith, mother of demons and one of the most vilified female figures in history. Given that background, I wanted to avoid reducing them to demonic women who brought nothing but promiscuity, disease, and destruction and instead provide an opportunity to explore a more playful side of these creatures while still allowing them to be dangerous. Just like people, they can be perfectly friendly when cooperated with, or terribly dangerous when provoked.

Countless thanks to April Broughton, to my D&D group, and to every person who was willing to set eyes upon this work when it was nothing but a mess.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Blinne Emersyn is a student pursuing their love for writing and history. A lifelong storyteller, they fell in love with *D&D* two years ago and haven't looked back. They are ecstatic to be a part of *Uncaged* as their first publication and can be reached at @blinnebee on Twitter.



Lilitu

Medium elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17
Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +1
Skills Acrobatics +3, Nature +3. Perception +2
Damages Resistances thunder, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks.
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Primordial, Sylvan
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The lilitu's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). She can immediately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *thunderwave, fog cloud, gust of wind*

Actions

Slashing Wind. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Into Thin Air (3/Day). The lilitu disappears as she becomes one with the air around her. She is invisible for 3 rounds, or until she attacks or casts a spell.

Oak Tree Mimic

Huge monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (0)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	13 (+3)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +5
Damages Vulnerabilities fire
Condition Immunities prone
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages --
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Adhesive. The oak tree mimic adheres to anything that touches it. A Huge or smaller creature adhered to the mimic is also grappled by it (escape DC 14). Ability checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage.

Grappler. The oak tree mimic has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

False Appearance. While the oak tree mimic remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary tree.

Actions

Multiattack. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Vine Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage. Targets that are hit by this attack are subjected to the Adhesive trait and grappled as they are pulled to the base of the oak tree mimic.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

Based on the mimic stat block in the MM.



TOOTH AND FIN

by Jazz Eisinger

Creature: *Merfolk* | **Level:** *5*

SYNOPSIS

The Merfolk Queen asks adventurers to help retrieve merfolk roe (eggs) from a sahuagin raiding party lead by a **sahuagin priestess**, with custom water-based magic items as reward. The adventure is for three to four 5th level adventurers at a hard difficulty.

ADVENTURE HOOK

In the seaside town Atir'at (ah-TIER-aht), the Merfolk Queen approaches the adventurers with a rescue mission: recover a large clutch of merfolk roe kidnapped by a **sahuagin** group. In exchange for pledging their assistance, the queen gifts each adventurer a *ring of the merfolk* (see *Rewards*) and a place of honor in the merfolk city Ascalonia.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Unlike traditional western mermaids, these merfolk are based on Atir'at, the ocean goddess of the Mediterranean-sailing Phoenicians. This return to historical roots removes the modern hyper-sensuality of mermaids by replacing female breasts and bare-chested males with a scaled, fish-like body, and makes space for non-binary merfolk.

Known as "the first mermaid," the new *D&D* deity Atir'at has the body of a fish, with only the arms and head of a woman. The Merfolk Queen, the current leader of the merfolk city Ascalonia off the Sword Coast, replaces Poseidon and Neptune—ocean gods of Greco-Roman pantheons—with a powerful non-binary ruler blessed by a feminine deity.

This adventure is setting-neutral for any seaside or coastal region. It can follow *Lost Mines of Phandelver* on a return trek to Waterdeep, or any other Sword Coast adventure.



CHAPTER 1 – ATIR'AT

A small coastal village, Atir'at (ah-TIER-aht) is mainly a fishing town. A theme runs through its shops: the Merfolk Taproom, the Kelp Help general store, and the Chapel of the First Mermaid.

> The beach is rocky, like many coastal beaches, and flanked by docks tightly fitted between looming fjords. The water is grey-blue, and the horizon silhouettes a dozen fishing boats.

If asked about the town name, villagers encourage the party to attend the next High Tidal Praise service at the chapel. Because high tides are determined by lunar moons, the next service time is at the DM's discretion to fit the narrative.

Dedicated to Atir'at (the deity the town is named after), the small one-room chapel has three walls, the fourth opening directly to the sea with a dock extending past the walls. The dock is level with the bay at high tide.

> The inside of the Chapel of the First Mermaid has small windows and hard wooden benches that form a dozen rows on both sides. The traditional chapel altar is missing, an opening and dock jutting out into the water instead. The water level is close to touching the top of the dock, spotted salt and algae showing time and tide.

The only temple or shrine in town, the chapel is empty except at High Tidal Praise services. The party may wish to look at the paintings on the ceiling more closely.

> Pristine paintings cover the chapel ceiling and decorate the walls above the windows. The merfolk depicted are fish-like from the arms down; the merfolk are scaled and sleek through the chest and into the tail. Long hair, pointed ears, colorful tails, and elaborate dorsal fins are similar to fey or elven ancestry.

HIGH TIDAL PRAISE

Three to five attendants clad in brown dresses with knotted kelp belts perform worship services. These attendants are girls in the town aged five to fifteen years old.

At high tide, the eldest, titled the Queen's Handmaiden, assembles three to four Landmaids to distribute fish food: discarded chaff, vegetable food scraps, and leftover bread from the tavern. The Landmaids feed the fish that come to the chapel's dock, unaffected by occasional squelching of food scraps as they toss the food from buckets into the water.

To begin the service, the Queen's Handmaiden recites "The Ballad of The First Mermaid" around the chapel — one stanza from the left, back, right, and front of the chapel facing inwards; the fifth stanza is recited in a louder shout facing the water.

Recall, the elf upon the land
Who felt herself drawn to the sea
And so fashioned with her own hand
A tail, a fin, and gills to breathe

Yet once in that deep dark below
Freedom danced with isolation
Forlorn tears birthed a perfect roe
A newborn child, a cried creation

Noble Lady of Land and Sea
The first of merfolk down below
So made a folk of swimming free
And to the firstborn, a crown bestowed

Queen of merfolk, newly royaled
So watched as their small tribe did swell
Against dark waves they toiled
Forcing back dread beasts and spells

We pray to Our Lady of Land and Sea
To bless our hearths and nets this day
And let the merfolk queen ever be
Our great watcher of the ocean way

If spoken to outside the service time, the Queen's Handmaiden, Gurand Longshanks, openly talks about Atir'at and the **merfolk** that live nearby, though she has not met merfolk.

"The chapel serves as a focal point in the community. The town thrives on our daily catch and the other gifts the ocean provides. As the Queen's Handmaiden, it is my duty to observe the High Tidal Praise, to relate the story of our lady Atir'at, the first mermaid, to all who pass through our town, and to entreat the merfolk in the bay to look on us kindly and bless our nets.

"It's an honor to serve my village. When it's time for me to give up the mantle, Atir'at will tell me who will be the next Queen's Handmaiden. Perhaps I'll become an adventurer like you. Maybe marry a nice fisherman, or go to the big city and seek my fortune. Wherever I go, our lady of the land and sea will be with me."

- The local merfolk dwell in a merfolk city, Ascalonia, beyond the fishing area.
- As far as she is aware, Atir'at is only worshipped in this village, and in large port cities to a lesser extent.
- After a full moon, the merfolk may swim alongside fishing vessels nearby.
- Fishermen never fish off the dock; it is considered sacrilege to hunt while the fish are being fed by the Landmaids. If the party try to fish during a service, villagers forcefully hold them back.
- Chapel services are attended by fishermen before dawn and after dusk, as dictated by the tides; services are always held at high tide because it brings the fish closest to the dock.
- The full moon is the highest tide and the most sacred day; the night following the full moon is an all-village celebration with a midnight, torch-lit, beach party. Merfolk have been known to appear in the shallows to celebrate.

IN THE VILLAGE

LOCAL TRADERS

The local trade is clearly seafood; a fish market is set up at dusk, as the fishermen return with their catch. Local and traveling traders may set up wares, at the DM's discretion.

VILLAGE RUMORS

- "I've heard that during the Tidal Celebration, the merfolk tribe may join in the revelry, though I have not seen them myself."
- "They say the Merfolk Queen is an unspeakable beauty, rising out of the sea, walking on two legs, and granting wishes to those they talk to."
- "I don't think I'd like to be a merfolk. All that saltwater, dealing with sharks and eels...no thank you!"
- "I'm the tenth in my family to serve Atir'at. When I was younger, of course."

DEVELOPMENT

At the conclusion of a service, a humanoid climbs up the dock. The Merfolk Queen is non-binary in appearance and uses they/them pronouns. (This adventure uses they/them to differentiate the queen from Atir'at, who uses she/her exclusively.)

From out of the water, a non-binary humanoid appears. Dark-skinned, they have black braids with shells and bright fabric, dressed in worn but clean clothes, and smelling of a dawn sea breeze. Like the chapel paintings, they are flat-chested and have pointed ears. They move with fluid, graceful movements, and their nose flares like gills as they speak in an even, quiet voice.

"I am the Merfolk Queen, and in the name of our lady Atir'at, I beseech the assistance of land dwellers to retrieve our children from a dangerous foe. Will you assist me?"

CHAPTER 2 – THE STOLEN ROE

THE MISSION

There is a general atmosphere of shock and awe as the villagers all recognize the Merfolk Queen from tales of full moon celebrations. After they greet the villagers, they ask the party to talk privately.

If the characters have developed a good rapport with a villager or the Queen's Handmaiden, the NPCs may also be in the conversation to provide context, at the DM's discretion (see "Optional NPCs" below).

> *"One moon ago, our hatching nursery was attacked. A school of vicious sharks lead by a powerful Sahuagin Priestess and her followers killed several of my guards and stole nearly half of our roe — my children. Our scouts were able to track them to a cave a few leagues from here, but they have hidden the roe in a cavern that doesn't flood with the tide. I am the blessed of Atir'at, able to transform into this form with land-dweller legs, but I am the only one of my tribe able to do so. I need help from you to retrieve my children, by stealth or by might. Who knows what they have planned, but time is essential. I don't know what happens when the roe are out of the water this long."*

As compensation for their assistance, the queen loosens one of their braids and pulls a silver ring for each adventurer. This *ring of the merfolk* must be attuned, but is offered now, regardless of the group's response to the hook.

OPTIONAL NPCS

The party may select a townsperson who has a better idea of the village and coast than the Merfolk Queen. Use one of the following NPCs at the DM's discretion.

- **Fisherman:** Stanford Toastwater (N **commoner**) is a wiry dwarf, late twenties. He is the dockmaster and helps bring in the ships. He is only available during the day, as no ships arrive between dawn and dusk when the fish are most active. He knows the coastal waters and can give advantage to Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks when interacting with fish and sea creatures.
- **Queen's Handmaiden:** Gurand Longshanks (LG **acolyte**) is a lanky half-elf girl, late teens. When not in the chapel, she wears a simple dress with a colorful scarf around her neck. She knows the coast and surrounding land well, and can give advantage on a Wisdom (Survival) check to locate the above-ground entrance.

Tactics. The cavern has an underwater entrance, but the scouts were unable to tell the roe location, how many roe are intact, or how many sahuagin are present. The underwater entrance appears to be guarded. There may be an above-ground entrance, but the queen can't confirm this. They may help find another entrance, but can't say how the land geography corresponds to the cavern.

ABOVE GROUND

Two villagers may volunteer to help look for an above-ground entrance: one is a fisherman with a small boat to fit the party, and the other is the Queen's Handmaiden (see "Optional NPCs").

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check by the party reveals the location of an above-ground entrance that is 10 feet in diameter and appears to curve so that the cavern isn't visible. The shaft narrows to 5 feet in diameter after 20 feet, and winds a total of 100 feet before opening up to the cavern.

DEVELOPMENT

The adventurers may wish to prepare, attune to their rings, or otherwise delay. The queen introduces their four merfolk guards in the bay shallows and understands a few hours of preparation, but they are eager to develop a strategy.

CHAPTER 3 – THE CAVERN

Adventurers have several paths: attack with the Merfolk Queen and their guards from underwater, attempt to locate an above-ground entrance, or convince the guards to distract the reef sharks while the party enters the cavern.

UNDERWATER ENTRANCE

If the party decides to attack the guarding sharks and sahuagin, they may gather valuable intelligence about the sahuagin *blood frenzy* ability. The sahuagin is telepathically controlling three **reef sharks** to block the entrance.

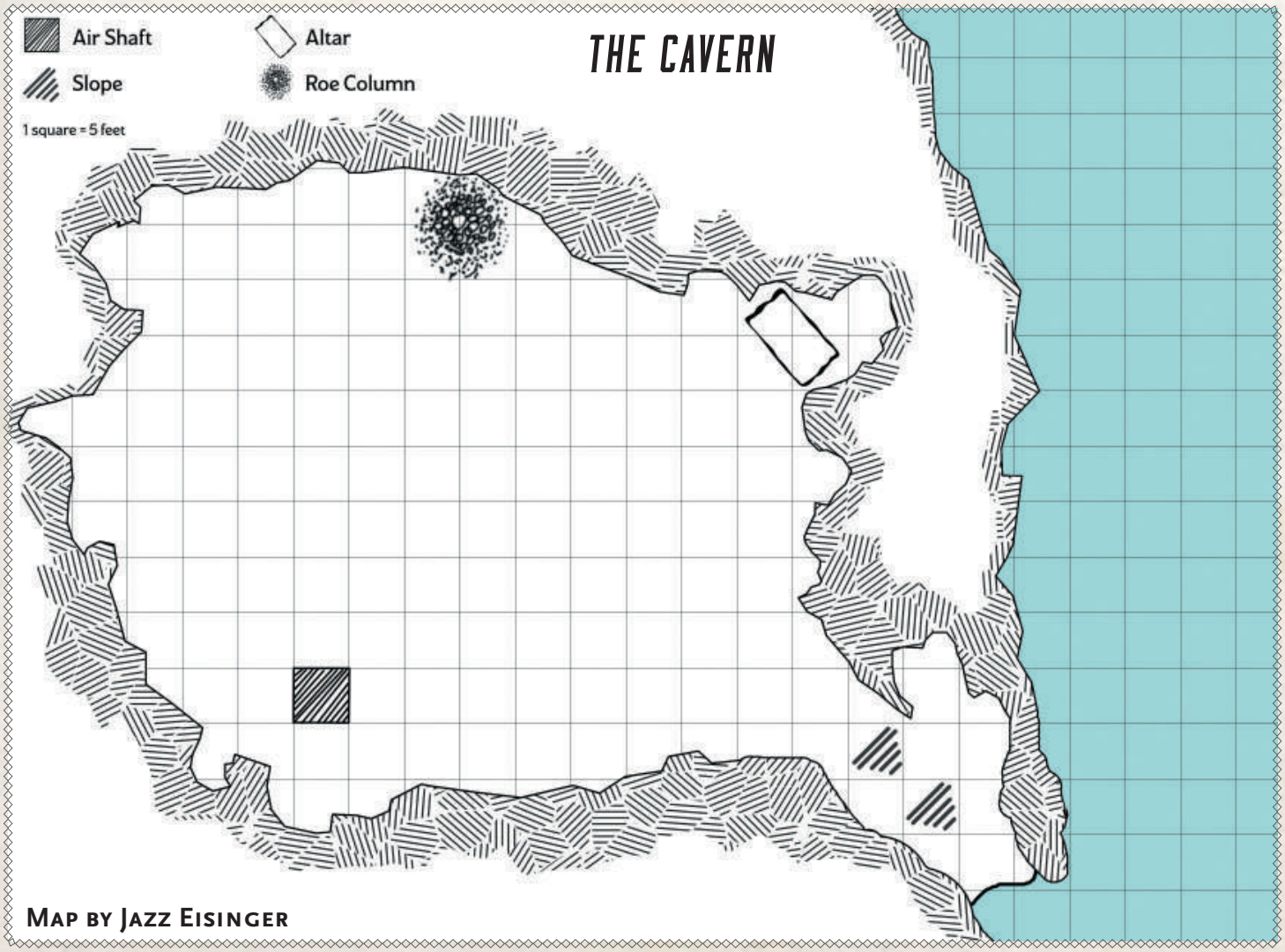
If the sahuagin at the cave entrance is not killed or engaged, it retreats to the cavern to alert the others. When the sahuagin leaves, the sharks take the *dash* action and their full movement to get away from the adventurers as they are no longer compelled to fight.

CAVERN LAYOUT

The cavern is 25 feet by 55 feet with a ceiling 100 feet high, and partially fills with the tide. The water never reaches the **roe column**. The roe column hit points is equal to the number of undamaged roe remaining in the column.

> The cavern smells damp and musty. A carved stone altar stands in the corner opposite the underwater entrance. Near it, the roe column occupies a 10 foot square, approximately 25 feet high.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a 5-foot-wide air shaft in the cave ceiling. It is 10 feet away from two walls and 30 feet above the cavern floor. It is off-center from the roe column by 15 feet. This is the above-ground entrance.



Map by Jazz Eisinger

RESCUING THE ROE

A **sahuagin priestess** and four **sahuagin** are in the cavern. The priestess hides behind a makeshift altar to Sekolah in one nook. If she senses the battle is turning against her, she casts *tongues* to speak Common and bargain with the party.

The adventurers may wish to reason with the sahuagin, fight them, or focus on retrieving the roe. If the party successfully sneaks in from above, or attacks from the underwater entrance while the merfolk guards distract, the sahuagin chant in Sahuagin and ritualistically dance around the column.

If the sahuagin were warned, they encircle the roe column, throwing spears at the party until a member is within melee range.

The party may try to talk with the priestess. On a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the Priestess offers the roe in exchange for a future favor from the adventurers.

Sahuagin Motivations

The sahuagin can have either of the following motivations:

- ***Brutal:*** The small group sacrifices the roe in a full-moon ritual to Sahegot for good favor. This is a good-versus-evil motivation for the adventure.
- ***Savvy:*** The raiding party stole the roe to raise and indoctrinate the merfolk in their tribe as infiltrators, facilitating the sahuagin conquering Ascalonia within a generation. This is the opposite of the *Monster Manual* **sahuagin** lore to highlights their intelligent, conniving nature.

DEVELOPMENT

If the roe column is damaged by either side, the queen enters a blind rage and attacks the priestess. They cannot be convinced to stop attacking until one of them dies, or the queen is magically held.

The party may choose to side with the sahuagin. Once the queen is killed, the sahuagin threaten the adventurers, and if the party doesn't leave, attack and fight to the last.

CONCLUSION - ASCALONIA

MERFOLK QUEEN LIVES

If the party is successful in rescuing the roe and keeping the queen alive, the queen honors the characters in Ascalonia by granting them Duke/Duchess titles (each party member chooses their preferred title) in a grand ceremony attended by dolphins, whales, and other sea creatures, plus thousands of merfolk in all colors, shapes, and sizes.

After the ceremonies, the Merfolk Queen pulls you aside privately.

"The rings are yours to keep. The promised reward was little, but you held to your part of the bargain, and we thank you. I consider you honored guests and my personal friends. You are welcome in our city, Ascalonia, whenever you wish.

"From now on, you may call whenever you are at sea by using my birth name, Tarathea. If I can't hear you, know that Atir'at knows you, and she will aid you as best she can."

See *Blessing of Atir'at*.

MERFOLK QUEEN DIES

If the queen dies in the fight, and the adventurers didn't side with the sahuagin, the guards retrieve their dead and return to Ascalonia. A young non-binary merfolk, Peace, presides over the funeral as the presumed heir to the throne, and describes the *Blessing of Atir'at*.

REWARDS

Each character receives a *ring of the merfolk* in Chapter 1 and may keep the item regardless of the adventure result.

Ring of the Merfolk

Very rare, equires attunement

This silver-green ring magically resizes to the wearer's finger. When attuned, it grants the wearer a swim speed equal to their base speed (which cannot be reduced by armor), waterbreathing, and the ability to comprehend (but not speak) Aquan.

Optional: Blessing of Atir'at

Once per long rest when traveling by vehicle (water), particularly on saltwater (ocean, sea, or bay), a character may call out to Tarathea or Atir'at and roll a d100 to determine the effect. The character that invokes the Blessing (the caster) is granted one effect per long rest.

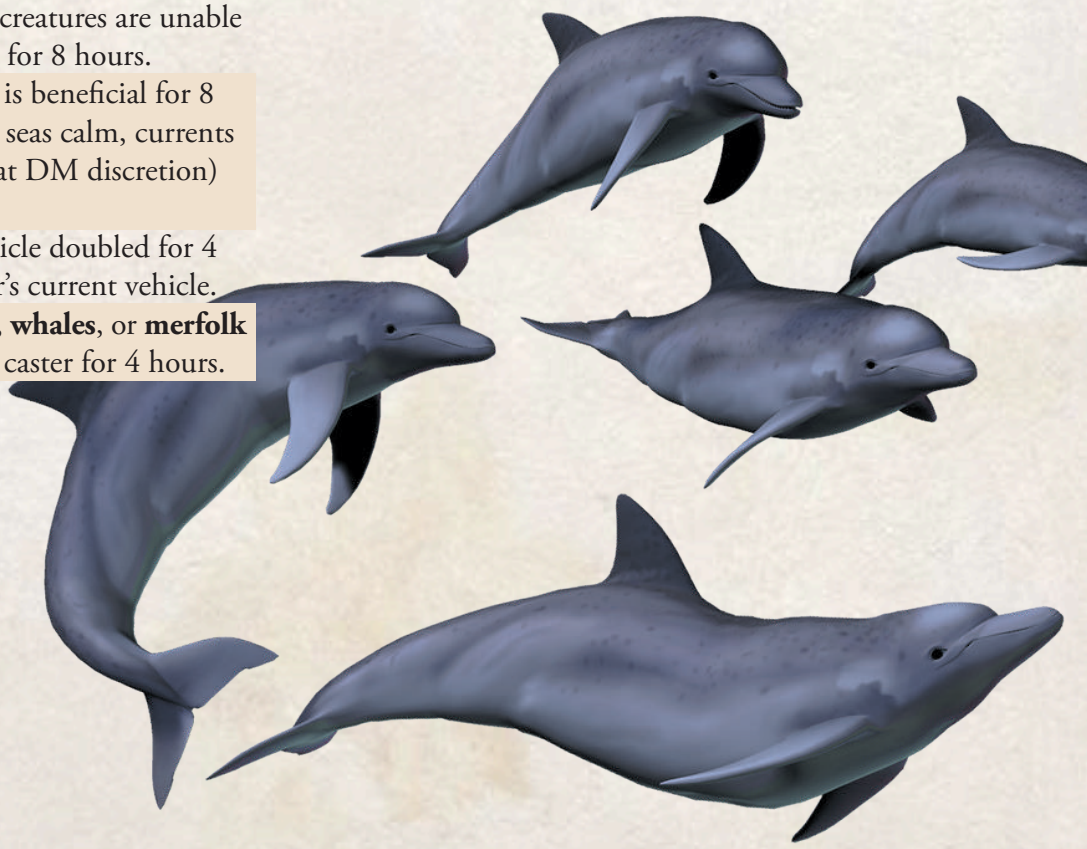
Roll	Effect
0-10	Proficiency in vehicles (water) for 8 hours to the caster.
11-20	Wisdom (Survival) checks produce double rations for 4 hours for the caster for fishing and foraging.
21-50	Neutral or evil sea creatures are unable to attack the caster for 8 hours.
51-80	Water-based travel is beneficial for 8 hours (e.g. choppy seas calm, currents in their favor, etc. at DM discretion) for the caster.
81-90	Speed of water vehicle doubled for 4 hours for the caster's current vehicle.
91-100	A pod of **dolphins**, **whales**, or **merfolk** appear and aid the caster for 4 hours.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Many thanks to my spouse for being ever-supportive and constant prodding to get an adventure written up and released. You're my favorite, Dave. Jacob G., the help you gave on the meter and rhyme for the chant was invaluable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jazz Eisinger is a podcaster, bibliophile, and all-around gamer. Hear her play games on podcasts The Rancor's Brothel, Heart Beats: A Heartwarming Fantasy, and Novelty Stylus Gaming. Follow her on Twitter @orangelikejazz.



The Merfolk Queen

Medium humanoid (merfolk), neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 33 (6d10 + 3)
Speed 10 ft., swim 40 ft. (30 ft. in human form)

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

Skills Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Aquan
Challenge 1/4 (25 XP)

Amphibious. The merfolk queen can breathe air and water.

Shapechanger. The merfolk queen can use their action to *polymorph* into a Medium human or back into their true form (that of a Medium *merfolk*). Other than their speed, their stats are the same in each form. Any equipment they are wearing or carrying aren't transformed. They reverts to their true form if they die.

Innate Spellcasting. The merfolk queen's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *friends, prestidigitation, shape water*
2/day each: *healing word, animal friendship*
1/day: *mage armor*

Actions

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage, or 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Leadership. (Recharges after a Short or Long rest). For 1 minute, the merfolk queen can utter a special command or warning whenever a non-hostile creature they can see within 30 feet makes an attack roll or saving throw. The creature adds 1d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the merfolk queen. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the merfolk queen is incapacitated.

Roe Column

Large construct, neutral

Armor Class 5
Hit Points 150 (10d10 + 100)
Speed 0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	4 (-5)	10 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)

Damages Vulnerabilities fire, lightning, force
Condition Immunities prone, chamed, paralyzed, frightened
Perception 14
Challenge 0 (0 XP)

Actions

Retrieve. As an action, a creature can remove 1d12 (5) roe from the column. The creature's hands are both occupied with the roe until otherwise stated by the creature.





"Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom" by Ilya Repin



SERPENT'S TOOTH

by Monica Evans and Tim Christopher

Creature: *Medusa* | **Level(s):** *5 - 7*



SYNOPSIS

Ten years ago, the local hunting lodge was shuttered after a series of tragic accidents. Now, a local lord has hired the adventurers to investigate the site. The catch: a medusa has been running an exotic creature smuggling ring out of the abandoned lodge—and was involved with the past tragedy.

ADVENTURE HOOK

"Serpent's Tooth" is intended for four to six 5th to 7th level players of good or neutral alignment. The party has been hired to investigate an abandoned hunting lodge. The adventure begins in the Drunken Uncle, the last inn on the way to the lodge, where the party meets with their employer's agent.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Ten years ago, a warlock made a pact with her evil patron to "improve" her daughter's looks, so that the girl could marry rich. The plan backfired, as noble young men killed themselves and each other over the beautiful girl, resulting in the closure of the hunting lodge. The girl, now transformed into a medusa, runs a successful smuggling operation out of the abandoned lodge, and is increasingly concerned that her controlling mother is becoming a liability.

CHAPTER 1 – THE DRUNKEN UNCLE

Lord Devlin's agent is waiting for the party in the Drunken Uncle Inn. They have already paid for the characters' room and board.

> The agent shakes their head. *"I don't know why Lord Devlin is so set on reopening the lodge, but he's offering six hundred gold apiece for your report. The place should be empty, but if it's not..."* They look you over and grimace. *"Well. Maybe leave that part out. I can tell you what the lodge was like ten years ago, but who knows what's there now."*

The agent can describe the lodge's layout but refuses to talk about its history. On a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the agent reveals that ten years ago, an incident with a beautiful woman caused the deaths of three young noblemen.

THE HUNTING PARTY

A local hunting party enters, cheerful and ready to drink. They are somewhat concerned about a missing girl, especially as there have been strange tracks in the woods.

The adventurers can gather the following information from them:

- Most people think the lodge is cursed and avoid it.
- Lately, there are fewer large animals in the woods. Occasionally, hunters find tracks they can't identify.
- The missing girl, Constantina, knows her way around the woods. She's never been gone this long before. Her father is more annoyed than worried: the girl was supposed to start work as a housemaid for a local nobleman. If she doesn't return soon, she'll lose her position.

The strange tracks belong to the occasional escaped creature from the lodge's operation; they also eat the forest animals. Constantina, hearing rumors that there was a better life for women at the lodge, now happily works for the medusa.

DEVELOPMENT

The adventure continues when the party leaves for the lodge.

CHAPTER 2 – THE ABANDONED LODGE

The journey to the lodge takes six days. After the fourth day, a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals "the rear feet of a bear," belonging to an escaped owlbear.

On the fifth day, the party finds a four-foot stretch of wagon tracks headed toward the lodge. A DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests the wagon has a mechanism that erases its tracks, which failed and was repaired.

APPROACHING THE LODGE

The ground shakes and the party hears shouting, a high-pitched scream that abruptly cuts off, and a heavy smash. When the party can see into the lodge's central courtyard, read the following:

> Two guards are poised, weapons drawn, in the center of the courtyard. A third guard is trying to wake an unconscious robed woman. A large wagon has been smashed apart and a wounded horse shivers nearby. One of the guards shouts, *"Watch yourselves!"* The ground rumbles again, and an armored creature bursts through the earth, leaps high into the air, and lands heavily in front of you.

The **bulette** attacks the party directly. The guards' objectives are, in order: wake up the gnome wizard (Binky Sparklepop, an **enchanter** (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*); get the wizard to safety, conscious or not; and kill or contain the bulette. They can't capture the bulette themselves, but will assist if the party attempts it. The guards' Captain, Beatrice, is a **gladiator**; the other guards are **knights**.

The DM should roll a DC 15 Constitution save every round to wake Binky. On waking, she casts *sleep* on the bulette, using a 5th-level spell slot; subtract 5 from the spell's hit point roll due to head trauma. If she succeeds, the fight is over; if not, she retreats and the party must kill the bulette.

THE SMUGGLING OPERATION:

The **medusa** runs an exotic creature smuggling operation out of the lodge. When things go right: a creature is captured, put to sleep, and transported to the lodge, where the medusa turns each creature to stone. Live creatures are kept in the stables; once petrified, they are crated like statuary and shipped to buyers.

In this case: the bulette's sleep spell has accidentally worn off. It smashes the wagon, knocking out the gnome wizard. The party arrives as the guards are attempting to contain the damage.

SERPENT'S TOOTH RARE AND EXOTIC CREATURES

When the fight is over, read the following:

> The lodge is more a luxury resort than a fortified camp, comprised of a main house and multiple smaller buildings arranged around a central courtyard with a gazebo. Some of the buildings have been partially restored with heavy wooden doors and iron locks. All windows have been removed and are boarded over, and most of the buildings lock from the outside.

The Captain insists on immediately taking the party inside the main house to meet their boss, Lady Malice. If the party makes any helpful offers, such as healing injured guards or the wounded horse, the Captain accepts but insists on escorting them; they won't be left alone at any point.

The gazebo has a small plaque labeled "Dread Gazebo: In Memory of Eric."



LADY MALICE

When the party enters the main lodge house, read the following:

> The main hall has been extensively restored. Two female guards are bantering with a teenage girl serving drinks. The girl smiles at the Captain, then heads into the kitchen. A door at the far left of the room opens, and a tall, veiled woman enters silently. The Captain approaches her for a quiet conversation, then the woman exits. The Captain says, *"Boss is grateful for your help. You'll have dinner tonight, your own rooms, and we'll talk in the morning. We'll lock you in, of course, no offense. But don't worry. Lady Malice is very fair."*

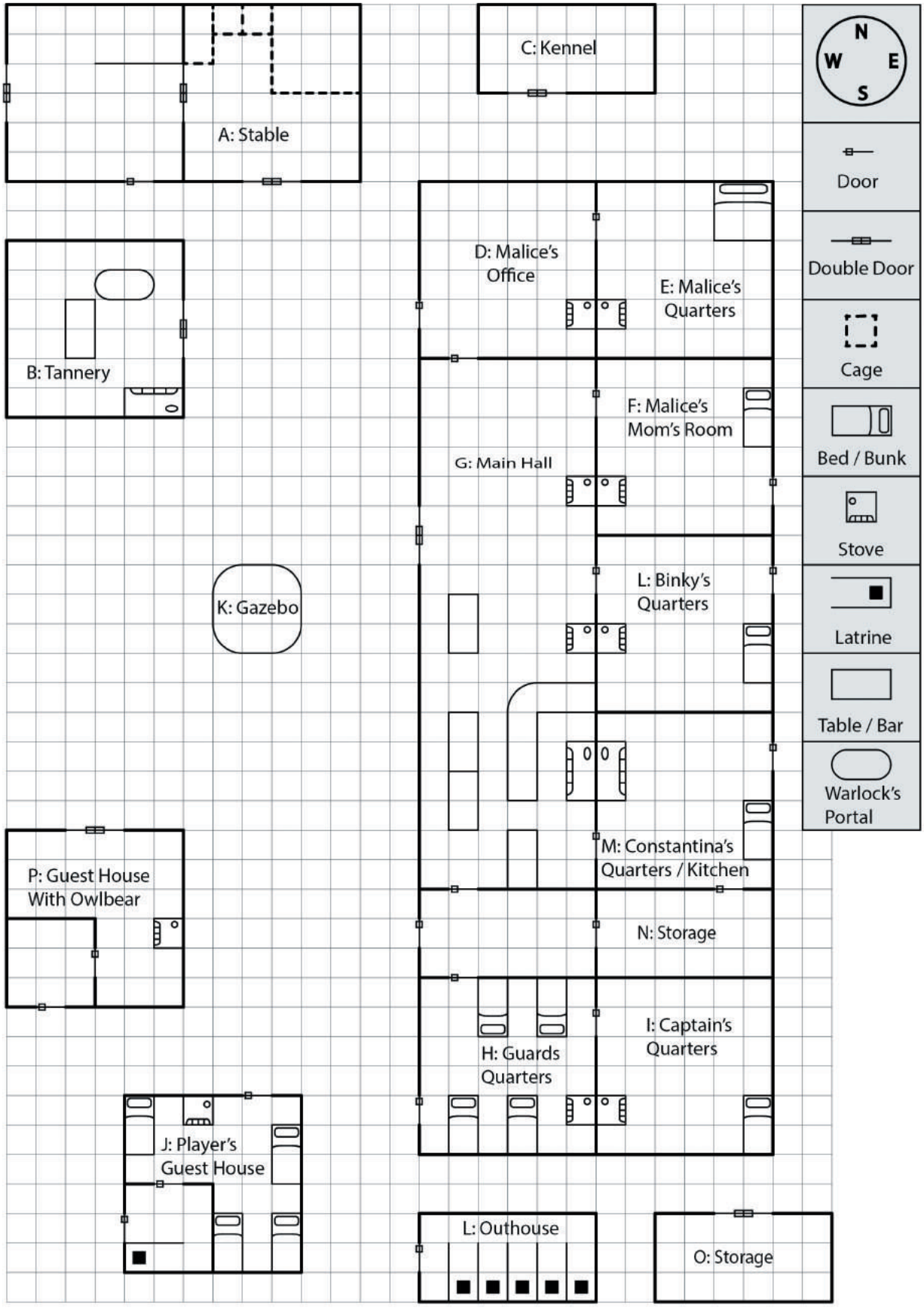
The tall woman is a medusa. She stays far enough away that Wisdom (Perception) checks reveal nothing about her. A DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals there are no reflective surfaces anywhere: no windows, the cups and cutlery are wooden, and the guards carry leather bucklers and non-reflective weapons.

The Captain, Binky, and the remaining guards sit with the party at a table. The girl brings everyone sausages and bread. At this point, the lodge staff is polite but guarded. If the party has been helpful, they may choose to share the following information:

- Their operation is called "Serpent's Tooth Rare and Exotic Creatures." They've been operational for eighteen months, and capture dangerous animals for exclusive clientele.
- Lady Malice is an excellent boss, and critical to the operation's success.
- None of the staff or guards let slip that Lady Malice is a medusa.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals the teenage girl is Constantina, a scout. She is quite happy working at the lodge and is friendly unless the party attempts to "rescue" her, upon which she coldly avoids them.

After some conversation, the Captain and Binky retire, leaving at least two guards in the room.



SERPENT'S TOOTH

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

MAP BY MONICA EVANS AND TIM CHRISTOPHER

THE BLIND WOMAN

An old woman hobbles toward you, tapping her way with a cane. *"I hear some new voices,"* she says loudly, sitting down at your table. She leans forward and hisses, *"Stay calm. You are all in danger. I'm trapped here and so are you."*

The old woman is secretly a **warlock of the fiend**. She supplies the following information, shifting to meaningless chatter if the girl or any guards approach:

- The veiled woman has enslaved everyone at the lodge. If pressed for details, all she'll say is, "There's more than one way to make a slave."
- Many others would like to see the veiled woman dead, but the party can't trust anyone else yet.
- The only way to escape is to kill the veiled woman. The party should let themselves be locked in for the night, and the old woman promises to release them "at the right time."

The old woman leaves before answering too many questions. The Captain returns and escorts the party to a guest house, where she locks them in for the night.

DEVELOPMENT

Enough time should pass for the party to talk among themselves, but not begin any serious escape attempts, before the old woman returns.

CHAPTER 3 – ESCAPE!

You hear wood scraping against the door, then the sound of labored breathing. *"One minute,"* the old woman pants. More scraping, then a heavy thud and loud cursing in an unfamiliar language. At last the door swings open. *"Not much time,"* the old woman says, breathing heavily. *"Door on left. Go now. Don't die."* She nods once, and hobbles away.

Once out of sight, the old woman casts *invisibility*. A DC 16 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals she swore in Infernal.

EXPLORING THE LODGE

The party can now explore the lodge. If they are noisy or obvious, the guards capture them and take them to the main hall in the lodge house. DMs should refer to the map for the following locations.

GUEST QUARTERS

The party has escaped one guest house. The other guest house has been hastily boarded up. Inside is a sleeping **owlbear**: another escaped creature that has been recaptured. The guards, embarrassed about yet another escape, haven't told the medusa yet.

THE STABLES, KENNELS, AND THE TANNERY

The stables have been reinforced to contain live creatures. A **cockatrice** and a **yeti** are currently caged, both well-fed and asleep. The kennels contain three large shipping crates. A fourth crate is partially assembled around a stone **displacer beast** with a note: "Dear Dave – Found Your Cat! Love, Mom." Both the kennels and stables are locked; picking the locks requires a DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

The tannery is magically sealed, as it contains the warlock's shrine.

THE MAIN HOUSE

The party can pick the lock on the far left door with a DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. Lady Malice's office is well-furnished and organized. A DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a scroll of stone-to-flesh and 34 gp in a box marked "Petty Cash." A door at the back of the office leads to Lady Malice's private quarters, equally well-kept.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals quiet voices from the main hall.

If the party has been particularly noisy, captured, or taken too long, read the following:

The Captain clears her throat. *"Alright, then,"* she says. *"Now you're just embarrassing yourselves. Come with me."* She leads you to the main hall.

Upon entering the main hall, read the following:

> Constantina, the veiled woman, and Binky are inside, drinking hot cocoa. As you enter, the veiled woman sighs. *"So she let you out,"* she says. *"How very like her."* She pulls her veil back to sip her cocoa, revealing that she is a medusa. *"Now, then. What exactly did my mother tell you?"*

The party can now converse with the medusa and her staff to gain the following information:

- The medusa is at peace with her transformation, which was not always the case. She prefers her real name, Mabel, but Lady Malice is good for business.
- The blind woman is Mabel's mother and has been increasingly difficult to deal with since Mabel started "Serpent's Tooth."
- The lodge staff are loyal, happy, and enjoy their work. No one has been enslaved, magically or otherwise. "I would never do to others what was done to me."

If the party mentions Lord Devlin or ask what was done to her, Mabel tells her story.

MABEL'S STORY

> *"My mother's no fool,"* Mabel says, *"but she has old-fashioned ideas. I wasn't pretty, you see, so she took matters into her own hands."* She pats the snakes hissing gently around her head. *"She may not have thought it through, entirely."*

- Ten years ago, Mabel worked at the hunting lodge. Her mother, an unsuccessful social climber, wanted Mabel to seduce and marry one of the young lords constantly visiting, and made a pact with an evil patron to "improve" Mabel's appearance.
- Mabel became too beautiful: young lords attempting to impress her held duels, performed dangerous stunts, and generally got themselves and others killed. After the third death, the lodge was closed and Mabel and her mother were driven off.
- Seven years ago, the pact was fulfilled and Mabel became a medusa. It took five years for her to adjust to her new form. Being organized and practical, Mabel chose creature smuggling as the most lucrative use of her new talents.
- Mabel's mother blinded herself for protection. "It was painfully dramatic. Not necessary at all, really."
- Mabel's mother chafes at her daughter's newfound independence, and cannot handle her loss of control. "I didn't think she'd try to kill me, though. I'll take it as a compliment."

Once Mabel's story is finished, read the following.

> There is a loud crash from the courtyard, followed by a hooting screech. *"Of course,"* Mabel says. *"You were the distraction. We'd better see what she's gotten up to."*

DEVELOPMENT

The adventure continues when the party enters the courtyard.

CHAPTER 4 – THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

> An owlbear stands silhouetted atop the wreckage of the previously restored gazebo. It rears back, enraged, and screeches at the moon. The Captain turns to Mabel, chagrined. *"Yeah,"* she says. *"We've been meaning to tell you about that."*

Mabel and her staff retreat to the main house. Mabel feels it's the party's responsibility to stop her mother, given their escape, and won't risk her own people until necessary.

The **owlbear** attacks the party directly. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check or a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a trail of blood from the stables to the tannery's open door. Inside the stables, the cockatrice's cage is empty and the yeti is roaring angrily. For stronger parties, the DM may determine that the warlock has released the yeti as well, which attacks the party two rounds after they enter the courtyard.

THE WARLOCK'S SHRINE

When the party enters the tannery, read the following:

> The old woman stands over a stone table, draining the cockatrice's blood into a chalice. *"She's still alive, I assume,"* she says. *"Pity."* She flings the blood to the ground. A glowing portal opens where it lands, and a hellhound emerges.

The party must now fight the warlock and her **hellhound** while dealing with the portal. If needed, more than one hellhound can emerge as the portal opens.

Tactics: The warlock stays close to the portal, letting the hellhound do most of the fighting. She may also place her hand on the portal to summon more hellhounds, taking 2d4 damage per round.

Party members inside the tannery and within ten feet of the portal must make a DC 14 Wisdom save or touch the portal's surface and take 2d4 damage at the end of each round. For every 10 damage dealt, the portal releases a hellhound. Party members can be pulled away from the portal with a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

When the warlock dies, the following things occur:

- All remaining hellhounds are sucked into the portal.
- Corpses are sucked into the portal in this order: hellhounds, the warlock, the cockatrice, and any dead party members.
- Any blood in the tannery is sucked into the portal.
- Black tendrils emerge from the portal and begin lashing the walls of the building, which bows inward and shakes dangerously. In 1d4 +1 rounds, the tannery will collapse.
- The tannery collapses into the portal, which vanishes. Anyone still inside the tannery must make a DC 10 Dexterity save or be sucked into the portal.

The portal leads to an Infernal plane. It will require plane shift, or some similar ability to planar travel, to mount a rescue for characters drawn into the portal.

THE AFTERMATH

As the portal vanishes, Mabel and her retinue enter the courtyard.

> Mabel surveys the scorched area where the tannery stood. *"She's gone, then. What a waste,"* she says, shaking her head. *"I suppose I should thank you, regardless of the damage."*

Mabel now considers the party allies, and gives them a *wand of stone-to-flesh* as a token of friendship. The party may suggest she join Lord Devlin's operation as the lodge's administrator, in which case she will hire them at 300 gp each to serve as her intermediaries. The party also receives 600 gp each from Lord Devlin's agent upon reporting back.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards. Creatures that are captured, not killed, provide a 10% xp bonus.

Obstacle	XP
Bulette	1800
Owlbear	700
Yeti	700
Cockatrice	100
Displacer Beast	700
Warlock of the Fiend	2900
Hellhound	700 each

TREASURE REWARDS

Wand of Stone-to-Flesh

Wand, rare (requires attunement by spellcaster)

This wand has six charges. While holding the wand, a character can expend one charge to cast stone-to-flesh as an action. The wand regains 1d4 + 1 charges daily at dawn. On expending the wand's last charge, roll d20; on a 1, the wand disintegrates.

AUTHORS' NOTES

We wanted to explore the Medusa as a tragic character rather than an evil one, especially as she was transformed against her will. Our warlock is essentially a pageant mom trying to live vicariously through her daughter, treating her as a marriageable commodity instead of a person. We were also interested in the Medusa as a figure of female rage, and wanted to subvert that with a character who is coldly practical, even facing a toxic mother-daughter relationship.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Monica Evans, Ph.D., is a professor of game design and game studies at the University of Texas at Dallas. It is her policy to include a "dread gazebo" in every adventure she runs. She can be reached at monica.evans@gmail.com.

Tim Christopher, Ph.D., is a professor of game design and development at the University of Texas at Dallas. For the past seven years he has run D&D campaigns for graduate students focused in gaming. Those who survive his campaigns bear life-long grudges for his actions.



Blind Isabella, "Mother"

Human Warlock of the Fiend, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +7
Damage Resistance slashing damage from non-magical attacks not made with silvered weapons
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Mother's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. She can innately cast the following spells (spell save DC 15), requiring no material components:

At will: alter self, false life, levitate (self only), mage armor (self only), silent image
1/day each: feeblemind, finger of death, plane shift

Spellcasting. Mother is a 17th level spellcaster. Her innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She regains her extended spell slots when she finishes a short or long rest. She knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast, fire bolt, friends, mage hand, minor illusion, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*
1st – 5th level (4 5th-level slots): *banishment, burning hands, flame strike, hellish rebuke, invisibility, magic circle, scorching ray, scrying, suggestion, wall of fire*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* + 3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Blinky Sparklepop

Gnome enchanter, chaotic good

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 40 (9d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4
Skills Arcana +6, History +6
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Gnomish, Common, Goblin, Dwarven
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Spellcasting. Binky is a 9th level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Binky has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *friends, mage hand, mending, message*
1st level (4 slots): charm person, mage armor, magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, invisibility, suggestion**
3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, haste, sleep*
4th level (3 slots): *dominate beast*, stoneskin*
5th level (2 slots): *hold monster**
**Enchantment spell of 1st level or higher*

Actions

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack.* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

Reactions

Instinctive Charm (Recharges after the Enchanter Casts an Enchantment Spell of 1st Level or Higher). Binky tries to magically divert an attack made against her, provided that the attacker is within 30 feet of her and visible to her. She must decide to do so before the attack hits or misses.

The attacker must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the attacker targets the creature closest to it, other than Binky or itself. If multiple creatures are closest, the attacker chooses which one to target.



Illustration by Wouter Florusse

A QUEEN'S REVENGE

by Dimitri Lambermont and Remko van der Heul

Creature: *Medusa* | **Level(s):** *6 - 8*

SYNOPSIS

Anea, the Amazon queen, and her warriors have helped neighboring king Eriklius defeat the usurper Todeuclis. When king Eriklius ascends the throne he covets the hand of Anea, but she refuses.

In a fit of rage he sends his warrior Euclatis to destroy her palace and the surrounding town of Gythaclea. Anea—gravely wounded—pleads with Nyx, Greek goddess of the night. She asks for the power to take revenge. Her plea is granted, at the cost of being turned into a **medusa**.

As rumors spread that Anea is still alive, the heroes are sent by King Eriklius to retrieve her. It seems an easy mission, but they soon discover all is not as it seems...

ADVENTURE HOOK

A Queen's Revenge is best played with four to six characters of at least level 6. During their briefing by the King, their ally Euclatis is kidnapped by a revenant. Euclatis was the last of the warriors that razed Anea's town. The King, mad with fear and anger, sends the party to save Euclatis. If they return Euclatis and Anea they will receive 10,000 gp.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventure takes place in two neighboring states: Dreokopia and Pregara. Both countries have a Mediterranean climate. The adventure takes place in summer.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Chief Warrior Euclatis Petraccas:** Euclatis was a General under King Eriklius the First. He now serves Eriklius the Second. He is 39 years old and has seen many battles. Euclatis is loyal to a fault, but is also secretly in love with Anea.
- **King Eriklius Tarsus The Second:** Ruler of the Kingdom of Dreokopia. Erikilius the Second is 25 years old. He keeps his black hair trimmed in a military style. He is considered handsome although his paranoid nature makes him hard to be around. Since the coup by Todeuclis, Eriklius has become drawn back. People around court whisper his paranoia is getting worse.
- **Anea Petralia, Amazon Queen, Ruler of the Kingdom of Pregara:** Anea is 32 years old. She took over as ruler of the land, when her mother died. She is a kind and warm ruler and a fierce warrior. She is secretly in love with Euclatis.

DREOKOPIA

The kingdom of Dreokopia is located on any southern coast. Dreokopia is well-known for its harbor and capital Pylaea on Mount Thebeion. Dreokopia depends heavily on trade coming in through the harbor. You can expect the usual business of any large harbor town. Many goods, both common and exotic can be found here. Important locations in Dreokopia:

- The capital Pylaea on Mount Thebeion on the coast.
- The palace of King Erikilius in Pylaea.

PREGARA

Pregara is a kingdom north of Dreokopia, of which it is half the size. Pregara is a rural country, known for its agriculture and fruits. Anea's family has long ruled Pregara and it has known peace for many years. Important locations in Pregara:

- Gythyria — border town
- Gythaclea — the capital
- Temple to the Goddess Nyx outside the capital

CHAPTER 1 – RAIDERS IN THE NIGHT

As you rest in your usual hangout you receive a letter. It is from an old friend—Euclatis Petraccas. During your adventures you met this warrior and his band and fought alongside him to help rid a village of gnoll raiders.

Euclatis asks your help in a delicate matter—further details can not be disclosed. *"I will tell you more at our meeting and escort you to court in Pylaea. Here King Eriklius Tarsus the Second will give you your mission. The reward will be worth the effort. I hope we meet in three tendays from now."*

The party can give their reply via the messenger and head off the next day.

SCENE 1 - INTO THE PALACE

The characters ride with Euclatis (NG male human **veteran**) to the Royal Court of King Eriklius.

The Capital Pylaea is a City of about fifteen thousand souls. It sprawls between the sea and the foothills of Mount Thebeion. Pylaea is known as a hub to the wider world. The southern regions lie across the sea. Many goods and people travel through Pylaea to other regions in the realm.

The city is bustling with activity. All known races of the realm mingle here. Eventually the party leaves the city behind and rides up Mount Thebeion.

The hills of Mount Thebeion (a dormant volcano) are known for agriculture and a fine selection of strong red wines. Eriklius the First has built his palace high on the slopes of Mount Thebeion.

The party rides up to the white walls of the palace grounds. They are assigned to a small circle of villas to the left of the palace.

Euclatis leaves you here: *"I have some work to do for the King. Unfortunately. He has been ill at ease lately and wishes you to remain inside this part of court. I will see you at the meeting later today."*

The party is welcome to use the facilities in this sectioned off part of court. There is a bathhouse nearby. Servants provide them with food and drink. As evening comes they make ready for their appointment with the King (CN male human **noble**).

LOCATION: THE THRONE ROOM

As you walk from your villa to the palace you are accompanied by two guards. You pass large white marble columns and move through a heavy wooden door as you enter the palace proper.

A servant welcomes you. The man seems nervous. He asks you to follow him with all possible haste. *"I am ever so sorry, the King does not like to wait."*

The throne room is a large rectangular room with high ceilings. Even though there is still some sun out, the room is mostly shady and dark. At the far end opposite the door Eriklius sits on a large white marble throne with his back against the stone. He does not move.

Beside the throne is a wooden table filled with food. As you scan the room you make out the shapes of warriors on either side. You sense a certain tension in the air. From the deeper shadows you hear whispers which go silent as the King's angry gaze passes over the room.

As you are brought before the throne, Eriklius rises with a sigh and walks towards you. *"Come. Let us eat,"* he announces. *"Euclatis should be here soon."*

Eriklius waves his advisors and servants away. Only his guards remain. The party can try to engage in casual talk as they wait for Euclatis.

LOCATION: THE BARRACKS

As you enjoy the food and wine there is noise coming from down the hall. You hear screams and the sounds of battle. Alarm bells start ringing.

The king is immediately surrounded by a cordon of guards who move him out the door. You are left to fend for yourselves.

As you make your way outside you see part of the barracks in flames. There is chaos everywhere. Euclatis is on the far side of the courtyard. Through the fire you catch a rider on horse shooting flaming arrows into the barracks. She—an Amazon—is headed straight to Euclatis. You try to reach him but are cut off from him by the raging fires.

Catching sight of your band one of the attackers breaks off and charges towards you. As it gets closer you realize you are being attacked by a large horned humanoid.

- **Creatures:** Three **minotaurs**, one **minotaur skeleton** and one **revenant** amazon.
- **Tactics:** The minotaurs are a decoy and do most of the fighting. The revenant, covered by the minotaur skeleton, heads for Euclatis and must escape. Ten palace guards rush towards the fight to aid the party. During the battle, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the revenant is carrying Euclatis to her horse. She rides off into the night.
- **Treasure:** The minotaur skeleton has a gold band worth 75 gp) around one of its horns.

As soon as battle is over King Eriklius and his guards catch up. Bodies lie everywhere. Most of the barracks are still burning.

"Where is Euclatis?" the king stammers. *"Where is my noble friend?"* As you tell him of the abduction, the King sobs and sits down on the floor. *"That is the last one. One by one they have gone. They have come for Euclatis's band. Always during the night. They have taken all of his former warriors. Rode off with them. To Pregara."*

He clutches one of you. *"Please go and reason with Anea. People say she is coming for my head. Get Euclatis back and reason with her. Please."* With that the King falls to the ground at your feet sobbing and muttering.

As he finally rises his demeanor changes. He tells you through gritted teeth. *"You will get me back Euclatis. I will give you 10,000 gold. Reason with Anea if you can."* The King stands proud again. *"And if reasoning fails... bring me her head."*

The party is charged to grab their things, leave immediately and are quickly supplied with horses and provisions.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters leave in pursuit of the raiding party.



CHAPTER 2 – IN PURSUIT

After three days of pursuit the party reaches the border of Pregara at the town of Gythyria.

> As you cross the border you come upon a strange sight. Two statues of warriors stand on the very border. They appear new. Only some plants have started to grow on them. The statues hold aloft two large purple banners. In the middle of the banner you see the head of a woman, rays of sunlight swirl from her head.
>
> Upon further inspection you see the awfully lifelike faces of the statues. Both warriors appear to scream in anguish. The gear they carry seems very familiar.
>
> The town of Gythyria is a medium town of about two thousand souls, on the very border of Pregara. It has acquired most of its renown as a trading post. Merchants on their way to Pylaea often rest here.

SCENE 2: MIDNIGHT RAID

The party can camp somewhere between Gythyria and Gythaclea on the plains. During the night, they are ambushed by two **minotaur skeletons** and one **revenant**. If the party survives they find the attackers all wear a band of purple showing the symbol of the radiant woman.

Treasure: The revenant still wears her original leather amour gifted to her by Anea. It is a *+1 leather armor* that allows the wearer to cast *water walk* once per day.

SCENE 3: SOME SPICY GOSSIP

On the road the party passes many caravans and traders. At the DM's discretion they can stock up on goods.

> You meet a merchant caravan led by a half elf. He is a slender man, tanned by the sun, wearing layers of light flowing robes. A purple scarf adorns his head, but his golden jeweled earrings are visible. On his back a crescent shaped blade with two purple sashes hanging from the pommel. He introduces himself as Diogo Zamarkis.

Diogo Zamarkis (LN male half-elf **commoner**) considers himself a man of culture and sophistication. He sells all kinds of wares. If the party engages in conversation he has some interesting gossip:

> *"Anea is alive and well lads. Not only that. She has a new lover. The whole town is abuzz with rumors. Apparently it is one of Eriklius's personal guard. Eu... Ecu.. Euclatis I believe. Anyway, she has abandoned her palace and has retreated inside the Temple to Nyx. They have not been seen for days."*

Treasure: Diogo has four *potions of healing* for sale at the price of 55 gp per potion.

DEVELOPMENT

The party should make it to Gythaclea the next day. News of the Queen ruling with Euclatis spreads fast. The party can head into town or straight for the temple.

CHAPTER 3 – A NEST OF VIPERS

LOCATION: TEMPLE TO NYX

The Temple to Nyx has been built on top of a hill. It is protected by a simple brick wall about 9 feet high. Only one gate can be seen in the south wall. Stone stairs lead to the gate, it consists of a heavy wooden double door. At it stand two skeletal minotaur and two fierce amazon guards. These are survivors of the attack by Euclatis and his warband.

Tactics: Depending on how the party presents themselves the guards allow passage. Aggressive action is met by equal force.

The Temple has seen better days. It has fallen in disrepair and is overgrown. Several pillars have fallen over blocking entrance from the western side. Other parts are intact. A statue to the Goddess Nyx stands proud among the rubble.

LOCATION: COURTYARD

The small path to the palace door is surrounded by fruit trees. There is a sweet smell on the air. Among the trees the party can discern more stone statues. All are crawling with snakes.

Gaining access through the gate the party walks through a rectangular courtyard to the temple.

SCENE 4: MEETING EUCLATIS

As you approach the door you see a humanoid in the doorway. They are around six feet tall, completely hairless and has a muscular build. They wear only a wrap-round leather skirt tied at the waist.

Arriving at the door the characters get a closer look at the man.

The creature before you has reptilian eyes and scales across his face. He has a bald snake-like head and neck. As the creature smiles you can see sharp fangs and a split tongue. Its body appears to be that of a large snake. As the party halts it speaks with his arms wide open in a non-hostile gesture.

"Welcome friends to our humble abode." You realize immediately: This is Euclatis. Or it used to be. *"With some help from the Goddess Nyx I have finally found my true form. There is no honor to gain here friends. I have chosen my true love. I have chosen Anea."*

- If the characters turn hostile, Euclatis fights them outside.
- If the characters reason, he takes them inside and takes his place beside Anea.

Euclatis is a **yuan-ti abomination** with the following changes:

- Euclatis adds petrified to his condition immunities.
- His innate spellcasting of *fear* once per day is replaced with *greater restoration* once per day.

Treasure: Euclatis still has his own enchanted sword, a *+1 scimitar*, and he has a *potion of greater healing*.



SCENE 5: THE QUEEN

You enter the throne room through two ornate doors. The golden symbol of the woman with swirling rays around her head appears on both doors. The doors themselves are painted purple.

As the characters pass through the gate they enter a circular hall. Even though it is a sunny day, not much light enters here.

At the end of the hall you see a raised throne and a smaller one beside it. Visage to the throne is blocked by many veils draped from the ceiling. You can make out a humanoid shape on the throne. The room is filled with the sweet smell of incense. Between the marble columns you make out more human-like statues.

The characters are greeted by Queen Anea (CG female human **noble**) in a friendly tone, even if the characters have fought their way inside she engages them in conversation.

"So Eriklius has sent another batch of heroes? Have you come to reason with me? To ask me to reconsider and take the old wineskin's hand in marriage? You come in vain brave travelers. As I already have my love... by my side."

As soon as the party moves through the many veils they see Anea in her new form. As a **medusa**.

Treasure: Anea wears a *ring of protection* and has a *+1 precise longbow* that allows her to do max damage twice per day.

DEVELOPMENT

At this point the characters can:

- Reason with Anea and Euclatis.
- Fight Euclatis at the gate and then fight Anea.
- Fight Euclatis and Anea together in the throne room.

CONCLUSION

1. REASON WITH ANEA

The characters can decide not to fight Anea. They can leave the Temple of Nyx alive and leave the lovers. The King turns hostile if the characters return without Euclatis and Anea. The party is advised to never return to Dreokopia again.

2. JOIN A POSSIBLE REBELLION AGAINST THE KING

If the characters listen to Anea's tale and see the love between her and Euclatis they can decide to switch sides. This is the intended, but open, ending and gives the DM the chance to follow up this tale.

3. KILL ANEA AND EUCLATIS

If the characters kill Anea and Euclatis the conclusion is straightforward. They can return to King Eriklius and claim their 10,000 gp.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow up option 1 and 3 with a tale they later hear. The King has invaded Anea's kingdom. He has destroyed all opposition and annexed Pregara. The King's fragile mind has made him dangerous to all his neighbors. He has become the usurper he so hated. If the lovers survived their encounter with the party, they went into hiding, plotting to free the people of another mad king.

REWARDS

XP REWARD

Advance to level 7

TREASURE FROM THE TEMPLE

600 cp, 9000 sp, 2000 gp, 80 pp.
Several art objects and jewellery (DM's discretion) worth 2000 gp total
One *potion of clairvoyance*, one *potion of superior healing*, one *potion of stone giant strength*

About the Authors

Dimitri Lambermont:
I have been playing *Dungeon & Dragons* at least 30 years. In my daily life I am an online copywriter. In my free time I like working on my fantasy novel and thinking up *D&D*-related stuff with Remko. I launched the website, www.nerdicted.com, to build a place where we can unapologetically be nerds. Connect with me on Twitter @nerdicted.

Remko van der Heul:
I have been playing RPGs since I was 12/13 and ever since that time I've been hooked. It started with a translated German RPG, but soon thereafter we discovered *D&D*. It must have been late 80s early 90s. Since then I've played numerous card, board, strategy and RPG games. Now we decided to publish some of our ideas.



"Ruins of the Temple of Bacchus" by David Roberts



BENEATH THE MAELSTROM

by Christine Prevas

Creature: *Scylla* | **Level:** *8*

SYNOPSIS

Far from shore, in the cold depths of the ocean, lies a legendary whirlpool, five fathoms wide, hungry for sailors, their ships, and their goods. By its side sits a man-eating monster, many-headed and hungry for any who escape the maelstrom. But beneath these perils are the ruins of a palace, rumored to be filled with treasure beyond imagining and, maybe, a history of secrets lost to time beneath the waves.

In the midst of a storm, the party's ship is caught in a strong current. The whirlpool traps them inside of the ruins of an underwater palace, which was once home to a group of nymphs and now is the last vestige of the story of how the nymph Scylla was transformed into the infamous peril she is today.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Beneath the Maelstrom is an adventure for 8th-level characters. It can be inserted into any seafaring journey, or used as a standalone. Characters can come across the palace one of two ways: either they have heard rumors of an underwater castle filled with untouched treasures and sought it out; or they happen upon the whirlpool by accident, during a storm on the way to some other destination.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Scylla is a nymph who has been using a magical plant called enchanter's algae to temporarily turn herself into a monster whenever unwelcome visitors—particularly treasure hunters—get too close to her home. In this way she can protect her home and the nymphs and creatures living within it. She was given the enchanter's algae by a sea hag as a means of eluding an undesired suitor several hundred years ago. She has protected this palace ever since by throwing sailors into the Maelstrom to meet their demise.



CHAPTER 1 – THE MAELSTROM

The party begins in any harbor or coastal town with a shipping dock. If they have a destination in mind, the Maelstrom should be located somewhere along the quickest route there. If they do not, rumors about the Lost Palace can entice them into setting sail.

RUMOR AND LEGENDS

Sailors around the docks and in local taverns know the story of the Lost Palace well, and some may claim to have encountered the Maelstrom before. The party can learn the following information around town:

- No sailor in their right mind would consider going near the Maelstrom, as countless ships have been caught in its current and wrecked.
- The Maelstrom is said to hide an ancient palace filled to the brim with treasures, which some have heard is worth a hundred thousand gold.
- Those who have managed to escape the pull of the Maelstrom have been devoured by a beast that lurks underwater nearby.

PASSAGE TO THE LOST PALACE

The party can book passage on The Second Wind, a caravel helmed by Captain T'amar Windbreaker (true neutral female half-orc **bandit captain**), a former pirate. Passage costs 30 gp per passenger, but T'amar is open to bartering on a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or will offer passage in exchange for dockwork moving crates off the ship. Characters with the Sailor background (*PHB*, "Personality and Background") can book free passage using the Ship's Passage feature.

If the party is not intentionally seeking out the Lost Palace, but is headed to another destination that passes in that direction, no ship in the harbor other than *The Second Wind* will risk venturing past the Maelstrom to take them there.

SUPERSTITIOUS SAILORS

While T'amar is willing to venture to or past the deep waters where the palace is rumored to be located, some of her crew are not so sure. Many of them are quiet and sullen during the voyage, or fearful, praying for safe passage.

THE SECOND WIND

The Second Wind is 50 feet from bow to stern and 15 feet wide, with two decks. It is a lightweight, fast, highly maneuverable ship with two masts.

There is a favorable wind, giving the ship a speed of about 6 miles per hour. The Maelstrom is about 80 miles from shore, taking the better part of the day (about twelve hours) to reach.

The Second Wind, caravel

Speed. 30 feet in average wind. 60 ft. in strong (favorable) wind. 5 feet in strong (unfavorable) wind.

- ***Hull.*** The ship's hull has an AC of 13 and has 50 hit points.
- ***Crew.*** The ship is crewed by twelve sailors, who use the **bandit** stat block, and the captain, who uses the **bandit captain** stat block.

AN APPROACHING STORM

A storm overhead becomes visible as the ship approaches the Maelstrom. A strong wind picks up as they draw closer.

THE MAELSTROM

The Maelstrom is a whirlpool with a diameter of 300 feet. Nearby, there is an outcropping of black rocks. When the party is within 800 feet of the edge of the whirlpool, the wind and current begin to pull the ship in at a rate of 100 feet per round. Characters can navigate the ship out of the current with a successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check. If they do, skip to "Scylla." If they don't try to steer the ship, T'amar tries.

Once they reach the edge, the Maelstrom does 3d6 bludgeoning damage to the hull each round. When the hull's hit points are below 25, the ship begins to leak. The sailors focus on bailing water and patching the hull. When the hull's hit points are reduced to zero, the ship splits apart and those on board are pulled into the Maelstrom.

Characters in the water must make a successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check each round to avoid being pulled into the Maelstrom by the current. Those outside the Maelstrom must make a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check when attempting to swim away from it. On a success, they can swim half their speed away, but must succeed a check on each round. On a failure, they are pulled into the Maelstrom.

SCYLLA

If the ship escapes the current, T'amar instructs the sailors to steer towards the nearby rocks to anchor and repair the ship.

> Just as you manage to steer the ship up and out of the Maelstrom's reach, a figure moves in your peripheral vision — a large, hulking figure emerging out of the water and onto the rocks. This must be the monster of legend. A mouth filled with row after row of thin, needle-like teeth split the face of each of the six heads on its long, sinewed necks as it they roar in your direction.

Scylla uses the **hydra** stat block, but has six heads instead of five, as well as 12 tentacle-like legs which can be used to restrain (DC 18 Strength save); she does not regenerate heads. Scylla swims under the ship and pulls it into the Maelstrom. She is accompanied by three **death dogs**, who attempt to incapacitate those out of Scylla's reach to make them succumb to the current. They have a swimming speed of 40 feet, and do not enter the current of the Maelstrom.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the party is trapped within it, the bottom of the Maelstrom opens up, dropping the party into a deep pool of water.

CHAPTER 2 – THE PALACE

Surfacing from the pool of water, the party finds themselves in a dimly lit room, most of which is occupied by the pool. Diving into the pool reveals that the bottom of it is covered in bones, as well as 1d8 corpses. By looting the bodies, characters can recover 1d4 x 100 gp and a *ring of swimming* (*DMG*, "Treasure").

There is an open archway in the room, to the side of the pool's edge.

THE CORAL COURTYARD

> As you go through the archway, it opens up into an impressive room, a hundred feet high and a hundred feet across.
>
> Above you, the walls rise into great, crumbling basalt towers, columns of dark rock long-since weathered by erosion, and an arching ceiling above you. Smears of bright colors — pinks and yellow and blues — paint the walls, and it takes you a moment to realize that it's coral, growing from the ancient vaults and spires.
>
> To the left of you is another archway, and the path through it curves downwards, a spiraling coral staircase that descends rapidly into the flooded area below you.

An invisible barrier prevents water from flooding into the palace through the windows, and through the windows a number of devastating shipwrecks can be seen.

NAVIGATING THE PALACE

The Lost Palace

Lighting. The lighting in the lower level of the palace is dim, unless otherwise specified.

Flooding. Areas of the palace which are flooded have a foot of breathable air at the top and must be swum through. Areas which are partially flooded are considered difficult terrain (*PHB*, "Combat").

There are four rooms on the lower level of the palace. They are connected by one long winding hallway which makes a complete circle. The rooms are, clockwise from the staircase:

1. Aquatic Garden
2. Treasury
3. Royal Baths
4. Scylla's Lair

THE HALLWAY

The hallway is flooded, with about 90-100 ft. between each of the rooms. They are 40 feet high and 40 feet wide. A **giant shark** patrols the hallway in a constant circle.

When a character exits a room into the hallway, roll 1d6 to determine the shark's location:

1-2 Not within eyesight
3-4 Within eyesight, moving away from the room
5-6 Within eyesight, approaching the room

The party can track the shark's movements to make navigating the hallways easier. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check allows them to exit a given room without encountering the shark.

AQUATIC GARDEN

This room, though underwater, is rich in color, with bright coral structures covered in a rainbow of plants, with deep reds and bold purples, tiny clusters of white flowers, and leafy green seaweed waving in the gentle current.

The room is 20 feet by 20 feet and flooded. The coral structures each occupy one quarter of it, with 5 feet of space between them and the walls.

The room contains the following plants:

- Water Hemlock, tiny clusters of white flowers, can be used to make an ingestible poison (pale tincture) on a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check. On a failed check, it is mistaken for Yarrow, a common medicinal flower used to stop bleeding and stabilize unconscious allies.
- Sailor's Rumex, a leafy green seaweed with yellow flowers, can be used to make a healing salve on a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check.
- Dragon's Tongue Algae, blood-red bush of tendril-like leaves, no known uses.
- Enchanter's Algae, purple moss-like algae, rumored to temporarily turn those who consume it into another form.

Any of the plants can be identified with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check and safely picked with a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check.

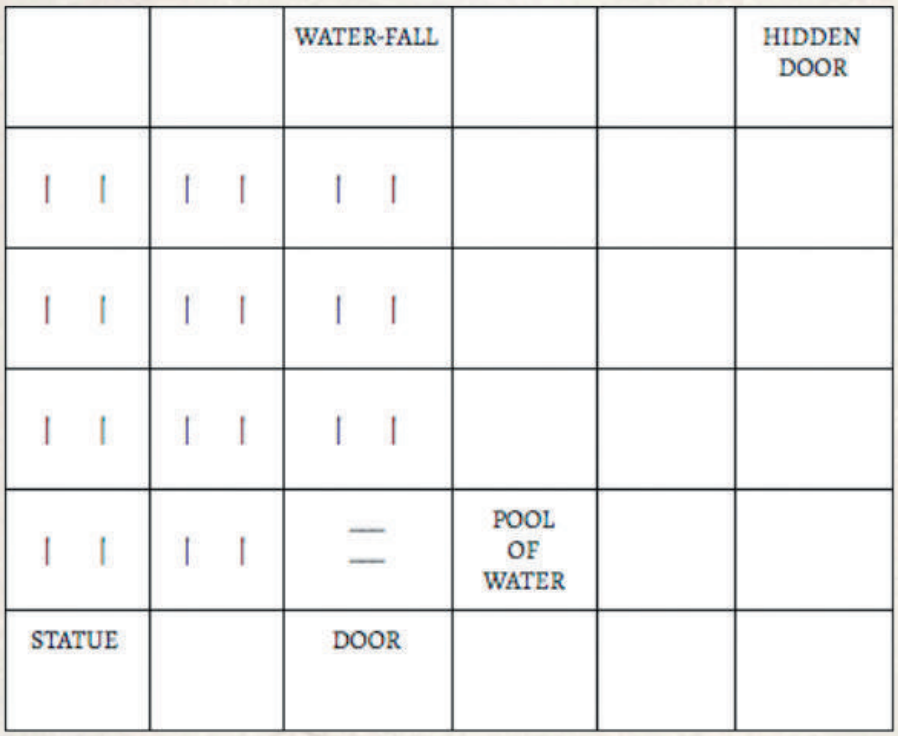
- On a failure for trying to pick the Rumex, the character disturbs a **swarm of quippers** who then attack.
- On a failure for trying to pick the Enchanter's Algae, they draw the attention of one of the merrow-nymphs from the Royal Baths (see "Royal Baths"), who is coming to check on the garden.

TREASURY

A heavy stream of water pours down from a hole in the ceiling of this room, running along the floor to a shallow pool in the center of the room. The floor around it is made of large tiles, all white except for twelve carved turquoise tiles on the left side of the room.

Not far from the door is a marble statue, which is a figure of a woman holding an urn under one arm. The other arm is raised, as if she were holding something else, but the hand has been broken off.

The pattern of tiles is as follows. All tiles marked with two parallel lines can be turned 90 degrees to alter the flow of water. Two vertical lines means the water will flow to the next tile down (away from the waterfall). Two horizontal lines means the water will flow to the next tile to the right or left unless blocked by two vertical lines.



A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the turquoise tiles can be turned to change the pathway of the water. Redirecting the flow away from the pool deactivates a pressure plate, which opens a hidden door in the wall. The room beyond is partially flooded and contains a large marble chest guarded by a **water elemental**.

The large chest contains:

- 2d6 x 1,000 gp
- 1d6 x 100 gp worth of gems and jewelry
- *Cloak of the manta ray* (*DMG*, "Treasure")
- 1d4 *potion of water breathing* (*DMG*, "Treasure")

Redirecting the flow to the base of the statue causes the statue to turn, revealing a partially flooded tunnel, which leads to a small cavern with a small coral chest on a pedestal.

The small chest contains:

- A small emerald (*elemental gem — water*; *DMG*, "Treasure")
- A pearl box worth 450 gp, containing a 4th level spell scroll (*control water*; *PHB*, "Spells")

ROYAL BATHS

Set into the floor of this room are a dozen pools of water each about three feet deep but varying in size, with space to walk between them. Along the back wall, a colorful mosaic frieze spans the length of the room.

On a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check in proper lighting (DC 25 without light or darkvision), the frieze reveals a series of scenes, which, in order, depict:

1. A nymph running from a man
2. The same nymph consulting with a woman, who gives her a purple seaweed-like plant
3. The nymph pouring a purple liquid into one of the baths

The plant is enchanter's algae (see "Aquatic Garden"). If correctly identified before, it can be recognized on a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check. If not, it can be identified with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check.

The water in the pool directly below the third frieze is slightly purple, and illuminating the area reveals a thin layer of purple enchanter's algae growing along the stone walls of the pool. Lurking around the pools are four **nymphs** protecting the algae; they have used the algae's illusive powers to make themselves appear and behave like **merrow**. If they are killed, their bodies revert back to their nymph forms.

SCYLLA'S LAIR

There are two levels to this room, set apart by a stone staircase which rises out of the knee-high water. Watery light streams through a large hole in the ceiling, through which water does not fall, and a spindly basalt staircase leads upwards to it.

The lower part of the lair is partially flooded, but the raised area is not. On the raised area, there is a normal human-sized bed, a small table with one chair, a bookshelf, and a cauldron with something brewing inside. There is also a mortar and pestle with some gooey purple residue left behind inside and three large cushions (dog beds).

From the top of the basalt staircase, the party sees light coming from the surface of the water and can make out the black rocks onto which Scylla emerged earlier. The distance between the staircase and the surface seems swimmable, but far, and the water seems unnaturally still. The invisible barrier is permeable only in one direction, allowing the party to swim through it without water collapsing in.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party decides to swim for the surface, they encounter Scylla on the rocks above. If they do not, or if they take too long deciding, Scylla enters the room from behind them while they are preoccupied.



CHAPTER 3 – RESURFACING

A SECRET UNCOVERED

If the party encounters Scylla above the surface of the water, use "On the Rocks" below. If Scylla has found them in her lair, use "In the Lair" instead. Either way, she is accompanied by whatever Death Dogs were not killed in the earlier conflict.

ON THE ROCKS

The rock island is 70 feet above the top of the staircase, and the Maelstrom's current has died down. On top of the rocks, Scylla waits in her monstrous form. With her eyes to the horizon, she does not immediately notice the characters, but attacks if provoked.

IN THE LAIR

When Scylla enters the lair, she is in her nymph form until she sees the party. She then drinks from a small vial and transforms, though the room is fairly small for her huge form. Because of this, she resists attacking unless provoked, hoping to scare the intruders out without having to fight.

A BARGAIN

Scylla can be persuaded to drop her monstrous form. For example, she might do so because:

- The party offers to return the treasure from the Treasury to her
- The party convinces her they mean no harm with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check
- The party heals an injured or unconscious **death dog**
- The party did not kill the merrow-nymphs in the Royal Baths, or otherwise proved they respected the place and creatures she protects
- The party explain that they know her story

In her nymph form, she looks like an elven woman with white hair, brown skin, and blue-green eyes.

She lets the party go on the conditions that they swear to leave her home alone and that they will continue to spread word of the monster that lives here, to keep others from trying to find her. If they return her treasure, she rewards them by allowing them to keep the *cloak of the manta ray*, *spell scroll*, and *elemental gem*

if they had them, as well as by giving them one *enchanter's potion* (see "Rewards").

If they do not persuade her, she attempts to lure them out of the palace and fight them in the water, where she fights to kill in order to keep her secret safe.

Development

If the party persuades Scylla to let them go, she offers to magically repair a boat for them to get them back to shore. Otherwise, they must find their own way out of the palace and back to safety.

Conclusion

Once Scylla has restored their boat, the party is free to leave to return to the harbor from which they departed or to continue on their journey elsewhere. The ship is smaller than *The Second Wind* and can be piloted by the party alone. Once they reach land, sailors ask them how they escaped the Maelstrom, leaving them to decide whether they want to tell the truth, or to tell the lie that they promised Scylla they would.

Rewards

XP REWARDS:

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

Encounter	XP
Death Dogs	200 each (up to 3)
Giant Shark	1,800
Swarm of Quippers	200
Treasury puzzle	800
Water Elemental	1,800
Merrow	450 each (up to 4)
Scylla	3,900

Enchanter's Potion

Adventuring gear (potion), legendary

This potion has the effect of the *polymorph spell*. The effects last for up to one hour.

Author's Notes

This adventure was inspired by the role of Scylla in Madeline Miller's *Circe*. While many of the myths of Scylla paint her not as a monster but as a victimized nymph murdered or transformed into a monster due to jealousy over a lover, I have long wondered at the power that her transformation gives her: her physical size, the fear she inspires. Rather than have Scylla transformed against her will, in punishment for daring to love or to exist, I wanted to portray her as a woman seeking out this power for herself and using it for her own ends—not evil, but necessary—and also to explore how easily rumors spread about women when they have too much power, and the power those rumors can provide if used wisely.

About the Author

Christine Prevas is a writer, librarian, and game designer. They are also the host and GM of the actual play podcast The Unexplored Places. You can find their games at cprevas.itch.io, and the rest of their work on Twitter @cprevas.





Illustration by Xan Larson

OUTFITTED WITH ARTIFICE

by Chai Power

Creature: *Firebird* | **Level(s):** *8 - 12*

CWs: *Animal abuse, classism-based abuse, and neglect*

SYNOPSIS

Outfitted with Artifice is designed for a group of four to five characters between levels 8 and 12. This adventure can be used in any setting that features landowning nobility as a social class. It focuses on the Firebird, a mythical creature from Slavic folklore similar to the phoenix.

The characters begin inside a tailor's shop where they've been gathered by Pero Toporov, the best tailor in the city of Krylo. The city is ruled by the confident and insensitive Baron Yuri, who commissioned Pero to create a beautiful cloak woven with the feathers of the Firebird, a creature known for its healing powers. Pero agreed on the condition that their work would be used to aid Yuri's citizens, who have been sick and ailing under Yuri's restrictive rule. Instead, the Baron took the cloak for himself.

Pero is hiring the adventurers to help them break into the Baron's fortress and steal the cloak back without being caught. The characters find a way inside the fortress and break into the dungeon, where the cloak is supposedly hidden away. Within the dungeon, the party finds the Firebird itself locked in a golden cage where Baron Yuri—wearing the magic cloak—is antagonizing it.

Baron Yuri attacks them to protect his treasure and is not open to negotiation. However, the characters may try to befriend or capture the Firebird. If they sway the bird to their side it may help them fight the Baron. Once Baron Yuri is defeated, the characters can take the cloak for themselves or return it to Pero. Dethroning the Baron earns them the gratitude of the city's people. If they return the cloak, Pero pays the adventurers and assures them that the cloak will be used for good from now on.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Pero would give up their life savings to hire adventurers who can reclaim the cloak and put the Baron to shame. The characters might hear of this job in a number of ways—a contact in an underground network, a rumor in a nearby town of the tailor quietly starting a revolution, or a traveling bard rehearsing a sonnet about Krylo's inevitable downfall.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In Slavic folklore, the Firebird can be a blessing or a signal of impending doom, and this adventure is designed to encompass both meanings. It is typically featured in stories as a prize, usually for a prince or king, or as a means to supply townsfolk with resources through its gifts. The most popular story tells of a Russian prince capturing the bird and gaining a wife in exchange. For this module, the Firebird itself is the prize guarded by a selfish ruler, and it can be up to the characters to kill it, set it free, or even convince it to help them defeat the villain. The theme of this module focuses on misuse of resources; the tales of the Firebird often treat it as an object or a way to get money, while this story highlights the abuse of the mythical creature and how those of high social and financial status can fail their people by being selfish and hoarding wealth for themselves.

CHAPTER 1 – A DESPERATE MOVE

The party starts inside the Aristo-Cut tailor's shop, waiting for the owner, Pero Toporov. They can have a little time to roleplay or dive right into the adventure. Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to set the scene:

> You find yourselves in a small tailor's shop. It's a cozy building, filled with clothing stands dressed in the finest fabrics, shelves stuffed with large bolts of fabric, and all manner of coats, shawls, and jackets hanging on the walls. Underneath the mass of fabrics, there is a small door on the back wall. You can hear muttering from behind the door, which you assume to be the shop's proprietor, Pero Toporov. Pero has asked you here to hear the details about a task they wish to hire you to accomplish.

Pero Toporov, CG nonbinary human tailor

"You shouldn't step on tailors. You might land on a needle."

- ***Appearance:*** Short and slight, dark skin and hair, androgynous features. Their clothing is plain but has many pockets for thread, ribbons, and accessories for their tailoring business.
- ***Does:*** Fidgets and shifts around a lot, gestures with their hands.
- ***Secret:*** Wants to depose the Baron and put someone fit to rule the city in charge.

Pero comes from a back room of the shop and introduces themselves, explaining that they want to hire the characters to break into Baron Yuri's fortress and steal back the cloak they made for him. They offer a reward of 4,000 gp (or an amount scaled to match the party's interests) if the characters succeed in their task. This money is their life savings, and they impress upon the party that they are risking everything to do this.

Pero patiently explains the following and answer the characters' questions about the job.

- Pero will not go on the job, to protect their identity.
- The best way inside is to sneak in during Baron Yuri's big dinner that evening. He and his guests will be distracted and the party will have an easier time getting inside.
- Pero stresses that they have a time limit. Baron Yuri will not have another large dinner like this one for some time and if they do not execute the heist in one night, they may be caught and tried for their crimes.

Pero presents several options for getting inside the Baron's fortress:

- Fake a crime and be arrested by the city militia. Pero advises against this, as the party might be separated in the process.
- Pose as guests for the Baron's dinner. He is trying to impress nobles of neighboring lands and would be eager to have more guests to boast to.
- Sneak inside through the servants' entrance.

If the characters choose to explore the city before their task, they find very little. The town has been suffering under Baron Yuri's rule and many businesses are closed. Pero's shop only thrives because Baron Yuri's friends buy tailored clothes to wear to the baron's parties.

- A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check leads the characters to a small apothecary where they can buy the last two remaining potions of greater healing in the city.
- There is also a hospital in desperate need of funds and supplies. The patients there are dying and there are very few healers on staff, and no clerics. Most people there are too far gone to be helped by healing magic. If the characters interact with the staff, they lament that Baron Yuri cut most of their funding to funnel the city's money back to himself, and his throttling of city funds is the reason many people are struggling.
- The atmosphere of the city is one of severely oppressed middle and lower classes, and a narrow area of affluence surrounding the baron's fortress. Infrastructure is poor except around noble homes, and what jobs are left are meant to serve the baron, as merchants who import goods or bankers foreclosing on the collapsing businesses.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters must seek a way into the fortress. They are free to choose from the methods Pero has suggested, or create their own strategy. They must start toward the fortress by evening so they can execute the heist while Baron Yuri and his guests are distracted.

CHAPTER 2 – INFILTRATION

After receiving the job the characters will eventually make their way to the fortress. The city around them becomes more alive as they grow closer until they reach the polished homes of the city's nobility that decorate the streets near the fortress. The time it takes to travel to the fortress can be used for roleplay or strategizing their approach.

THE FORTRESS WALLS

When the characters approach the Baron's fortress, read or paraphrase the following:

> You come up the wide cobblestone road and see looming walls surrounding a massive stone fortress. A large iron gate protects the entrance, but it is open to allow guests for Baron Yuri's dinner to enter. A pair of guards watch the doorway, each holding a guest list. The stone wall curves away from the road and around the fortress. Some distance from the gate, servants are taking dinner supplies from wagons and carrying them inside the fortress.

The front gate is open to allow party guests inside and is watched by two **guards**. Guests chatter excitedly, and the guards are checking a list of names with invited guests.

DEVELOPMENT

- A successful DC 17 Charisma (Deception) check convinces the guards that the characters are guests whose names have been left off the list. On a failure, the guards attempt to arrest the characters for impersonating nobility. If the characters allow themselves to be arrested, they are taken to the dungeon (see "The Dungeon," *Chapter 3*). If the characters escape the guards, they may try to sneak into the fortress. Killing the guards will attract the attention of the staff, who support rebellion against Baron Yuri, as well as reinforcements from the fortress to tame the rabble before the dinner begins. Optionally, a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check allows characters to notice a member of the staff signalling them toward the staff entrance, as recognition and support of the characters' attempts to undermine the Baron.
- The staff entrance to the fortress is off to the side of the main gate. None of the staff like Baron Yuri and happily help the characters sneak into the fortress as extra hired hands.

INSIDE THE FORTRESS

If the party is arrested and thrown in the dungeon, proceed to *Chapter 3*.

Through either the staff entrance or the front gate, the characters find themselves in the large halls of the fortress.

- A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows the characters to find their way to the dungeons without help.
- The characters can ask the staff for help; they are eager to undermine Baron Yuri.
- If they are attacked inside the fortress, the party can either dispatch the guards (up to twelve depending on party size and level) or run and hide in an abandoned side room in the hallway they entered through. If they defeat the guards they can move on with their search.
- If they loot any of the guards, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) yields a set of keys which unlock the shackles in the dungeon.
- Hiding from the guards requires a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check.
- For added difficulty, require additional DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) checks at various intervals as guards pass through the hallways.

As guests the characters have the privilege of viewing the fortress interior in all its grandeur. The front entrance leads to another doorway where dinner is being held. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check allows the characters to persuade the guests of their status as fellow nobles. On a failure, the characters are accused of thievery and attract the attention of the guards. Encounters with the guards are described above.

After some time, it becomes apparent that Baron Yuri is not coming to dinner. The guests do not know why. With a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the dinner staff reveal that the Baron is looking for his cloak and will not come to dinner until he finds it. Characters can leave the dinner at any time to explore the castle. They can excuse themselves to the dinner staff and guests with a successful DC 14 Charisma (Deception) check, or slip out unnoticed with a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check.

If the characters do not enter the dining hall, they can explore the castle to find the dungeon.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters can explore the castle and talk to the guests and staff. Once they reach the dungeon door, proceed to "The Dungeon," below.

CHAPTER 3 – THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

Baron Yuri's dungeon is where he throws troublesome citizens when they call too much attention to his stranglehold on Krylo.

THE DUNGEON

The dungeon is past a large door beneath the fortress. When the party reaches the door, read or paraphrase the following:

> You come to a wooden door, taller than any of you and made of thick, dark wood. Metal rims the edges and an iron lock holds it closed.

The door can be opened with a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Additionally, the guards each carry a ring of keys that unlock the dungeon.

Once inside the dungeon, the characters see a large room with a dark doorway across from them. Shackles line the walls. If the characters were arrested, they are shackled to the stone walls. When the characters enter the room, read or paraphrase the following:

> This room is dark and dank, smelling of mold and stagnant water. On the walls hang multiple sets of shackles to hold Baron Yuri's intruders. The ground is lined with rotting piles of straw. On the wall opposite the entrance, a doorway is open to another hall that goes deeper into the dungeons.

Breaking free of the shackles requires a successful DC 19 Strength check, or a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to slip out.

If the characters looted a guard and were then arrested, the keys they found also unlocks the shackles. Unlocking the shackles without a key requires a successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

DEVELOPMENT

The party can explore the dungeon, which can be arranged according to an existing dungeon map or created for this adventure. The dungeon must include a large room with Baron Yuri and the Firebird, as described below. Suggested monsters for this dungeon are:

- **stone golem**
- **chain devil**
- **wyvern**

Alternatively, for a quicker game, the dungeon could be simply composed of two rooms: the jail just beyond the entrance, and the large room containing the Firebird.

THE FIREBIRD

The last room of the dungeon houses the Firebird, locked in a golden cage. Also present is Baron Yuri, who is wearing the Firebird Feather Cloak and trying to yank another feather from the uncooperative bird.

You walk into an enormous, luxurious room. Tapestries of shimmering silk and embroidered jewels hang off the stone, and torches on the wall illuminate a large wooden pedestal with gilded, bejeweled cage. The cage contains a huge, magnificent bird. It sits on a wooden perch the size of a tree, its feathers shining like dancing flames in the low light of the room.

Beside the bird is a stout, middle aged human man dressed in ornate clothing and a cloak matching the Firebird's feathers. He is trying to yank another feather from the bird, claiming that his cloak is no longer magnificent enough for his guests.

DEVELOPMENT

Upon seeing the characters, Baron Yuri asks why they are invading his sacred chamber and if they intend to steal his Firebird. Reason does not reach him and he will attack the characters if they approach. The bird itself is similar in appearance to a large peacock, with brilliant red and orange feathers.

The characters can attempt to befriend the upset Firebird by making a DC 16 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check as an action. Befriending the bird requires three successful checks. Each success makes the bird more friendly to the person trying to soothe it. If the characters accrue three failures before three successes, the bird becomes hostile and attacks the party if the cage is opened. If they befriend it, the Firebird plucks a feather out of its body and bestows it upon the character who befriended it. The feather glows and when used heals 3d6 hit points.

The cage can be opened with a successful DC 25 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Opening the cage without thieves' tools requires a successful DC 25 Strength check or a spell dealing at least 40 force damage. Breaking the cage frightens the bird and it attacks Baron Yuri. Characters may continue to try and tame it as described above.

Baron Yuri uses the **champion** stat block. He also has two magic items, the Firebird Feather Cloak and a *horn of blasting* (*DMG*, "Treasure").

Firebird Feather Cloak

This magnificent garment was skillfully created from magical feathers and the finest flame-red silk.The cloak has six charges, and regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

Restore. You can use an action to expend 1 of the cloak's charges to regain 3d10 hit points.
As a reaction when you take damage, you can expend 3 of the cloak's charges to negate up to 4d8 poison, acid, or necrotic damage.

For the Firebird, use the **roc** stat block with the following changes:

- The Firebird's size is Huge.
- As an action, the Firebird can touch a creature and restore 3d8 hit points.
- When the Firebird is killed, it dissolves in a roar of flames that destroy its body and deal 3d12 fire damage to creatures within 10 feet.



CONCLUSION

After retrieving the cloak, the party is able to navigate out of the dungeon back the way they came. Their mission successful, the party can give the cloak to Pero at Aristo-Cut and receive their payment. After they receive payment they may leave, or stay a few days in Krylo to witness the aftermath of the Baron's downfall.

Alternatively, the characters can destroy or take the cloak for themselves, in which case Pero is disappointed and angry with them and refuses to pay them.

Pero intends to donate the cloak to the local hospital anonymously, where it can be used to heal Krylo's ailing citizens. Baron Yuri, if still alive, bemoans the loss of his greatest treasure as a small rebellion against him starts to cook at the edges of society. If he is dead, discussions will begin regarding his replacement, and Pero will put their name in the running to lead the city.



REWARDS

XP REWARDS

Firebird: 7,500 XP
Baron Yuri: 5,000 XP

MONETARY REWARDS

4,000 gp (or amount appropriate to the party)
Fine tapestries, decorations, and jewels worth 5d10 x 10 gp from Baron Yuri's dungeon

The characters obtain a powerful ally in Pero, who could become the new leader of the city of Krylo. Krylo is a city of strong willed people and could flourish as a town that exports farming goods and creates new healing magics based on their knowledge of the Firebird's feathers. Krylo's fate is a cautionary tale for other leaders who would try to steal their power by crushing their citizens underfoot.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This story is a comment on contemporary politics and the lack of care taken by world leaders in efforts of universal healthcare, and the prioritization of money over humanity. In a world where feminism is becoming a much more prominent ideology, it's important to remember that such political difficulties are often tangled with sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination as peoples in power attempt to push down those that would usurp them for their misdeeds. We must stand together and continue pushing back.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chai Power is an artist and author who creates fantasy stories and illustrations. They identify as nonbinary and try to push diversity and inclusivity in their works. Their contacts and content can be found @chailattemusing on Twitter or by emailing them at powers.chai@gmail.com.



"The Flying Carpet (Prince Ivan with the Caged Firedbird)" by Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov




TIER 3

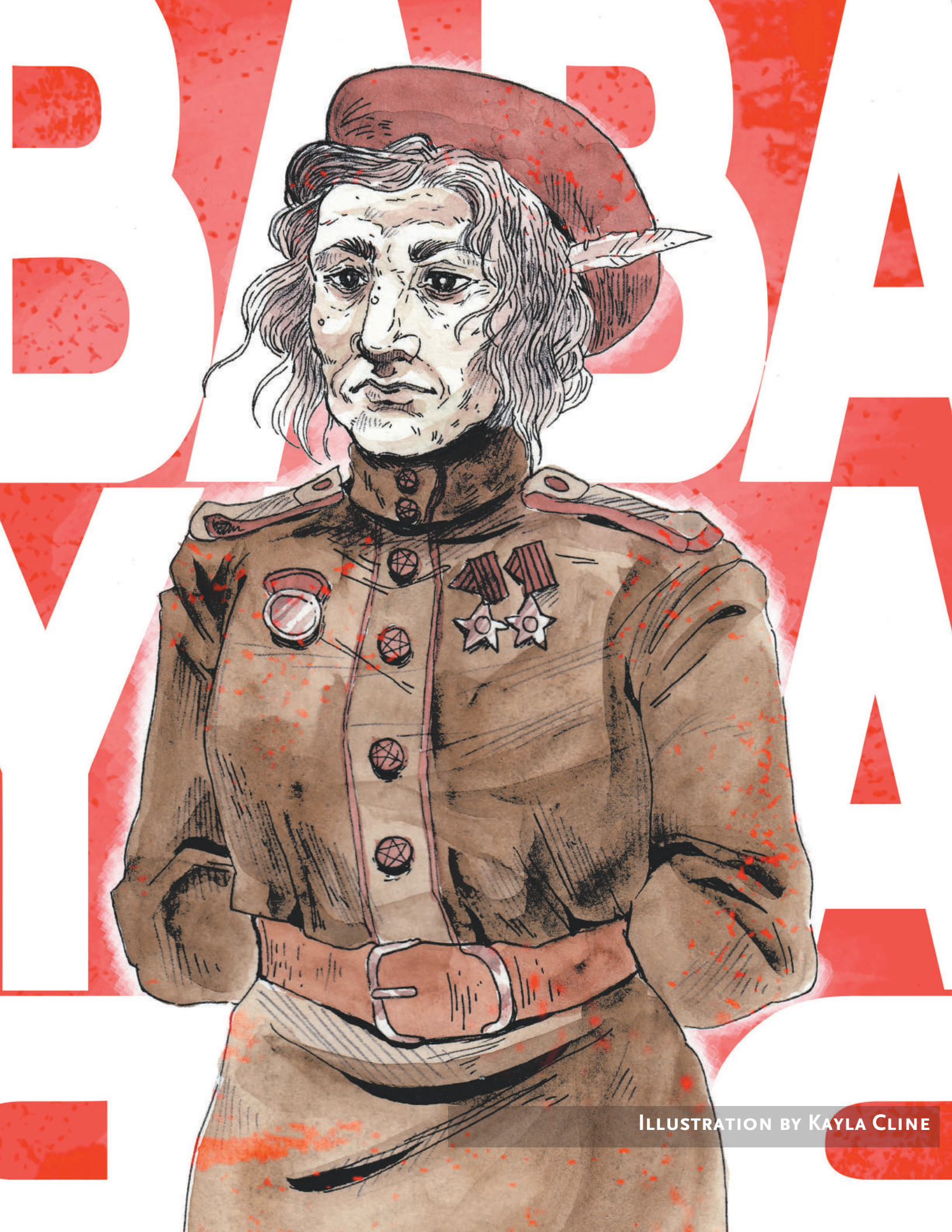


Illustration by Kayla Cline

THE SPOILS OF WAR

by Ashley Warren

Creature: *Baba Yaga* | **Level:** *11*

CWs: *War, allusion to violence, gaslighting, PTSD*

SYNOPSIS

Dark magic lingers in war-torn Voynagrad. Citizens of the once-great city spread rumors about the Witch of the Blood Woods, whom they claim is resurrecting a demon army that will lay waste to what's left of Voynagrad. When adventurers are tasked with cleansing the forest of the Witch's influence, they do indeed discover an army—but the soldiers-in-training will do whatever it takes to rid Voynagrad from the threats that have plagued it for almost a century. Will adventurers help the Witches defeat a greater enemy?

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure is designed for characters of 9th-11th level. It is set in a Slavic-inspired locale, which can be easily slotted into an existing campaign set in Ravenloft or the Cold Lands in Faerûn.

The party receives a letter from a burgomaster named Koschei Voynov, who asks that they come to Voynagrad and root out an evil spreading through the region.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Seventy years ago, demons from the Lower Planes invaded Voynagrad. Voynagrad's army fended off the invaders in a devastating war that lasted for decades. Ten years later, the demons are gone, but their influence remains —Voynagradians fear nothing more than the demons returning. This has made them fearful and superstitious, and rightfully so, for their burgomaster, Koschei, a former soldier, is a demon in disguise.

During the war, Koschei framed the Voynagrad army's commander, Vasilisa, as a traitor. The city turned on her and Koschei believed she had been killed, until he learned recently that she resides in the Blood Woods alongside other veterans. Koschei calls her a witch and stokes the superstition to deflect from his own dealings: opening a portal in Voynagrad to bring back the demons.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **The Commander (Vasilisa):** The Commander, referred to by Voynagradians as "Baba Yaga," joined the war to serve as a healer. Out of necessity, she became a soldier. The horrors she witnessed corrupted her soul, but she wants to right her wrongs by training a new generation of soldiers called the Night Witches. (The Commander's stat blocks are found on pg. 189).
- **Koschei Voynov:** Koschei is the Burgomaster of Voynagrad and a **cambion** in disguise. He knows the Night Witches want to protect Voynagrad from demons.

THE NIGHT WITCHES:

- **Comrade Marya:** Marya is the Night Witches' second-in-command (N female human **veteran**). She has a magical familiar, a quasit named Ivan.
- **Comrade Amira:** Amira is a soldier (CG female human **cult fanatic**) whose parents took the demons' side in the conflict. She wants to atone for their actions.
- **Comrade Constantina:** Constantina is a former bard (CG female human **veteran**) whose family was killed in the war. She struggles with PTSD.

CHAPTER 1 – CITY OF THREE NAMES

Koschei's letter brings adventurers by an arcane-powered train to Voynagrad. The letter instructs them to meet him in the citadel, which is a tall, red, onion-domed building that towers over the rest of the city. Although the train is quite ornate, the fanfare does little to mask the desolation of the city. Many of the buildings are piles of rubble, and the cobblestones underfoot are cracked and uneven. The remnants of savage, magical warfare are evident everywhere: a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies that the many scorch marks and destroyed buildings were caused primarily by fire and force damage. Some buildings have been crudely rebuilt with simple gray bricks.

Voynagrad is heavily guarded; menacing **guards**, dressed in gray uniforms, patrol the streets. Residents of the city keep their eyes downcast; they do not like to speak to outsiders, and most speak in a hushed whisper.

THE RED CITY

The city of Voynagrad was once a bastion of prosperity. People flocked to the city from across the realms, inhabiting its many spired buildings and praying in its onion-domed cathedrals. During this time, the city was called Krasna. Krasna was nicknamed the Red City thanks to its jewel-toned buildings. Then the demons came and the war started, and the city was renamed Prochnost, which meant "strength"; the Red City now invoked the red uniforms donned by the soldiers. The war devastated Prochnost and a soldier named Koschei took control as the city's leader. He renamed the city "Voynagrad" as the streets ran red with blood. Since Koschei took over, Voynagrad has not been visited by demons, and the citizens attribute this to Koschei's leadership.

A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notes graffiti scrawled on several of the buildings in Voynagrad:

BEWARE THE NIGHT WITCHES
THE COMMANDER FEASTS ON CHILDREN
DO NOT STRAY INTO THE BLOOD WOODS
THE OLD WITCH RIDES UPON HER MORTAR

THE CITADEL

The main road through Voynagrad leads upward to the Citadel, which was built on a hill, adding to its impressive height. The colorful building is a stark contrast among the muted tones of the greater city. Two **guards** flank the front door and demand to know what the party's purpose is. Presenting the letter earns them entry.

The main chamber of the citadel is a gleaming, domed room. Frescoes and rich tapestries line the walls, depicting scenes from the war that now defines Voynagrad. Pillars are painted in gold, and a circular table sits in the center of the room. Two additional guards escort the party to the table, upon which a samovar and several tulip-shaped tea cups have been set out for their arrival. The Burgomaster, Koschei, descends from the main staircase. Although his true form is a **cambion**, he assumes the form of a husky human male with gray hair pulled back away from his face. He wears rich brocade and a black fur ushanka. His life as a former soldier is evident: he walks laboredly with a cane, and sports an eyepatch over his left eye and an artificed right hand.

Detecting fiends in Voynagrad is difficult, for everything in the city emits a fiendish aura. This is in part what adds to the suspicion among the citizens: they cannot tell who is and who isn't a demon. Everyone still living there remains affected by the war. This also makes it hard to sleuth out Koschei's real identity.



ROLE-PLAYING KOSCHEI

Koschei is very charismatic, articulate, and warm. He welcomes the party to the city and urges them to enjoy their stay in the city. He is a cambion in disguise; he's lived in this disguise for a decade and has perfected it. He beckons them to sit if they haven't already and pours them each a cup of spiced tea. Over tea, he tells the characters the following:

- If questioned/interrogated about being a fiend, Koschei claims that most of the soldiers who fought in the war suffered severe magical damage and curses from the demons. The lasting damage is fiendish, and the soldiers continue to suffer from it. He hopes to find a cure that will rid him of the demonic blood he still possesses. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine) check on his scars confirms that the injuries are fiendish. Koschei remains patient through any interrogation and never rises to anger.
- Demons first came to Voynagrad to claim it as an outpost during the Blood War, in which demons from the Abyss and devils from the Nine Hells fought to eradicate each other. The demons assumed Voynagrad would be easy to conquer, but their occupation catalyzed a war against humans that raged for sixty years.
- The demons were defeated by Voynagrad forces a decade ago. However, Voynagrad nearly lost the war when their commander, a woman named Vasilisa, betrayed the cause and was revealed to be a demon.
- Voynagrad was so devastated by the demon war that residents prepared to abandon it. He volunteered to serve as Burgomaster and led repairs of the city. Voynagrad has enjoyed peace for a decade.
- Koschei didn't have the heart to execute the Commander for her treason—they had been friends and fought alongside one another. He let her go, but learned recently that she lives in the forest and seeks to rebuild her demon army. Koschei feels guilt over this and wants to rid the city of the Commander's influence.
- He asks the party to investigate the Commander's activity in the Blood Woods. If she is in fact building an army, he asks the party to stop it at all costs.
- He also mentions an item in the Commander's possession, a weapon that is both very valuable and very dangerous. It is a grenade that can eradicate a large group of demons all at once. Koschei wants to keep it at the citadel in the event that the demons return. He promises the party an exorbitant sum of money, 5,000 gp, in exchange for this item.

DEVELOPMENT

Tasked with a mission, the characters can travel to the Blood Woods, a few miles outside of Voynagrad, to investigate.

CHAPTER 2 – THE BLOOD WOODS

The trees in the Blood Woods are spindly with leafless branches, interwoven to form a canopy over the forest floor. The lighting is dim. The soil is so saturated with several decades' worth of blood that the trunks of the trees are stained a faint crimson. Not much grows in the cold, dreary forest, but aberrations, corrupted creatures, and minor demons roam among the trees. Roll a 1d4 on the table below to determine what the party meets in the forest.

Random Encounters in the Blood Woods

D4	Encounters
1	Ghasts x 3
2	Carrion crawler x 2
3	Crawling claws x 5
4	Ettercap with 3 giant spiders

THE NIGHT WITCH OUTPOST

After a mile, the canopy of trees thins and opens into a clearing. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check spots a **swarm of ravens** (accompanied by three **imps** who have shifted into ravens) flying overhead; an additional successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check discerns that something seems strange about a few of the ravens. (Rolling above a DC 20 notes that they are imps.) The ravens and the imps serve the Commander and are not hostile unless provoked; they serve as her spies. About 100 feet into the clearing is the Outpost, a large wooden cottage that sits atop two tall 20-foot-tall metal posts that resemble chicken feet. The party must pass a successful DC 22 (Dexterity) Stealth check to approach undetected, for the outpost is heavily surveilled and many of the creatures and soldiers are capable of seeing through invisibility.

A ring of guards, comprised of three **kenku** and three **aarakocra** each holding crossbows, patrol the perimeter. Beyond the guards, a DC 15 passive Perception notes a group of 12 human soldiers, nine dressed in the same red uniforms and each bearing a cross bow, and three dressed in black. The women in black are the Night Witches, shouting orders at the others in unison; they resemble each other, each possessing thick dark hair and sporting furrowed brows, but are not related. Baba Yaga hovers above them on a large metal mortar. Her uniform is green and decorated with badges and ribbons denoting her experience in the war.

An old woman with a crooked nose and a jagged scar that slices across her face hovers around on a strange device. She regards everyone with a look of respect and gratitude.

Note: Technology meets magic in Voynagrad. Those who fought in the war used experimental artillery, like mortars, firearms, and grenades, alongside powerful arcana. Although these types of weapons are extremely rare elsewhere in the fantastical universe, they have become familiar to Voynagradians.

An invisible trap rings the perimeter of the camp, detected on a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation). Failing the detection sets off a series of small fireworks, alerting the camp to intruders.

DEVELOPMENT

Proceed to *Chapter 3*, following the path that pertains to the nature of the party's arrival.

CHAPTER 3 – THE ONCE WICKED ONES

I was once just a girl, my eyes keen and dark like obsidians, my skin unscarred and creamy like milk. Then the war came, and I curdled. — The Commander

If the party is undetected:

The party sees the Night Witches break away from the other soldiers and huddle with Baba Yaga. They overhear the following:

"I don't think they are ready, Baba," says one of the women in black. She tugs on the end of her long, thick braid. *"They are still so young. Are we leading them to death?"*

"We have done our best, comrades," says the old woman. *"We must all be brave. We must do what's right for Voynagrad. They need to be protected. Koschei must be stopped at all costs. It's time to act."*

The party can choose to return to Voynagrad and deliver this information or approach the Night Witches. If they choose to aid Koschei, they'll be recruited to participate in his ambush, inadvertently taking the side of the demons (see "The Ambush," pg. 187).

If the party is detected:

The three Night Witches ready their crossbows and demand to know the party's intentions. If the party shares their assignment from Koschei, Baba Yaga addresses them with surprising patience and asks that the Night Witches lay down their weapons.



ROLE-PLAYING BABA YAGA

Baba Yaga, as she is called, was once a young woman named Vasilisa. Although she is a formidable war strategist, she is kind to those who have suffered and very protective over her soldiers. She suffers from great guilt for her actions during the war. She tells the characters the following:

> *"It is Koschei who is the demon — I found out during the war and attempted to assassinate him. I killed the wrong person: the soldier whose disguise he had assumed. Koschei leveraged my failure. He calls me old, he calls me wicked, he calls me scarred, he calls me a witch — I am all of these things, but I will always be the Commander, and I am called to serve."*

- She is indeed building an army. She wants Voynagradians to be prepared for the battle to come. When the war first came to the city, many perished because they were unarmed and untrained. Vasilisa never wants anyone to feel helpless ever again, even if that means going face to face with the enemy itself.
- A DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) determines that she speaks truthfully. The Night Witches provide additional confirmation.

THE AMBUSH

While the party is speaking with Baba Yaga and the Night Witches, they are ambushed by Koschei and his minions. Koschei, impatient, followed the characters hoping they would lead him to the grenade, but upon witnessing their conversations with Vasilisa, assumed they would take their side against him. This kicks off a substantial battle.

Koschei (**cambion**) is joined by three **chasmes**. This group is primarily focused on attacking the party and the Night Witches, so these are the only creatures that should be added to combat. For easier facilitation, keep the chasmes on the same initiative order. Depending on the size of the party, NPCs can be added or omitted from initiative. Potential allies include:

- The Commander
- Marya (**veteran**)
- Constantina (**veteran**)
- Amira (**cult fanatic**)

Tactics: Koschei lets the chasmes do most of the work while he attempts to find the grenade, which is in the cottage. This occurs concurrently to the party fighting the chasmes. The grenade is in a box under a bed, which is buried under a stack of rabbit pelts. Getting to it requires climbing up the ladder into the hut, which takes a full action. Characters can choose to go after Koschei—he can be engaged one on one. If he successfully locates the grenade, he attempts to flee.

The following battle happens in the periphery of the party's battle and does not need to be facilitated. It's intended to add a chaotic atmosphere to the battle.

- A group of ten **hell hounds** (the enemies) attack the nine soldiers, three aarakocra, and three kenku (the allies). After each round of combat for the party, roll a d10 twice to determine how many enemies and allies have been felled in that round. If any additional hell hounds remain after the party's battle is over, they flee.

DEVELOPMENT

The battle plays out in the Blood Woods, where the war once began. Depending on the outcome, this is where the war may finally end.

CONCLUSION

If Koschei succeeds in his escape:
He returns to Voynagrad and expedites his plan, letting loose a legion of demons. Voynagrad is once again under demonic rule, and likely for good. If anyone is still left of Baba Yaga's army, they continue to plan a resistance, but the odds have never been more stacked against them.

If Koschei and the demons are defeated:
Marya and the other soldiers address the Voynagradians on Vasilisa's behalf. The Citadel is reclaimed, and the work to rebuild Voynagrad—for real this time—finally begins. The Night Witches reward the characters with 1,000 gp and vow to build a monument in their honor. Baba Yaga chooses to live out her days in the outpost in the forest, tending to her garden, but hopes her soldiers will still visit her on occasion.

REWARDS

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

ENCOUNTER	*XP*
Ghast	450 each
Carrion crawler	450 each
Crawling claws	10 each
Ettercap	450
Giant Spider	200
Cambion	1,800
Chasme	2,300 each
Hell Hound	700 each

STORY REWARDS

The Night Witches gift the party an **imp**, who can serve as a familiar, as a thanks for their assistance. The Commander presents them each with a medal of honor for their service to Voynagrad. It has the properties of an *amulet of health*.

The Grenade

As an action, a character can throw a grenade at a point up to 60 feet away. With a grenade launcher, the character can propel the grenade up to 120 feet away.

Each creature within 20 feet of an exploding fragmentation grenade must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 5d6 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I have been deeply passionate about Russian history and folklore for much of my life, thanks in part to my Russian heritage. Folklore from this country is rich and often dark. I was inspired by Baba Yaga and Koschei the Deathless, and wanted to marry this with WWII history. The Night Witches were an all-female unit of Soviet pilots and their name leant itself perfectly to a fantastical retelling. (There is a beautiful RPG called *Night Witches* that I encourage you to check out if you enjoy *Uncaged*.)

I'd like to thank all of the *Uncaged* crew for their love and contributions to the project, and my husband, Andrew, for his input in this adventure. A special thanks to Kayla Cline for her beautiful illustration of The Commander. "Fire and fortitude."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley Warren is the founder and producer of the *Uncaged* anthology and a bestselling author for Dungeon Masters Guild. She is distinguished by her membership in the Wizards of the Coast Guild Adept program. She is a cast member on the gothic horror show *Tales from the Mists*, which airs on the official *D&D* Twitch channel. Connect with her on Twitter, @ashleynhwarren, and check out her other work at ashleywarrenwrites.com.



The Commander (Baba Yaga)

Medium humanoid, chaotic good

Armor Class	15 (natural armor)
Hit Points	120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed	30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (0)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws	Wis +7
Skills	Arcana +13, History +13
Senses	passive Perception 13
Languages	Common, Abyssal, Infernal
Challenge	11 (7,200 XP)

Shapechanger. Baba Yaga can use an action to polymorph into a swarm of ravens, or back into her true form. While in swarm form, she has a walking speed of 5 feet and a flying speed of 30 feet. Anything she is wearing transforms with her, but nothing she is carrying does.

Blessing of Mother Night. Baba Yaga is shielded against divination magic, as though protected by a nondetection spell.

Spellcasting. Baba Yaga is a 16th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Baba Yaga has the following wizard spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *acid splash, fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
- 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, magic missile, sleep, witch bolt*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *crown of madness, enlarge/reduce, misty step*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, fireball, lightning bolt*
- 4th level (3 slots): *blight, Evard's black tentacles, polymorph*
- 5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, geas, scrying*
- 6th level (1 slot): *programmed illusion, true seeing*
- 7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, mirage arcane*
- 8th level (1 slot): *power word stun*



Actions

Multiattack. Baba Yaga makes three attacks with her sickle.

Sickle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Summon Swarms of Ravens (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Baba Yaga summons 1d4 swarms of ravens. A summoned swarm appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet of Baba Yaga and acts as her ally. It remains until it dies or until Baba Yaga dismisses it as an action.

Based on the Baba Lysaga stat block in Curse of Strahd.



Illustration by Jen Vaughn

DEATH DON'T DO US PART

by Kelly Mangerino

Creature: *Death Knight* | **Level(s):** *11 - 16*

SYNOPSIS

In the city of Helswick, members of House Moreway are being murdered by a threat known as the Iron Maiden. The Moreways are contracting adventurers to locate and destroy her. It's quickly learned the Moreways made a deal with a paladin of Tyr to intervene with an immoral relative. The characters investigate the Moreways' interwoven interactions, discovering the Iron Maiden is actually seeking revenge for her supposed death. The characters face a choice: they can either pursue the Iron Maiden or make her an ally and bring the true culprits to justice.

ADVENTURE HOOK

At the Black Rose, Pearce Moreway is recruiting adventurers on his father's behalf. An undead threat called the Iron Maiden has killed members of the Moreway family and the patriarch is paying a generous sum to see it eliminated. The characters learn there's more to this menace than previously admitted and discover connections to a slain paladin of Tyr. The characters can either deal with the Moreways' hunter or make a deadly friend in order to bring justice to those above the law.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Lord Euros Moreway has taken to seclusion. His heirs, Alva and Dane, have been slaughtered by what the locals are calling the Iron Maiden. Desperate, Euros is hiring adventurers to deal with it.

Meanwhile, a paladin of Tyr is also looking for help. She's seeking answers regarding the death of her sister Deirdre Colehart. Deirdre was sent to confront the Moreways' relative, a worshiper of Loviatar, who she reportedly killed. Not long after, Deirdre was found dead, and her body went missing. That's when the murders started.

A deeper search proves Deirdre earned Euros' ire, and when she was murdered, the City Guard captain helped cover up his involvement. Now, the Iron Maiden lurks within the city, waiting to strike down her targets. The Iron Maiden is bent on revenge, unable to rest until the truth is brought to light.



CHAPTER 1 – ARMORED THREAT

It's early evening in Helswick, cloudy with low fog. The characters stand before the Black Rose, an upscale inn for the wealthy. Euros Moreway—the widower head of House Moreway—has sent his illegitimate son, Pearce (NG), to hire adventurers to slay the Iron Maiden.

Note: In an effort to make this module suitable for any world, assume NPC races are left to the DM's discretion unless otherwise stated. When in doubt, NPCs are considered human.

A nobleman, Pearce Moreway bears distinguished features, coupled with a haunted expression. His mannerisms are reserved, despite being the Moreway bastard.

THE BLACK ROSE

The three-story building's frosted glass emanates a warm glow. Inside is a lavish, crowded seating area. An elegant staircase curves upwards and out of sight.

Pearce witnessed the Iron Maiden slaughter his half-sister, Alva, and then just walk away.

- He's offering 5,000 gp to kill the Iron Maiden.
- A successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince him to give the party 100 pp up front.
- Pearce doesn't know what the Iron Maiden is or why he was spared.
- He describes her as being clad in blackened armor, with fiery blue eyes set within a ghoulish face.
- Pearce suggests the murders began with a distant relative's death—Jemma Emerton (CE). Emerton was accused of performing rituals in service of Loviatar, and she was killed by a paladin of Tyr, Deidre Colehart, about a week ago.
- Loviatar, the goddess of pain and death, is a restricted god, and her worship is strictly prohibited.
- Emerton was killed on her estate outside the city.
- A few days later, Colehart was killed outside a nearby tavern. Pearce's siblings were killed a few days later.
- Vargas Abel, captain of the City Guard, knows the details. Euros consulted with him about Emerton.

FOGGY STREETS

The characters exit the Black Rose and into the evening's fog. The sound of armor rattles close nearby. A figure in plate armor steps into view. As she nears, she introduces herself as Mallie Colehart, a paladin of Tyr.

Mallie has the visage of a capable fighter but bears a warm smile.

Mallie Colehart (CG) needs the characters' help. Give the characters *Handout 1*.

- She and her sister, Deirdre, belonged to Tyr's Eyes—contracted law enforcers.
- Deirdre investigated Emerton, a Loviatar cultist, on Euros' request.
- Deirdre was killed shortly thereafter, but her body wasn't recovered, only a necklace.
- Mallie spoke with Captain Vargas Abel.
- Vargas claims Deirdre was killed near the Bolting Mare by thieves who haven't been caught.
- Mallie suspects the thieves live near the Bolting Mare.
- Due to Mallie's prying, Vargas has suspended Tyr's Eyes' authority in the city, rendering Mallie unable to assist.

Before the characters leave, Mallie hands them Deirdre's necklace, Tyr's Insight. The necklace bears the symbol of Tyr—scales balanced on a war hammer.

Mallie quietly says, *"It... talked to me... told me to ask for aid. Deirdre wants you to have this. I don't think she's dead. I think she needs you but my hands are tied."*

Note: The necklace is holy and emanates unknown magic. At the DM's discretion, the necklace shares Deidre's memories.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters have reason to investigate the Bolting Mare or question Vargas Abel about Deirdre's death.

CHAPTER 2 – LOOSE ENDS

THE BOLTING MARE

This one-room tavern holds mismatched furniture beside a shabby bar. It's lightly packed with grumbling locals.

Trigger: Before entering the Bolting Mare, the bearer of Tyr's Insight overhears a conversation nearby. Mallie's voice and that of an unknown woman ring out from the side of the tavern. Following them leads the party to an empty alley—the location of Deirdre's murder. Clues of the incident are long gone.

Mallie: *"Deirdre, wait!"*
Deirdre: [Uncertainly] *"Mallie? What are you doing here?"*
Mallie: *"Not happy to see me...?"*
Deirdre: *"I am, it's just that I feel... hunted. You shouldn't—"*
[Her voice cuts off with a choking gasp.]
Unknown: [Horrified] *"Oh gods! You killed her... I didn't sign up for this!"*
[Footsteps run off.]

Inside the tavern, a dwarf (N) barkeep with a cleft lip eyes the characters warily as they enter. She'll tell them to buy a drink if they plan on loitering. If asked, she didn't witness the murder and didn't know until the City Guard arrived.

A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check alerts the party to a patron watching them. If they draw near, the man shakes his head to indicate "not here."

If they miss the check, he'll wait outside the tavern and meet the characters when they exit.

Outside, the man introduces himself as Daey (N), then drops his illusion to reveal his true form, that of a firbolg. Daey knows who killed Deirdre—he's being hunted by them.

Daey's a young, lanky firbolg. Shy and gullible, he's prone to peer pressure.

A hooded female (NE **assassin**) approaches and coolly asks the characters to leave—she has business with Daey. If the party refuses, she attacks. With a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party notices the other two assassins skulking in the fog.

Note:

- DMs can add or remove assassins to change the encounter's difficulty.
- The assassins try to flee if any of their comrades are slain.
- One assassin (of the DM's choosing) carries a promissory note (*Handout 2*).
- Each assassin carries 100 gp and a poison vial.
- With a successful DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check, the party can force any of the assassins to admit Vargas hired them to eliminate Deirdre. They won't get paid until the last witness, Daey, is killed.
- Daey states the assassins paid him to take the shape of a woman matching Mallie's description. He didn't know they were going to kill Deirdre, and after witnessing the act, he fled in a panic.

If any of the assassins get away, the fog deepens. The characters hear the scrape of armor, followed by a scream. If they pursue, they find the bodies of the escaped assassins.

CITY GUARD STATION

The City Guard Station is a cross between a government building and barracks. It's loosely protected by weary members of the City Guard.

Trigger: When the party enters the station, the bearer of Tyr's Insight hears a bodiless conversation.

Deirdre: *"Captain Abel, I know you're helping Lord Moreway. Why won't you let me search his manor? Why was Emerton any different?"*
Vargas: *"You're out of line, Colehart. Lord Moreway is a respected member of the nobility, not under suspicion."*
Deirdre: *"You mean Lord Moreway is an affluent patron of the City Station."*
Vargas: *"You're pushing your luck, Colehart."*
Deirdre: *"Or Moreway is pushing his. I urge you to look into his personal life, he knew quite a lot about Emerton. Their ties run deeper than you think."*
Vargas: *"Get out, Colehart."*

VARGAS' OFFICE

If the characters ask to speak with Captain Vargas Abel (CN) regarding Deirdre, he'll reluctantly agree to a brief meeting.

> Vargas Abel is a lithe figure in formal military garb. His dark eyes are mistrustful, and he speaks with a strong sense of self-importance.
>
> As they enter, he's hurriedly burying letters in his oversized desk.

If asked about Deirdre, Vargas admits to the following:

- He claims to have never met her. His guardsmen found her body in an alley. The body later disappeared.
- A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals he's lying.
- If confronted, he'll ignore further discussion about Deirdre.
- He admires Lord Moreway—a patron of the City Station.

If the assassins are brought in or the promissory note is shown:

- Vargas denies hiring assassins, claiming the promissory note was stolen about a week ago.
- The assassin(s), if alive, won't admit to working with Vargas.
- If pressured, the assassin(s) confesses to killing Deirdre.
- Vargas has the assassin(s) arrested.

If no assassins are brought in, Vargas rebuffs the association, calling out the party's lack of proof. If Daey is brought in to confess, Vargas states an investigation is in order.

Eventually, a guard bursts into the room—there's been a sighting of the Iron Maiden. Vargas hurries out with the guard, leaving the characters alone.

- If the characters follow, it proves a false sighting by a drunk guard.
- If the characters linger, they have a few minutes to snoop before they're retrieved to help search.
- If the characters get caught snooping, they're escorted out.

The drawers of Vargas' desk are not locked. Within are correspondences with Euros. One of the documents is a handwritten letter from Euros to Vargas (*Handout 3*).

Correspondences:

- Euros requests a warrant to search Emerton's estate. A donation is offered.
- Euros is grateful Emerton was brought to justice. Should Tyr's Eyes asks for anything more, deny them. A hefty donation is made.
- Panicked, Euros states he saw a woman of Deirdre's likeness around his manor. Shouldn't she be dead?
- Furious, Euros confirms a death knight in Deirdre's visage killed his son.
- Dejectedly, Euros states his daughter was killed and plans to hire adventurers.

THE MOREWAY MANOR

> The Moreway Manor is an impressive two-story building with a windowless gable. A circular driveway sits empty while a heavy fog clings around the building.

A servant is leaving, suitcase in hand. She sees the characters and waits, door ajar. She explains all the servants left, unwilling to die for Euros despite his offers of gold.

> The interior is daunting, lit only by low-burning sconces. The drab furniture is sparsely situated in oversized rooms. A dual staircase rises toward the vaulted ceiling from the center of an empty foyer.

Trigger: There's another conversation for the bearer of Tyr's Insight, this one in hushed voices.

> Deirdre: *"You're lying to me, Lord Euros. What happened with Emerton was complicated, to say the least."*
> Euros: [Coolly] *"You eliminated a cultist and threat to the city, what else is there?"*
> Deirdre: *"You contracted us specifically—backed by Abel's investigation warrant and your proof."*
> Euros: *"You're thinking too much into this, Colehart. Accept my donation to your church and move on."*
> Deirdre: *"Is that all you have to say?"*
> Euros: *"No. If you please, get out."*

The sound of fire crackles from the parlor. Within, Euros (NE) wears a black tailored suit with gold stitching and watches the fireplace quietly, goblet in hand.

> Euros is tall and well-built. A once dominating personality has withered into bitter resentment after losing his children and his control of the situation.
>
> Upon hearing the party enter, he turns and snarls, *"You took your time."*

The party is free to wander the manor. Euros' bedroom and study are off-limits. If asked about Deidre:

- Euros reluctantly states Deidre dealt with a complicated family matter, and she thought there was more to it. There wasn't.
- He admits they parted on bitter terms. As a result, he suggested that Vargas reign in her order's privileges.
- He has no idea why the Iron Maiden targeted them. He doesn't believe it's Deirdre.
- A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests he's lying, but he doesn't respond to the accusation.
- If shown *Handout 3*, he smirks. *"It's not like I killed her."*

Note: Allow the party enough time to explore before triggering the next section. If they choose not to search, continue.

Other Bedrooms

- **Alva and Dane's bedrooms:** A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers the symbol of Loviatar, a barbed nine-tailed scourge, hidden away in their dressers. The same check collectively finds a total of 350 gp.
- **Pearce's bedroom:** Stacks of books litter all available surfaces in this comparably small and dingy room. No gold lies hidden anywhere, as if the books are the only things of value. On the desk rests a letter to Euros (*Handout 4*), and tucked within the envelope is a master key for the house.
- **Euros' bedroom and study:** The doors to these two rooms are locked, but those with thieves' tools must make a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to unlock them. Alternatively, the master key will open them. Inside the bedroom, there's an unlocked chest containing 500 gp. There's also an unlocked door to Euros' study.

Euros' Study

> A floor to ceiling fireplace, empty of wood, dominates this room. In front of an embedded bookshelf stands a wide desk, devoid of clutter.

As for the bookshelf, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check spots a peculiar tome, which bears the symbol of Loviatar on the spine.

- If the tome is pulled, the switch reveals ascending stairs within the fireplace.

Alternatively, a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check notices hinges along the inside seam of the hearth—a secret door that can be pushed aside. When the party opens the door, inside hangs a broken silver thread. A tiny, cracked bell lies discarded to one side.

- A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check divulges a broken *alarm* spell.

Altar of Loviatar

> The attic is a site of worship. A banner bearing the symbol of Loviatar, a barbed nine-tailed scourge, hangs on the wall. Dried blood is spattered on the ground, and dangling from hooks are instruments of self-flagellation. A cabinet stands just beside the stairs.

Within the cabinet can be found sensitive documents, a map of ritual sites, cultist robes, a medallion of Loviatar, a chest containing 50 pp, and a tightly bound barbed silver whip.

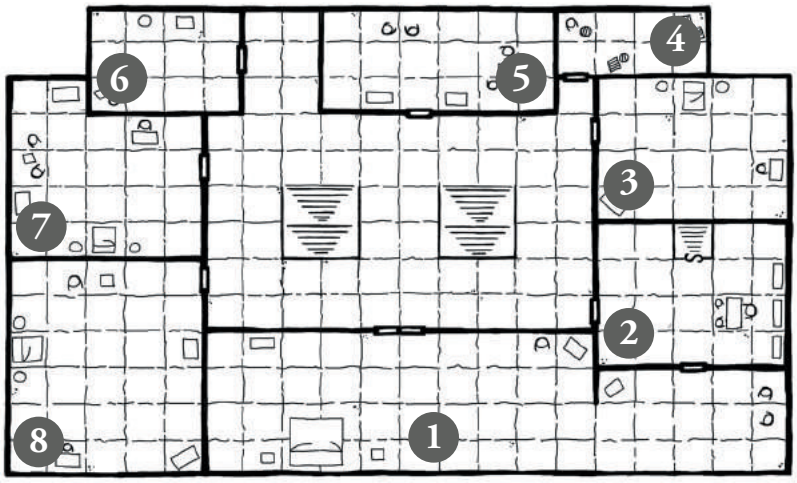
The documents reveal Euros implicating the head of Loviatar's order, Pain Jemma Emerton, as false in her faith. Euros secures permission to pressure Emerton into demonstrating her convictions. He settles on using a paladin of another religion. When Jemma's killed, Euros is promoted as the new head—Pain Moreway.

The map highlights Thresh and Bone, an abandoned tavern in the city's slums, and Moreway Manor with a symbol of Loviatar. It also reveals a hidden sewer passage there from the cellar of the manor.

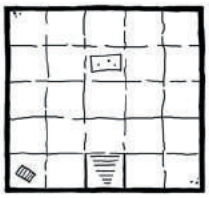
When the characters return downstairs to the parlor, Euros is gone.

Moreway Manor

1. Master Bedroom
2. Study
3. Pearce's Room
4. Storage
5. Solar Room
6. Washroom
7. Alva's Room
8. Dane's Room

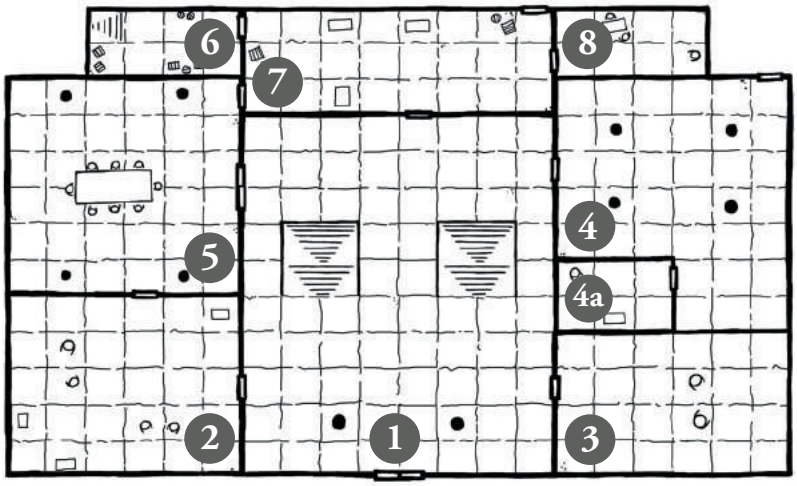


Second Floor

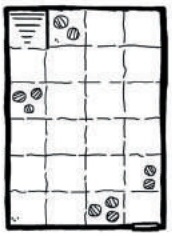


Attic

1. Grand Foyer
2. Music Room
3. Parlour
4. Gallery
4a. Powder Room
5. Dining Hall
6. Pantry
7. Kitchen
8. Servant's Lounge



First Floor



Cellar

1 square = 5 feet

Map by Kelly Mangerino

THE SOUND OF NIGHTMARES

Hoofbeats and an impatient whinny echo down the driveway loud enough for all to hear. A **nightmare** with bluish-white flames calmly approaches the manor with a figure slumped across its back. It stops, rears, and the figure falls off. The nightmare gallops away.

The body is that of Vargas Abel. A piece of yellowed parchment is pinned to his chest by the symbol of Tyr (*Handout 5*).

DEVELOPMENT

There's only one place left for the characters to go: Thresh and Bone. Two divided parties are heading there, and confrontation is imminent.

CHAPTER 3 – IRON MAIDEN

THRESH AND BONE

Thresh and Bone is a single-story building with a shingled roof in much need of repairs. The splintered door of the entrance is closed, and no lights come from the shuttered windows.

Hoofbeats echo from all around the party, and the fog coagulates into a thick haze. The nightmare appears again, ridden by an armor-clad figure.

Deirdre wears blackened plate armor, the marred symbol of her god across her chest. Through the narrow opening of her helm peers a ghoulish woman's face with empty sockets save for fiery blue orbs.

Her raspy voice calls out, *"Who will you side with?"*

- If questioned why, Deirdre replies, "*Who'd believe a monster over a noble? They'll believe you, for I can only enact revenge.*"
- If the characters fight the Iron Maiden, Deirdre attacks from atop the nightmare (optional).
- Deidre (CN **death knight**) bears a *+1 shield*, increasing her AC by 1. In addition, add Turn Immunity (Deirdre is immune to features that turn undead) to her stat block.
- Unlike most nightmares, Deirdre's mount (CN) is imbued with the cold grip of undeserved death; thus, replace each instance of 'fire' in the creature's stat block with 'cold.'
- If Deidre is defeated, her body bursts into bluish flames, leaving nothing but a scorch mark behind.
- If the characters accept her help, the nightmare vanishes into mist. Deirdre kicks down the door of Thresh and Bone and heads straight for the back, knocking aside furniture with nary a second glance. Within a dingy storage room, rickety, wooden steps lead to the cellar below. Deidre descends the steps without looking back.

THE CULT OF LOVIATAR

Before they can reach the bottom of the steps, the party hears the cracking of whips. When they spill out into the cellar, they find Deirdre restrained by two figures bearing barbed chains. Deirdre must succeed on a DC 15 Strength check to free herself.

The long, rectangular room is lined on either side with shadowed archways lit by low-burning torches. Euros stands at the back, his shirtless form bearing fragmented armor beneath an open robe. Crisscrossing scars mar the exposed flesh of his upper body.

Calmly, Euros tells the characters, *"End her life, and I'll let you walk. What's more, I'll double your reward."*

If the party accepts, Deidre turns on them, but her primary target is Euros.

If they attack Euros, he retaliates. He attempts to escape when most of his comrades have fallen.

If Euros is captured, Deirdre unceremoniously executes him. Characters can persuade her otherwise with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Combat: Two **shadow dancers** (*Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) hold Deidre restrained with spiked chains, while two cult fanatics brandish wicked ritual daggers. Adjust the number of enemies or their respective hit point values to appropriately suit the party.

DEVELOPMENT

Much depends on who the characters sided with, but each choice bears a rippling effect throughout the city.

CONCLUSION

- **Deirdre Defeated:** Mallie approaches the characters the next day. If the characters betray Euros, Mallie later kills him. If Mallie learns nothing, she'll leave the city.
- **Euros Defeated:** Deidre thanks the characters and gives them her sword and shield, Tyr's Hand and Faith. Before vanishing into the fog, she asks them to find Mallie and tell all.

Depending on who the characters helped, the Iron Maiden is either seen as a champion or a nightmare.

REWARDS

TREASURE

Item Name	GP Value
Euros' reward (Doubled)	5,000 (10,000) gp
Assassins (3)	100 gp each
Poison Vial (3x\)	100 gp each
Tyr's Insight	N/A
Alva and Dane's bedrooms	350 gp
Euros' bedroom	500 gp
Attic chest	50 pp
Silver whip	250 gp
Tyr's Hand	4,500 gp
Tyr's Faith	1,500 gp

MAGIC ITEMS

Tyr's Hand

Weapon (longsword), very rare (requires attunement)
You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

When you attack a creature with this magic weapon bearing the holy symbol of Tyr and roll a 20 on the attack roll, that target takes an extra 1d8 radiant damage.

Tyr's Faith

(+1 Shield) (DMG "Treasures")
A scuffed, magical shield bearing the faded symbol of Tyr.

STORY REWARDS

Champions of Tyr: If the characters helped Deirdre Colehart, Mallie informs the rest of her order. The party now has advantage on Charisma checks for those of Tyr's faith. They have also earned the ire of Loviatar followers.

Loviatar Masochists: If the characters killed Deirdre Colehart and helped Euros Moreway, they gain favor with followers of Loviatar. They now have advantage on Charisma checks for those of that faith. They also earned the distrust of Tyr's faithful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To those who helped shape this into existence, thank you! I couldn't have done it without your support.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Mangerino is an author (K.M. Riley), game designer, and fan of all things imaginative. A geek at heart, video games and *D&D* are part of who she is. Follow her on Twitter (@thespirit_riley) for more.



Pain Euros Moreway

Medium humanoid (any race), neutral evil

Armor Class 11
Hit points 150 (20d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)

Skills Deception +10, Religion +8
Senses passive Perception 12
Damange Resitances Necrotic
Languages Abyssal, Common
Challenge 15 (13,000 xp)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Euros fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Dark Devotion. Euros has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Spellcasting. Euros is a 13th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): chill touch, fire bolt, mage hand, poison spray, ray of frost, shocking grasp
1st level (4 slots): magic missile, expeditious retreat, thunderwave
2nd level (3 slots): mirror image, scorching ray
3rd level (3 slots): fear, haste
4th level (3 slots): dimension door, ice storm
5th level (2 slots): cloudkill, cone of cold
6th level (1 slot): eyebite
7th level (1 slot): finger of death

Actions

Multiattack. Moreway makes two spiked chain attacks and casts one spell that takes 1 action to cast.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 16) if it is a Medium or smaller creature, and Euros can't grapple another target. Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns.

Legendary Actions

Euros can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Euros regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Cantrip. Euros casts a cantrip.

Move. Euros moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Spiked Chain (Costs 2 Actions): Euros makes a spiked chain attack.



MALUS DOMESTICA

by Ally Sulentic

Creature: *Dryad* | **Level:** *13*

CW: *Mention of sexual assault*

SYNOPSIS

The town of Bounty is stalked by a serial killer. Desperate to find the killer before anyone else falls victim, the mayor asks a passing group of travelers to help track the killer down. Complicating this is the fact that the apple tree in the center of town suffers from a mysterious rotting disease that defies all treatment, and worsens with each new victim swinging from its branches.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters stumble upon the town of Bounty, nestled in the midst of a dark forest they've spent the long night trekking through. As the sun rises over the apple tree in the center of town, the sight of a small figure swinging upside down from a branch interrupts the lovely pastoral scene.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Malus, the dryad of Bounty's famous apple tree, was initially glad to see a town grow beneath her tree after centuries of solitude. That loneliness led to her revealing herself to a select few so that she might inspire beauty in them. She was sorely disappointed when the only beauty she inspired was the name of the local tavern, a poem describing the lustful desires of anyone who looked upon her, and countless scandalous portraits. The final straw was the assault on her body by the son of Bounty's mayor, from which she barely escaped. The love she once felt for the mortals at her feet became bitter; and instead of living in harmony with nature, she began to consume it, draining the life from the tree she once protected.

Desperate and hungry for the first time in her life, Malus lashed out at the owner of the Naughty Nymph, and when his blood spilt across the roots of her tree, her hunger abated. But soon, the hunger returned stronger than ever, and with it, her anger. Three villagers have fallen to Malus's hunger, and a fourth and final victim remains alive only because he remains hidden from her sight. That, however is soon to change.



CHAPTER 1

The dark trees that obscured your trek through the forest suddenly part, revealing a small town bordered by a grove of trees. Marring this pastoral perfection is a pale apple tree standing at the center of the town square, its leaves a sickly yellow-brown. A cluster of townsfolk is gathered at the base of the tree, looking up at a small, bloodless figure swinging upside down from one of the tree's boughs, his throat torn open and blood spilt across the tree's roots.

Bounty's warden, Morgana Beaulieu, approaches the characters as soon as they enter the town. She tersely warns them that she has no need for mercenaries in her town, but a nervous, portly man interrupts her. Abelin Maurice, the mayor of Bounty, asks the party for their help in tracking down a serial killer that has stalked the town for over a month. He offers them 750 gp each in payment for finding whoever is terrorizing the town.

Abelin offers them three leads to get their investigation started: Leona Duval, the widow of the killer's first victim, located at the Naughty Nymph Tavern; Lord Edmond Vigoreaux, half-brother to the killer's second victim, located at Caskhall Manor; and Patricia Schaeffer, the town's innkeeper who rented a room to the third, most recent victim, located at the Apple Slice Inn.

Investigation Structure

Each day is split up into three time periods: morning, afternoon, and evening. The characters are able to speak with one person per time period before they must rest for the night. These time periods are abstracted to account for travel, debate, and the like. It is okay to allow the characters a short rest between interviews, but always keep them aware of the urgency of the investigation, particularly on the second day.

INVESTIGATING THE TOWN

The characters are free to decide where they would like to investigate. The scenes below can be tackled in any order, on either day of the investigation.

THE THREE VICTIMS

All three victims were found hanging from the apple tree at dawn, their throats torn out and their blood drained. All townsfolk know the following about the three victims:

- Arthur Duval owned the local tavern, the Naughty Nymph. He was well-liked and was known for his boisterous charm, though recently he and Lord Vigoreaux almost came to blows over the orchard and the upcoming apple harvest. His tavern is famous for their homemade cider and a drinking game called "Bedding the Nymph." Arthur was a human and died four weeks ago.
- Bastien Vigoreaux was the younger half-brother of Lord Vigoreaux, who oversees the land containing Bounty and its orchards. Bastien was a bastard born to a half-elven maid of the Vigoreaux household. A gifted artist, Bastien designed the Naughty Nymph's sign. Bastien was a half-elf and died one week ago.
- Remi Millet was a visitor to Bounty, inquiring after a poem that his ancestor wrote about the mythical spirit of the apple tree. He was only in town for six weeks prior to his death and rented a room at the Apple Slice Inn. Remi was a halfling and died the previous night.

THE NAUGHTY NYMPH TAVERN

The Naughty Nymph is infamous for its sign: A beautiful naked woman with flushed cheeks and a coquettish smile, holds two large apples in front of her ample chest. The woman's hair is striking— a cascade of leaves fading from green to yellow, to orange, and eventually to red at the very tips. Inside the tavern, a particularly prominent banner challenges drinkers to "Bed the Nymph" by sampling every variety of cider available at the bar. Names of previous challengers and winners are tacked underneath the banner.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the figure as a dryad.

There are only a few patrons inside of the tavern, drinking in relative quiet. Leona Duval cleans the bar half-heartedly and only acknowledges visitors to the tavern when they approach her.

Leona softly tells her husband's story of stumbling upon a nymph in the forest, his tavern's namesake. A rotten apple was nailed to the tavern's front door the night before he died. She insists that her husband was loved by all the townsfolk; anything to the contrary brings uncontrollable tears to her eyes.

As the characters are leaving the tavern, a servant wearing the livery of the Vigoreaux family arrives, carrying a bouquet. Leona comments that Lord Vigoreaux is kind to think of her in this time of need; she is surprised that Edmond remembers her favorite flower as well.



THE APPLE SLICE INN

The Apple Slice Inn is a modest two-story boarding house near the center of town. The smell of apple pie permeates the front hall, and a stern-looking, gray-haired woman emerges from the kitchen as you enter. She wipes her hands on her apron and regards you critically.

The innkeeper, Mrs. Schaeffer, is a taciturn woman famous for her pies. She doesn't open up about her late boarder without a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, in which case she then allows questions and supervised entry to the victim's room upstairs.

A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check notes some discoloration on the front door of the inn; Mrs. Schaeffer mentions that someone stuck a rotten apple to the door the previous night.

Remi Millet's room is at the end of the hallway. It contains two items of note: Remi's collected research on Bounty's legendary guardian spirit, and the reassembled text of the poem To Pluck Her Flower.

There are interviews with Arthur Duval and Bastien Vigoreaux about meeting the spirit near the Heart Tree; both claim they resisted the 'nymph's' advances, but Remi correctly notes it was probably the other way around. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a third villager that recently met the spirit—the mayor's son, Gaspard Maurice. Remi never spoke to him.

To Pluck Her Flower
by Haverstone Millet

While not all flowers are for picking,
Nor do all of them let you
I think I would like to pluck this one
To remember the first thaw

And if the flower lets me
In my house it will find warmth
And water too, should it thirst
We can share until it tires

Then, should it sting
Or should it wilt
We would have shared
In something.

CASKHALL MANOR

Caskhall Manor is an hour's ride from the town, beyond the apple orchards that border Bounty. A youthful man receives you in his study with a genial smile.

Lord Edmond Vigoreaux elaborates on his half-brother—their late father set Bastien up with a trust to fuel his lifestyle. Unfortunately, Bastien had a habit of indulging in alcohol (and worse) whenever inspiration struck him, and was a surly drunk. Edmond planned to cut Bastien off, but Bastien died first.

Edmond shows them Bastien's sketchbook filled with drawings of a nude woman, her striking multicolored hair recognizable to patrons of the Naughty Nymph. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the woman as a dryad. Bastien would often speak of finding her again, and that he "wouldn't let her get away next time." Edmond mentions that a rotten apple was nailed to the door the night before Bastien's death.

Mentioning Arthur Duval causes Edmond to frown. Arthur stole several apple bushels the previous harvest, a theft that Edmond discovered two months ago. Their relationship soured after that, though Edmond speaks highly of Arthur's wife, Leona. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Edmond loved Leona once, and still does.

Questions about the Heart Tree are directed toward his orchard master, Genevieve.

BOUNTY TOWN HALL

Two wings branch off from the building's quiet entrance hall, marked with signs reading "Mayor's Office" and "Library and Records" respectively.

The mayor is unavailable on the first day while he looks for any of Remi Millet's next-of-kin. The library, however, is open to visitors and is staffed by the mayor's bookish wife, Yvette Maurice.

Yvette helped Remi Millet research his family ties to Bounty and she is shocked and saddened by his death. Two days prior, he spoke of attempting to contact the spirit of the Heart Tree. Yvette never saw him alive again.

As the characters are leaving the library, they bump into a dour-faced young man. He brushes past them without acknowledgement; Yvette follows and apologizes for her son, Gaspard.

THE ORCHARD

The orchard is home to hundreds of apple trees arranged in neat rows; none are as large or as full as the village's heart tree, but they seem to be the same breed. Farmers move up and down the rows, picking fruit and pruning overgrowth.

Alone in a row is a middle-aged half-elf, cutting branches from a healthy tree. Beside her is a basket full of the sickly white bark of the Heart Tree. She doesn't look up until the characters attempt to speak to her.

Genevieve's most urgent goal is to discover the source of the Heart Tree's infection. Every tree in the orchard was cultivated from the Heart Tree; she has been attempting to graft healthy branches back onto it to fight the infection. She is becoming desperate.

A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that she is afraid to speak about the dryad and the Heart Tree; a successful DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidate) check opens her tongue: The Heart Tree is home to a dryad. Six weeks ago, Genevieve saw a change—her skin as pale as the tree's bark, her leaves growing dull and brown, her usually nut-brown eyes a deep red. The dryad's condition and the tree's illness are surely related.



BOUNTY TOWN SQUARE

The town square is dominated by an enormous apple tree, called the Heart Tree by Bounty's residents. The tree looks like it is wilting where it stands, with gray-white bark streaked with reddish sap and sickly orange-brown leaves.

Warden Morgana Beaulieu is cutting the bloodless corpse of Remi Millet down from the tree. She is curt with the characters, whom she sees as meddling outsiders. With a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she allows the party to examine the tree and the victim's remains.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that the tree's disease is similar to vampirism, though plants are normally immune.

The body of Remi Millet is completely drained of blood. Tucked in his pocket is the key to his room.

DEVELOPMENT

Once three interviews have been conducted, night falls and the characters must cease their investigation for the day. As they are walking through the town, they hear a ruckus coming from the direction of the mayor's house; the mayor and his wife are arguing on their porch, where a rotten apple has been nailed to their door with a long, sharp thorn. Behind them, their son Gaspard, has a strange combination of triumph and despair in his eyes. The characters have little time to talk to the mayor's family, as the warden soon arrives and orders them away.

CHAPTER 2

The second day is gloomy and overcast. The party has time for three more interviews before night falls.

INVESTIGATING THE TOWN, CONTINUED

The locations listed above remain available to the characters, with the addition of the mayor's office, described below.

BOUNTY TOWN HALL

The town's mayor, Abelin Maurice, sits behind his desk, failing to hide his worry. The rotten apple nailed to his door rattled him and he is eager for good news.

If pressed, he says that Gaspard changed after a mysterious incident six weeks prior and is sequestered in his room at the family house, refusing all company.

What's Eating Gaspard Maurice?

The mysterious incident that changed Gaspard was an encounter with the dryad Malus. He attempted to seduce Malus, and when he was rebuffed, Gaspard became violent and forced himself on her. This assault was the final straw in a long history of abuse and suffering at the hands of Bounty's citizens, and prompted Malus's transformation into the vampiric creature she is now.

DEVELOPMENT

Night falls after three interviews are conducted. If the characters deduced that someone in the mayor's household is in danger, they can stake out the house to catch the killer. Otherwise, they awake in the early morning hours to an alarm—Malus took Gaspard, but not before Yvette caught sight of her moving toward the Heart Tree.

CHAPTER 3

THE HEART TREE

The party arrives at the Heart Tree just as Malus is preparing to kill Gaspard. Her cracked, ghost-white skin reveals oozing red sap, identical to the Heart Tree. Her long hair is dull and browning; her eyes, blood red and manic. She threatens Gaspard with bloodstained claws and tells them to leave her to her revenge.

The stalemate holds so long as the characters don't approach or act hostile; if treated with kindness or respect, Malus reveals her story. A successful DC 25 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Malus's trauma prompted her transformation. The characters now have a choice:

OPTION ONE: REVENGE

An immediate change overcomes Malus the moment Gaspard's blood spills across the roots of her tree. Lights crawl across her skin and the tree's bark, leaving behind ugly scars on both. The tree's leaves and Malus's hair both drain to a stark white. Without a word, she touches the tree and disappears, never to be seen again.

Three White Heart Tree Apples fall from the tree to land at the characters' feet.

OPTION TWO: DEATH

If the party attacks Malus, she fights back with terrifying power. Before the characters can strike the final blow, Genevieve dashes into the square. She knows she can't stand against the group if they choose to continue, but is adamant that they spare the dryad's life: Malus's death diminishes not only the Heart Tree, but the land around them for miles.

Killing Malus causes the tree to shudder and lose all its leaves at once.

OPTION THREE: FORGIVENESS

With a successful DC 30 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Malus stares at Gaspard with tired eyes.

> *"Will forgiving this monster truly bring me happiness? How can I be sure he truly repents what he's done to me?"* Malus looks down at herself and the gashes in her flesh. *"Death would be easier, but perhaps living with the knowledge of what he did is worse. So I forgive you, mortal. May this haunt you for the rest of your days, as it will mine."*

The change that comes over Malus is drastic. Her skin flushes and the red sap evaporates, leaving her skin scarred, but healthy. Her hair begins to regain its natural color. She is whole, though not without reminders of her ordeal. She presses her hand against her tree, disappearing inside it.

Three Red Heart Tree Apples fall from the tree to land at the characters' feet.

DEVELOPMENT

Once Malus is gone, dawn arrives, bringing townsfolk to the square through some unspoken summons.

CONCLUSION

IF GASPARD IS DEAD

Abelin and Yvette are in shock at the sight of their son's body. Morgana quietly hands the party their payment and shakes their hands. Other townsfolk wish them well, but it's plain to see that they think Gaspard's death was avoidable.

IF MALUS IS DEAD

Genevieve kneels beside the body of the dryad, tears in her eyes, as the rest of the village watches in mute dismay. Abelin awards the party with coins and his thanks, though the words seem hollow in the wake of the dryad's demise.

IF MALUS WAS HEALED

The townsfolk are in awe of the revived tree and the people who saved it. Gaspard falls to his knees, repenting. Abelin thanks the characters for their help, handing them their reward and promising them that they are always welcome in Bounty.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP earned through play, then divide by the number of player characters to determine individual XP rewards.

Obstacle	XP
Interviewing a townsperson	100 per interview conducted
Defeating or otherwise healing Malus	13,000

TREASURE REWARDS

Item	Value
Mayor's payment	750 gp each

Red Heart Tree Apple

Wondrous item, very rare

You can use your action to eat this apple, granting the effects of a *potion of supreme healing* (*DMG*, "Chapter 7").

White Heart Tree Apple

Wondrous item, very rare

You can use your action to eat this apple, granting the effects of a *potion of superior healing* (*DMG*, "Chapter 7").

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I think almost everyone can admit to feeling powerless at one time or another, until the seed of something bloodthirsty and angry can no longer be contained. I wanted to capture some of that feeling while also giving players a chance to help a victim start to heal herself. Malus domestica is the scientific name for the common apple, and I love that the phrase also brings to mind the idea that something is wrong at home.

Special thanks to my husband, Tom, who helped talk me through many anxiety-filled nights when I thought I wasn't good enough for this anthology (and let me use his wonderful poem!), and to the rest of my friends and family for believing in me and being my greatest inspiration. You all make me feel like a rock star and I can't thank you enough!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ally Sulentic is a nerd from Massachusetts with a love of obscure RPGs and bad fantasy novels. She designs games for Mastermind Adventures as their Master of Lore, and lives in a tiny apartment with her husband Tom and two annoying cats.



Malus, Dryad of the Heart Tree

Medium fey (shapechanger), neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 144 (17d6 + 68)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +8, Cha +9
Skills Perception +8, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances Necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Sylvan, Elvish
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Spellcasting. Malus is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *poison spray, thorn whip, druidcraft*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, entangle, faerie fire*
2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin, flaming sphere, enhance ability*
3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning, dispel magic, sleet storm*
4th level (3 slots): *blight, polymorph*
5th level (1 slot): *tree stride*

Shapechanger. If Malus isn't in sunlight or running water, she can use her action to polymorph into a Tiny bird or a Medium cloud of mist, or back into her true form. While in bird form, Malus can't speak, her walking speed is 5 feet, and she has a flying speed of 30 feet. Her statistics, other than her size and speed, are unchanged. Anything she is wearing transforms with her, but nothing she is carrying does. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

While in mist form, Malus can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. She is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing, and she can't pass through water. She has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and is immune to all nonmagical damage, except the damage she takes from sunlight.

Legendary Resistances (3/Day). If Malus fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. Malus regains 20 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If she takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of her next turn. Malus dies only if she starts her turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

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

Vampiric Weaknesses. Malus has the following flaws:

- *Forbiddance.* Malus can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.
- *Harmed by Running Water.* Malus takes 20 acid damage if she ends her turn in running water.
- *Sunlight Hypersensitivity.* Malus takes 20 radiant damage when she starts her turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, she has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack (Dryad Form Only). Malus makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Claw Strike (Dryad Form Only). Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. Instead of dealing damage, Malus can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Throat Slice (Dryad Form Only). Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Malus, incapacitated, or restrained. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Malus regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Charm. Malus targets one humanoid she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see her, it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by Malus. The charmed target regards Malus as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Malus's control, it takes her requests or actions in the most favorable way it can, and it is a willing target for Malus's throat slice attack.

Each time Malus does anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving through, ending the effects on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Malus is destroyed or takes a bonus action to end the effect.

Children of the Forest (1/Day). Malus magically calls 3d6 wolves to her side. The wolves arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of Malus and obeying her spoken commands. The wolves remain for 1 hour, until Malus dies, or until Malus dismisses them as a bonus action.

Legendary Actions

Malus can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Malus regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Malus moves up to her speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Claw Strike. Malus makes one claw strike.

Throat Slice (Costs 2 Actions). Malus makes one throat slice attack.





"The Muses in the Temple of Apollo"
by Richard Samuel

QUEST FOR THE MUSE'S WREATH

by Margaret Mae

Creature: *The Greek Muse Ourania* | **Level:** *13*

SYNOPSIS

The Trial of The Wreath arrives every year, and while many gather to observe, few risk their lives to compete. Winners are awarded the veneration of the city and the honor of a Muse's interest, but the real draw is the power of the Wreath: the wearer has the power to cast a single use of the *wish* spell. Within the temple, the scope of the rooms seems impossible—but the dangers adventurers will face are very, very real.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Wreath festival has already begun when the party arrives in Sévomai, a city built in tribute to the glory and honor of the Nine Muses. Late as they are, only one muse remains. Ourania, Muse of Astronomy, has not beheld a worthy challenger in many years. Perhaps the risk is all talk. How dangerous could stars be?

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Muses are ungenerous with the arrogant, but reward impressive daring and skill. They don't like "cheating" unless it truly venerates them. They are tempestuous and care only for the worthy.



Illustration by Margaret Salter

CHAPTER 1 – THE FESTIVAL AND SELECTION

Upon entering the city in the late afternoon, the party finds the festival already well underway. Vendors are proffering goods, incense is burning, and the scents of flower garlands, delicious foods, and burnt offerings fill the air. Townsfolk sing and dance in praise of the Muses. As the party arrives, read the text below.

> A blast of joyful music from the horns of four centaur temple guards fills the air as six figures hobble gallantly out of the temple into the light of the late afternoon sun. A brawny dwarf lets out an ecstatic roar and lifts a gilded laurel wreath into the air—peals of applause and cheering drown out the dwarf's roar. The six figures are hoisted away in litters festooned with flowers.

NPCs may offer flowers or snacks or pinwheels to the party; everyone they see is exuberant, and that exuberance doubles when they realize the party is considering the challenge.

In the background of these festivities, what's left of a half-orc is dragged down the side steps of the temple. Missing half an arm and most of both legs, the half-orc pleads to be allowed to finish, but is dragged away weeping.



ENTERING THE TEMPLE

As adventurers approach the temple steps, the centaur guards notice them.

> On seeing you approach, a sable-coated centaur guard nods. *"You stand here in the worship of the glorious sisters. All but one has taken subjects already. None have seen her for many years."* He stays stoically silent until they agree to take on the challenge.
>
> "I give you Coins for Kharon—your first offering this day to the Muse." He passes each of you two cold silver coins. *"Leave them on her altar, and abandon the life you knew before her veneration. May this be your only brush with death's ferryman this day."*

There are eight altars with no statues, each with a few coins on them. The ninth has a sculpture of a woman, eyes turned upward, a celestial orb in one hand and a rod in the other. Embroidered constellations adorn her robe. The name "Ourania" is inscribed at her feet.

After the adventurers place their coins on the muse's altar, the sculpture slides away into the stonework to form an archway with a darkened hall beyond. Torches at the mouth of the tunnel light up, then the next, and the next, guiding them deeper in.

If characters hesitate to enter, there is a deep rumbling within. Once inside the hall, the archway closes, leaving them in flickering torchlight.

A TRIAL OF WORTHINESS

Inside, the guardians await, seeking battle to assure that none who are unworthy progress.

The walls have old flaking frescos with stars above, beautiful hills and temples, winged horses, and humans venerating the Muses, all half-visible in the flickering torchlight.

The dreamy laughter of the Muse, as though she has recently awoken, fills the room. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher notice the minotaurs—they may feel an eerie prickling sensation before a hot, damp snort on their neck, or perhaps it's the smell of sweat that alerts them. Once any character registers that they are not alone, the torches flare and battle begins!

Three **minotaurs** armed with great axes attack.

The minotaurs have three well-worn ceremonial loin cloths, three battle-damaged great axes, two *+1 magic daggers*, and one electrum pendant shaped like an astrolabe.

This battle is meant to prove the fitness of the party to compete. The minotaurs want to die gloriously for their patroness and have not had the opportunity to fight for her for many years. They do all they can to stop the party moving forward, and the tunnel is sealed by the Muse until she is completely satisfied.

She sees all and knows all, and she may be satisfied by an impressive battle even if it doesn't end in death. The minotaurs follow their Muse's lead, and they don't necessarily have to die to satisfy her.

> *"Enough,"* the dreamy voice murmurs. *"There now. It does delight me to see fitting veneration."*
>
> You hear the sliding of smooth stone, and cool, dusty-smelling air drifts toward you from the opposite end of the hall.
>
> *"Come closer, and see what honor still remains for you who have proven yourselves."*

DEVELOPMENT

After the beasts are sufficiently defeated, and the voice of the Muse gives the go-ahead, the far end of the tunnel opens. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher may hear a faint sound of shifting machinery.

CHAPTER 2 – OURANIA'S ORRERY

A 60 foot tall orrery dotted in gems stands in the center of an obsidian hall; cool moonlight filters in through a small oculus 200 feet above. Great bronze mechanical arms hold figures of planets, nymphs, and stars, all drifting lazily in the disturbed air as the adventurers enter. Four massive gold bands, each adorned with a crystal, stand still with a light layer of dust covering them. As the party approaches, four constellations flicker in the ceiling. On closer examination, players see that they are the sea god Neptune to the west, earth goddess Gaia to the south, sky god Oranus to the north, and hearthfire goddess Hestia to the east. Players with proficiency in Religion recognize the gods by name, but all can tell what elements they represent.

The following phrase is inscribed in mosaic in a ring that runs along the circumference of the room in Celestial. If a character discerns it, the muses's voice is heard aloud in their head:

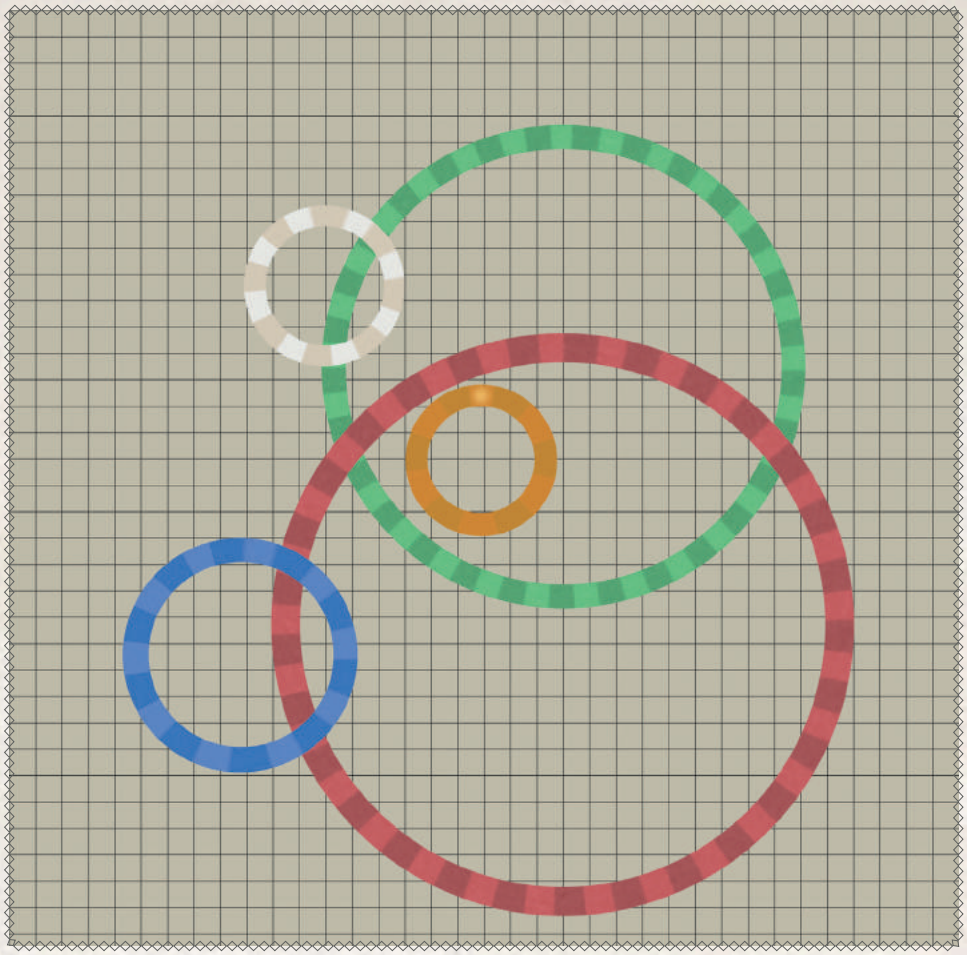
"Upon a night when stars align
Devoted to their masters
Those with strength of soul and mind
Depart in glory after."

Four rings worked in colored tile overlap on the floor with the orrery at the center. Use the included map, or create one based on it. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that these rings are pressure plates. There are also faint sigils that form a smaller ring around the orrery itself—if a character familiar with the spell *teleportation circle* examines it, they recognize it as a permanent teleportation circle.

Nothing happens in the room until a pressure plate is activated. Pressure plates activate when any weight is placed on them, and once activated:

- The associated ring begins to shift on the floor
- The coordinating elemental crystal on a band of the orrery begins to turn
- The mechanical arms of the orrery spin erratically
- Initiative order begins (the orrery itself has an initiative of 20)





THE PUZZLE ITSELF

Set up the crystals with each marker on the orrery (thick gold band in the center of the map) like this: consider the marked point 12 o'clock, which is due North. Roll 1d12 for each of the four crystals, and place each crystal at the appropriate 'hour' on the clock (a roll of 6 would place the crystal directly opposite 12, for example).

Red ring = fire crystal, in the shape of a tetrahedron = orientation must be eastward to align with Hestia (3 o'clock)
Green ring = earth crystal, in the shape of a cube = orientation must be southward to align with Gaia (6 o'clock)
Blue ring = water crystal, in the shape of an icosahedron = orientation must be westward to align with Neptune (9 o'clock)
White ring = air crystal, in the shape of an octahedron = orientation must be northward to align with Oranus (12 o'clock)

All crystals move clockwise, and freeze and lock in place once they are aligned properly.

A crystal moves one space on the 'clock' for every full turn a single character stands on the matching ring, while the ring they are standing on slides along the floor at a speed of 20. If two characters stand on the same ring, the crystal will go two spaces while the rings speed will go up to 40, and so on, though once three or more characters are on a ring, each of them roll any saves at disadvantage.

Example: perhaps a character steps onto the red ring as their action, and it moves 20 feet during their turn. The next character in initiative order steps on the same ring—both players must now move their pieces 40 feet during that player's turn, as they are both on the ring and the ring's speed has increased. If, on the next round, they are both still on the ring and choose to stay on it, they will move their pieces 40 feet, as that is the ring's total speed. Make characters roll with disadvantage or increase the DC of some checks as appropriate—this should be challenging for them to manage!

RISKS TO CHARACTERS:

- Standing on the ring causes it to move.
- Characters who start their turn or move onto a ring or within the circle enclosed by a ring must make a DC 15 (DC 13 for crouching players or players under 5 feet tall) Dexterity saving throw to dodge the spinning mechanical arms. On a failed save, players are knocked prone and take 4 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.
- At any point where the rings overlap, players must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be thrown from the ring entirely.

The orrery delights in having characters to play with and swings at them almost gleefully on its turn (initiative 20). The orrery has a +5 to hit, does 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage, and may make two attacks per turn. It has been known to tease adventurers by pre-

tending it will hurl a moon at them only to fling tiny comets at someone else, to swing a planet in a low circle causing all the adventurers to skip over it, or to toss a filigree meteor shower in the way just when some noble knight was about to deactivate it. The orrery likes to have fun, and its attacks should reflect that.

The orrery's bronze mechanical arms can be deactivated from its center, which can be accomplished from its center with a successful DC 19 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a successful DC 15 Strength check using a weapon. The center is difficult to get to, and the orrery fights back.

When the last crystal is aligned, all four glow more intensely, and the stars of the constellations twinkle, as do sigils encircling the base of the orrery.

"How lovely of you to set my orrery to rights. Come to me that I may bestow my favor on you, worthy and noble adventurers! Join hands, and step within the circle."

This is written as a moderately challenging puzzle for a group of five higher-level adventurers, but it can be altered for stronger or weaker parties. For instance, to make it simpler, limit the speed of the rings to 20 and/or remove Dexterity saves at overlap points. To make it more challenging, roll 1d6 and multiply by 10 to establish the ring's speed. You could also scale the orrery's attacks up or down.

DEVELOPMENT

When the players join hands around the base of the orrery, the sigils glow brighter and the effect of a *teleportation circle* spell takes place, the adventurers arrive at the top of Mount Helicon.

CHAPTER 3 – MOUNT HELICON

A beautiful moonlit mountaintop, covered in small flowing springs, delicate greenery, and rocky outcroppings—there was never a better place for battle. Three winged horses graze calmly. At the highest point there are a few columns around an altar. A woman enrobed in starlight and embroidered constellations languishes on a chaise, while two handmaidens attend her. She wears a glittering laurel wreath.

Characters with darkvision or a high passive Perception score may notice bits of armor stuck in amongst the rocks: ancient, unusable, and rusted through, but a sign that battles (and deaths) have happened here.

THE FINAL CHALLENGE

"You are welcome indeed—it has been too long since I enjoyed the exaltation of mortals."

As she speaks, the rod in her hand lengthens and molds itself into a silvery jewel-encrusted mace.

"You have bested the minotaurs, stalwart protectors of my orrery. You have danced with the movement of the heavens and aligned the elements of earth with their quintessence.

"And yet, one thing remains to be defeated. Me."

In this challenge, Ourania wants to find truly worthy competitors: those who desire inspiration, who value learning, who study and learn through observation, and who demonstrate a will to act on knowledge. Taking the wreath is not enough—the characters characters must earn it. If she decides to end combat early, she may award the wreath herself. As combatants, Ourania and her handmaidens want to see adventurers tested; this may lead them to hold back a bit in order to better observe the characters.

The Muse allows her handmaidens to fight until one or both of them are at half health, then she joins the battle. The mountaintop qualifies as difficult terrain.

Three winged horses (**pegasi**) graze calmly throughout the encounter unless directly bothered by the players; they are benevolent and assist the players if adequately persuaded. They can not be persuaded to fight a Muse.

Two handmaidens assist Ourania. They use the statistics of **banshees** with the following alterations:

- ***Corrupting Touch:*** The handmaidens deal radiant damage instead of necrotic.
- ***Horrifying Visage:*** Their beauty invokes the charmed condition instead of the frightened condition.

- ***Wail:*** The handmaidens cannot take this action.
- ***Languages:*** They speak Celestial (and prefer it to Common).

Ourania, Muse of Astronomy, uses the statistics of a **rakshasa** with the following alterations:

- ***Limited Magic Immunity:*** Ourania can't be affected or detected by spells of 3rd level or lower unless she wishes to be. She has advantage on saving throws against all other spells and magical effects.
- ***Innate Spellcasting:*** Ourania can cast *plane shift* twice per day: once to bring the party to the mountain located in one of the Outer Planes, and once to send them home. She has prepared it to go off and send them, with the wreath, back to the orrery should she drop to zero hit points. As a Muse, she does not need to physically travel with the adventurers for the spell to take effect.

DEVELOPMENT

To Ourania, no adventurer seeking her favor deserves to live—though the truly worthy might earn a future with her blessing. When Ourania drops to 0 hit points, or decides the battle is over, she sends the characters back to the temple in Sévomai, wreath in hand.

CONCLUSION

The last thing you see is the circle of sigils on the ground glowing around you, and a moment later, you're back in the temple entrance where nine altars now sit empty. All is dark within the temple, but there is light outside: the light of colorful lamps and firecrackers. Trumpets blow and joy resounds, and the people make to carry what's left of you off in the same sort of litter as before.

REWARDS

Characters who survive this encounter each get one use of the *wish* spell (the effects are up to the DM's discretion), the love of the townspeople of Sévomai, and free drinks at any inn in town. Adventurers may also add the benefits of the Acolyte background relating to the Muse, gaining a leaf of the wreath as a holy symbol.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I'd like to thank my own muses—especially Joel, whose proofing and problem-solving skills are as good as his puns are bad, Allison, who can hand out inspiration dice from an astounding distance, Alyss, who forged the finest DMing mug I'll ever own, Maggie for her fantastic art, the rag-tag Defenders of the Archive, the pixie dust-swilling Heroes of Becharia, and the supremely odd friends of Tobias the Baker.

We make still by the law in which we're made.

Thank you, all of you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret Mae (she/her) is a practicing nerd girl who loves gaming, weightlifting, martial arts, arts & crafts, deeply upsetting puns, and safe community spaces. Say hi to her on Twitter @Margaret_Mae or Instagram @MargaretMaenad!



From the "Apollo and the Muses" Polyptych
by Charles Meynier

APPENDIX A: FEATURED CREATURES

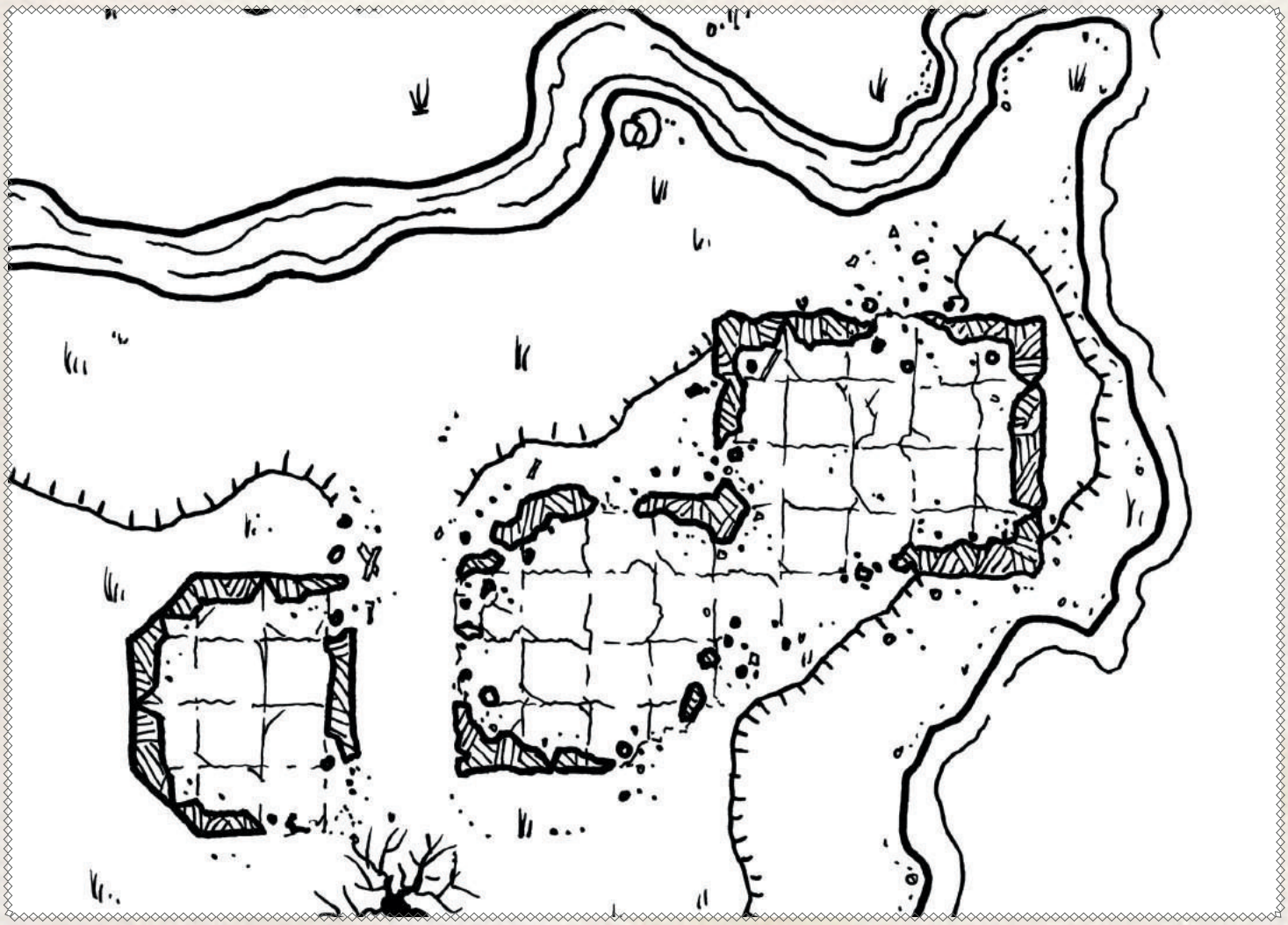
These creatures are featured prominently in this anthology. Those denoted with an asterisk are new or reskinned creatures, whose stat blocks are provided in this book. The page numbers below correspond with the adventures the creatures are found in.

Rusalka* — pg. 13
Rusalka* — pg. 19
Lamia — pg. 21
Marzanna* — pg. 29
Sea Hag — pg. 35
Banshee — pg. 43
Siren — pg. 59
Banshee — pg. 61
Succubus — pg. 69
Lady in Red (Ghost) — pg. 75
Dryad — pg. 83
Melusine — pg. 91
Rusalka* — pg. 107
Bheur Hag — pg. 109
The Red Wolf* — pg. 126
Banshee* — pg. 127
Lilitu* — pg. 135
The Merfolk Queen* — pg. 144
Medusa — pg. 147
Medusa — pg. 157
Scylla (Hydra) — pg. 165
Firebird — pg. 173
Baba Yaga* — pg. 189
Death Knight — pg. 191
Dryad* — pg. 208
The Greek Muse Ourania — pg. 211



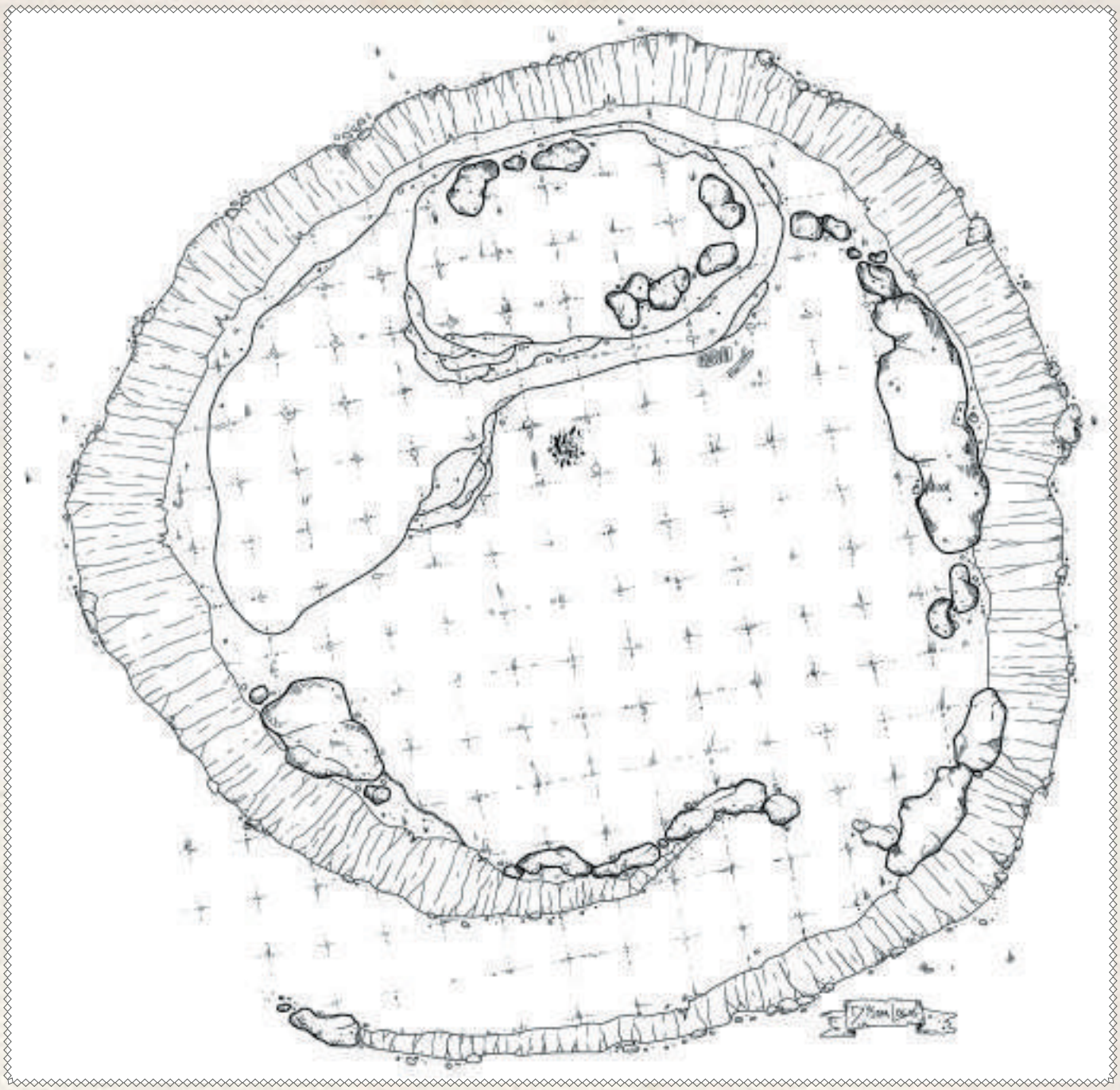
APPENDIX B: MAPS FOR PLAYERS

THE TEMPLE (FROM *THE LOCRIAN WAY*, PG. 51)



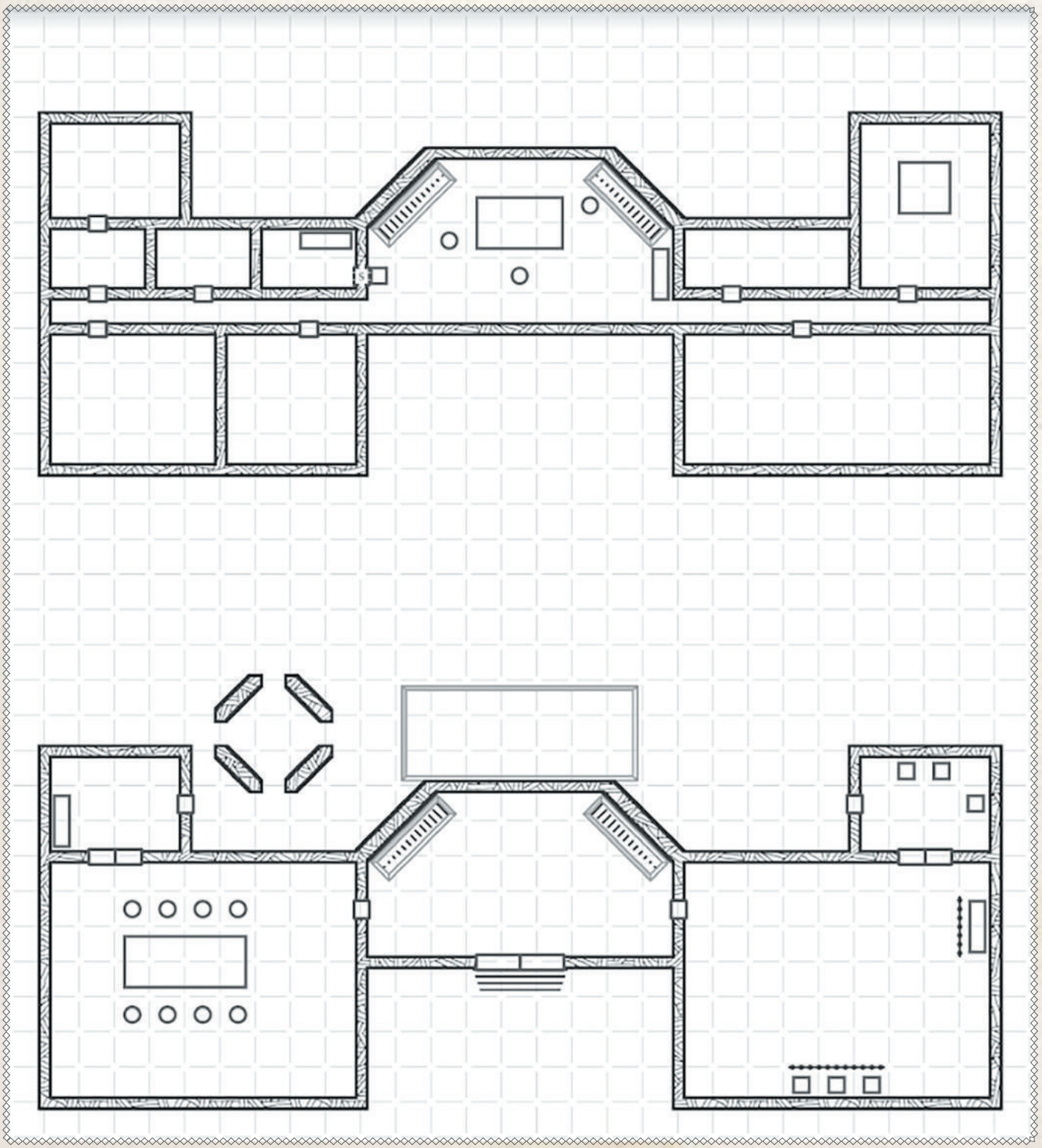
Map by Dyson Logos

THE ISLAND (FROM *THE LOCRIAN WAY*, PG. 51)



Map by Dyson Logos

HOUSE SHANDOREL (FROM *PERMANENT COLLECTION*, PG. 61)



Map by William Abeel and Leon Barillaro

SHANDOREL FAMILY BEDROOMS (FROM *PERMANENT COLLECTION*, PG. 61)

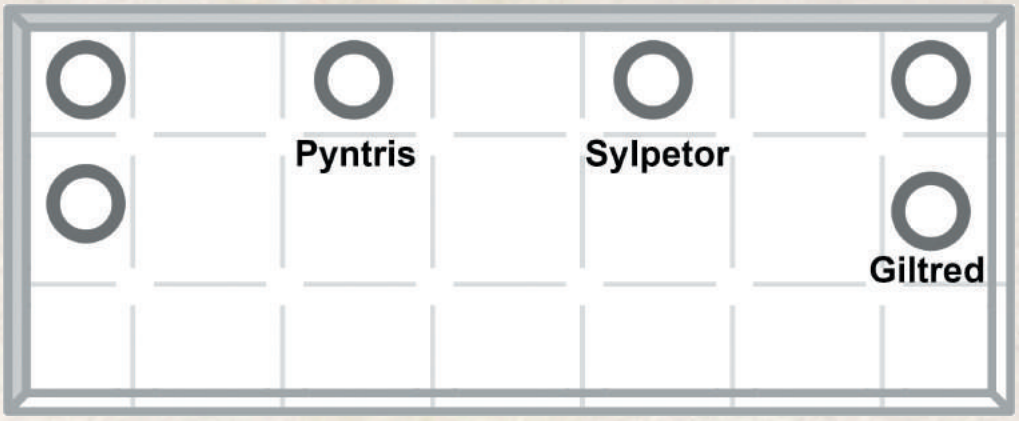


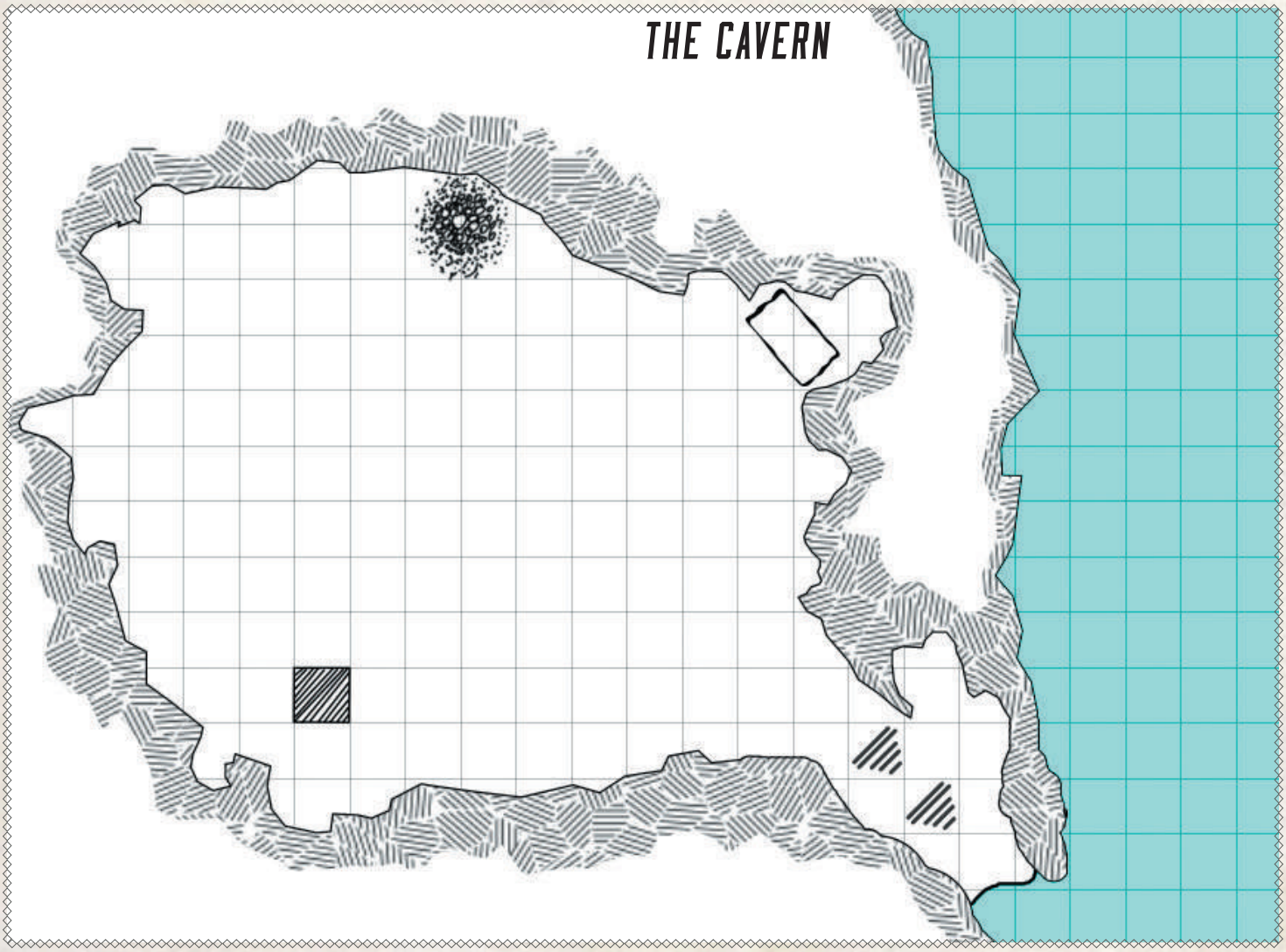
Diagram by Leon Barillaro

TREASURY PUZZLE (FROM *BENEATH THE MAELSTROM*, PG. 161)

		WATER-FALL			HIDDEN DOOR
| |	| |	| |			
| |	| |	| |			
| |	| |	| |			
| |	| |	— —	POOL OF WATER		
STATUE		DOOR			

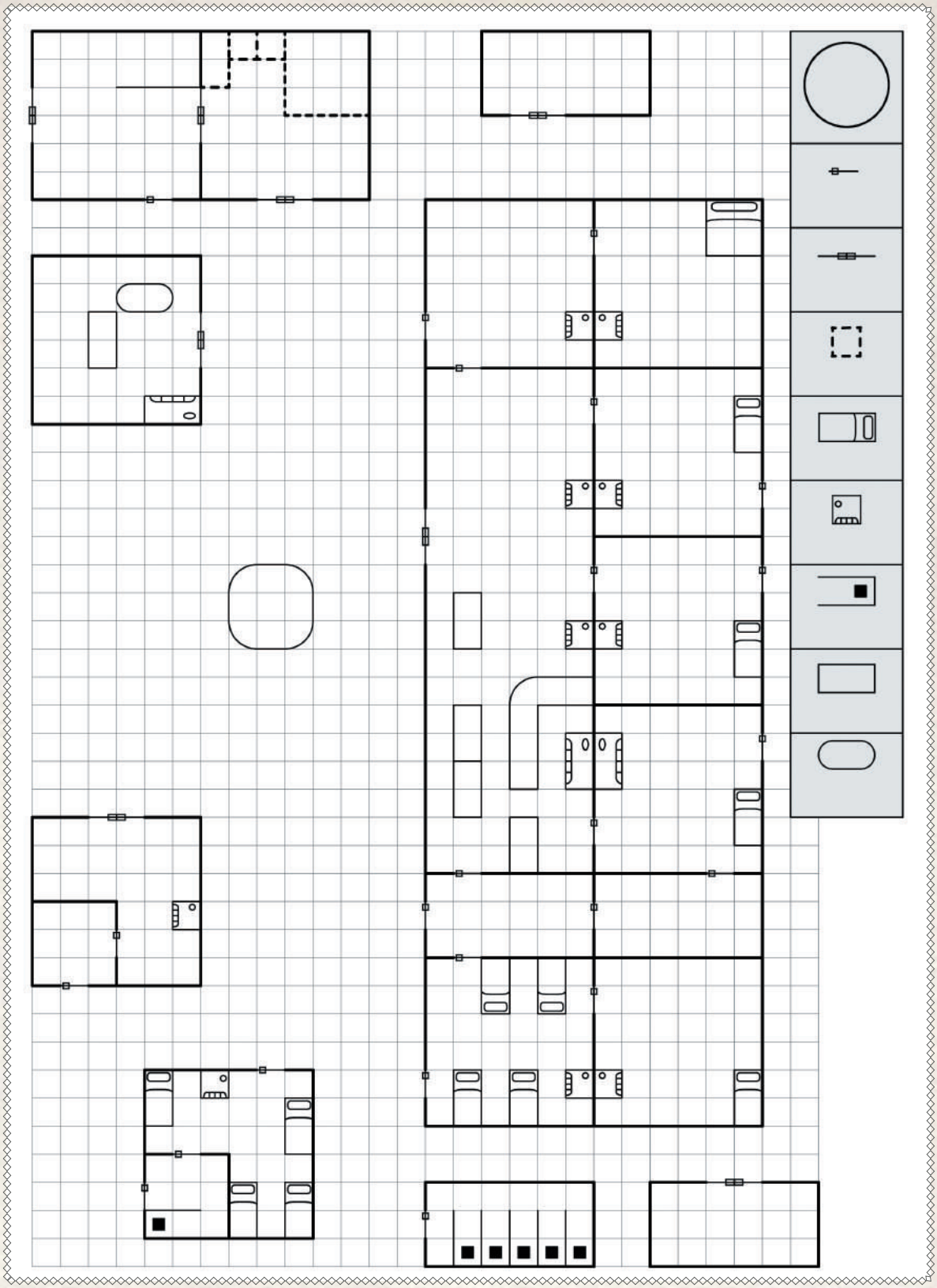
Diagram by Christine Prevas

THE CAVERN (FROM *TOOTH AND FIN*, PG. 133)



Map by Jazz Eisinger

SERPENT'S TOOTH (FROM *SERPENT'S TOOTH*, PG. 143)



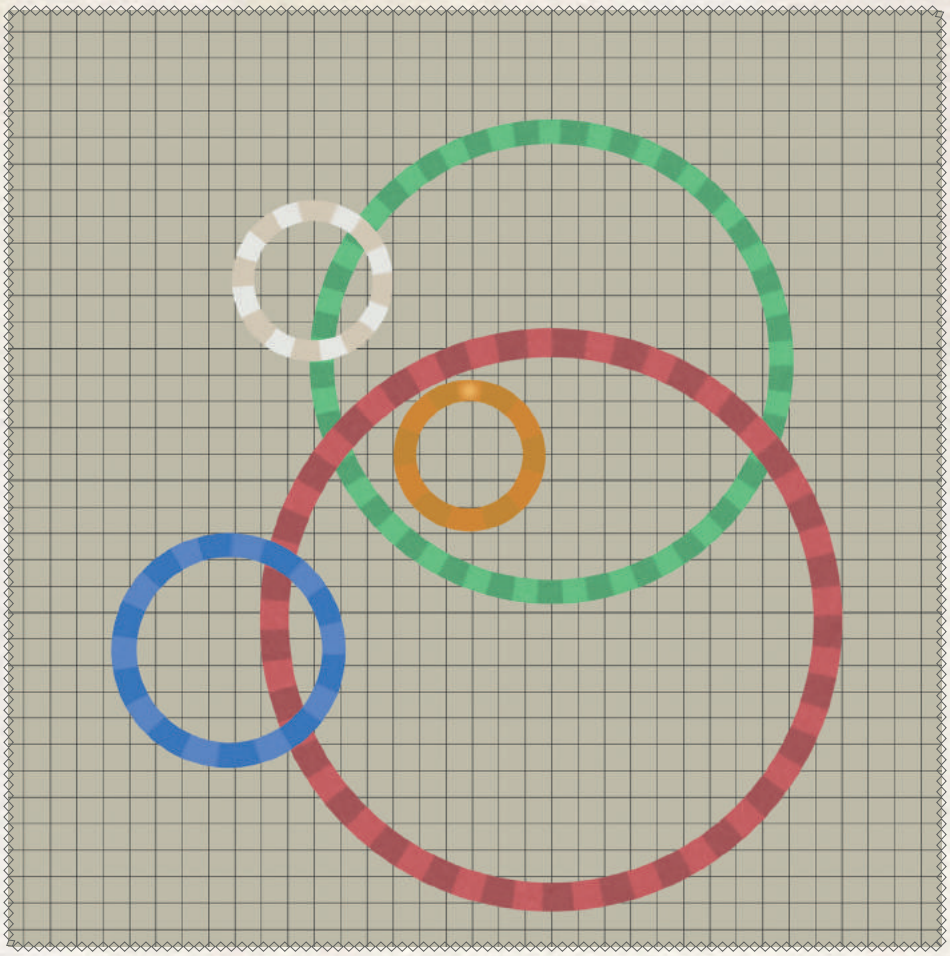
Map by Monica Evans and Tim Christopher

THE MOREWAY MANOR (FROM *DEATH DON'T DO US PART*, PG. 187)



Map by Kelly Mangerino

URANIA'S ORRERY (FROM *QUEST FOR THE MUSES' WREATH*, PG. 209)



Map by Margaret Mae

APPENDIX C: HANDOUTS

The following handouts go with *Death Don't Do Us Part* by Kelly Mangerino (pg. 191).

HANDOUT 1

Mal,

After thorough investigation, all Loviatar implications regarding Lady Emerton proved true. Almost conveniently so. Unfortunately, she turned hostile and I was forced to kill her. I found frequent correspondences with Euros, though nothing implicating. I plan to speak with the Captain of the City Guard, Vargas Abel, but I fear his friendship with Euros might hinder my investigation. Either way, I'll keep you posted.

Be safe,
Deirdre

HANDOUT 2

Promissory Note

Amount: 500 gold pieces

Upon return of this receipt, the signee agrees to pay the full sum listed above.

Sign: *Vargas Abel*

HANDOUT 3

Vargas,

Colehart has been digging around. Get rid of her, otherwise you can find yourself another patron.

-Euros

HANDOUT 4

Father,

I know you have no love for me, and I thank you for never casting me aside despite my siblings' protests... Still, you consort with Her. I went to your study, I found the attic. I guess I had to know... Ever since the Iron Maiden looked into my eyes and spared me... Until that moment I suppose I wanted to believe otherwise.

Before I go, I'll do as you ask and hire the adventurers, but after, I shall take my leave.

Your son,
Pearce

HANDOUT 5

Euros Moreway is a murderer and conspirator—a faithful of Loviatar. Stand with me, and bring him to justice. Stand against me, and meet justice yourselves. The proof you need is concealed in his home. I'll be waiting beside Thresh and Bone.

–D. Colehart

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

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ARTISTS

David Markiwsky

David is a writer and artist in Edmonton, Canada, with a moderate to unhealthy obsession with horror and all things Fey. You can find all his other D&D content on the DM's Guild and he can be reached on Twitter @ DavidMarkiwsky

Gwen Bassett

Gwen ("gwendybee" across the web) is a freelance fantasy illustrator who will take any excuse to paint bright colors, flashy magic, and dramatic lighting. In her spare time, she likes to eat inadvisable quantities of dessert and pet other people's dogs.

Jen Vaughn

Jen is a freelance cartoonist/narrative designer living in the forests of Washington and available in multi-dimensional experiences. You can see her art in the comics *Teenage Wasteland*, play her *D&D* adventures like "The Experiments of Dr. Skulldial," you can touch her art if you print out her Paper Smalls, you can hear her play a tiefling ranger on podcast d20Dames. You cannot taste or smell her unless you bake food in her name and then you must tweet a pic of that to @thejenya. www.HauntedVaultStudios.com

Kayla Cline

Kayla Cline is an illustrator and graphic novelist, whose work frequently invokes gaming culture, the occult, and science fiction. Her work can be found at her website kaylacline.com.

Wouter Florusse

Wouter Florusse is a freelance illustrator with a passion for history, fantasy and nature. He lives in Rotterdam, the Netherlands with his wife and two sons. In his spare time he engages in Historical European Martial Arts, plays tabletop roleplaying games and can be found wantonly drawing trees anywhere.

Xan Larson

Xan Larson is an illustrator, comic artist, mythological creature enthusiast, DM, and more. *Artist of If Dragons Were Horses*, *SVN*, *Deep False Waters*, and creator of the teacup almiraj and teacup wolpertinger. Follow on Twitter @PaleWhiteRabbit or Instagram @pale.white.rabbit.

About Our Cover Artist

Samantha Darcy

Crafted from only the finest twigs and glamours, Samantha Darcy was well-nurtured in exchange for her father's freedom. She was beloved by all her neighbors, though her presence would frighten the livestock and cause the room to chill. The families would vie for her attention on the hot summers' days, and found they preferred the taste of soured milk. Samantha saw her first artistic inspiration behind their straining smiles, and delighted in drawing all their prettiest nightmares.

An illustrator for tabletop roleplaying games, Samantha has risen far above those humble beginnings. She has contributed to works both great and small, including the *Uncaged Anthology*, *Rolled & Told*, and countless commissions. She currently labors on the *Adventurer's Fashion Primer*, a book sorely needed by creatures of every type.

Samantha lives in a tower of toadstools and teeth, located somewhere in the strange wilds of Indiana. She dwells there with her loving husband — a musical clockwork filled with bartered voices, and their darling son — who she made herself, using only the finest twigs and glamours.

Editors

Dr. A. Kelly Lane, Ph.D.

Dr. A. Kelly Lane is a biologist and education researcher by day, a TTRPG player, GM, and streamer by night. Kelly loves playing games both live and in person. Being an avid promoter of all things inclusive, she couldn't pass up the opportunity to be involved with this wonderful project. The talent and kindness in this group have been astounding and Kelly has learned a great deal from those involved. You can find her @AKellyLane on Twitter where she discusses higher education, gaming, and inclusivity.

Ashley Warren

Ashley is the founder, creator, and producer of the *Uncaged Anthology*. She writes for Wizards of the Coast, Onyx Path Publishing, and more. Ashley is a cast member on *Tales from the Mists*, which airs on WotC's official Twitch channel. Additionally, she is the founder of the RPG Writer Workshop and the author of countless titles on Dungeon Masters Guild. Her website is ashleywarrenwrites.com; Twitter, @ashleynhwarren.

Bianca Bickford

Bianca is a lifelong geek living deep in the Heart of Texas. She can be found running around the jungles of Chult or pulling off the biggest heist in Waterdavian history. Bianca DMs for friends and one-shot adventures for girls ages 9 to 12 to introduce them to the imaginative world of Dungeons & Dragons. Her module "Maid in Waterdeep" was a part of Uncaged Volume 1. Find her on Twitter at @BiancaBickford.

Brent Jans

Brent has worked as a freelance fiction and TTRPG editor for the last thirteen years. He is currently an editor for On Spec Magazine, a Canadian quarterly publication of speculative fiction, and has edited for: Wayfinder (a magazine for the Pathfinder RPG); the Space: 1889 line for Clockwork Publishing; and the RPG Foreign Element for Mystic Ages Publishing. He is also the founder and curator for the Canadian Library of Roleplaying Games, and you can read more from him at renaissancegamer.ca.

Catherine Evans

Catherine has been playing and running RPGs since 1997, and she somehow always finds her way back to *D&D*. You can find her shamelessly self-promoting on Twitter (as @perpetualgloom) and writing dark fairy tales and outright horror on DMs Guild.

Christopher Walz

Christopher is the Dungeon Masters Guild creator of *The Midnight Revelry* and *An Ogre and His Cake*, a children's charity project. He is also a freelance tabletop roleplaying game editor, currently working on Cubicle 7's *Adventures in Middle-earth*. His journey

into roleplaying games began before he could read, stealing away his brother's Monstrous Manual to look at the pictures. He resides in central Kentucky with his son, who is most certainly a crafty kobold. Connect with him on Twitter @DMChristopherW.

Echo Roanoke

Echo Roanoke (they/them) is a writer, editor, gamemaster, and game creator in Indiana. They graduated in 2011 from Eastern Illinois University with an MA in Literary Studies with Creative Writing Emphasis. They can be found on Twitter and Instragram at @echoroanoke.

Hadeel Al-Massari

Hadeel is the co-creator of Bramblefoot Adventures with Kayla Cline and a cast member on Wizards of the Coast's official Twitch channel. Connect with her on Twitter @twittysuch.

Hannah Rose

Hannah is a professional nerd with two cats, several hundred books, and never enough time for *D&D*. She co-produces the actual play show Worlds Apart, where she also plays the strong barbarian mom Mara. DMs Guild credits include the *College of the Opera* (gold bestseller), the *Temple of Shattered Minds*, and upcoming projects — follow her on Twitter (@wildrosemage) for updates, cat pictures, and general geekiness.

Jamie O'Duibhir

Jamie O'Duibhir is an atheist minister and writer. Her writing includes content for the DMs Guild, indie TTRPGs, nerdy news articles, poetry, and essays. She is an activist focused on trans liberation, immigrant rights, and prison abolition. She is also very gay #RampUptheLesbians. Twitter: @irreverendjamie.

Jeff Ellis

Jeff has written and published multiple adventures using the Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition Open Gaming License to the Dungeon Masters Guild and is happy to be working as a contributing editor for the first time on *Uncaged*. He is humbled by all of the talent present in these anthologies and is honored to have helped in what little way he could. You can find out more about him on Twitter @manyeyedmonster.

Jessica Washburn

Jessica is an aspiring writer and copy editor who looks forward to releasing more projects and supplements for *D&D* 5e. You can find her on Twitter as @HealthPakStream. She may or may not be a halfling bard.

Jessica Ross

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

Joe Nehmer

A nine-year-old boy in 1983. Glorious red box basic *D&D*. Elmore cover. What? No board?... what. is. this. So many summer days making spell books from chopped up looseleaf, and seeing dungeoneer and crusader alike fall to glorious *AD&D* deathtrap dungeons. Thrilled to be a contributing editor for the *Uncaged Anthology*!

Liz Gist

Liz is a hobbyist, artist, and freelance editor. They grew up fascinated with mythology and look for any excuse to burrow into that part of their psyche. Follow them on Twitter @crit_liz for puppy photos, mini painting, and far too many tiefling PCs.

Lynne M. Meyer

Bisexual interfaith and diversity educator and activist Lynne M. Meyer holds a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Master of Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute. Lynne is a chronic illness warrior, devotee of Hekate, and lover of cats and good coffee. Her adventure appears in *Uncaged Volume I*. Connect with Lynne on Twitter @Lynne_M_Meyer.

Michael Haney

Michael Haney is currently finishing his creative writing degree from the University of South Florida. When he isn't writing about the occult or editing, he is devoting his free time to playing ttRPGs. You can find him on Twitter @michaelhaneyc.

Stephanie Lee

Stephanie Lee is an editor, aspiring author, and perpetual GM. You can find her work at scribblesandknots.com or on Twitter @scribblesnknots.

TK Johnson

TK is a full-time southern gothic/dark fantasy writer and part-time eldritch horror. They have been derailing campaigns since early childhood, but their most diabolical plans are unveiled every Friday evening as DM in the Twitch actual play, *Tales From the Mists*. Their spooky stories can be found at www.tkjwrites.com. Legends say that you can find TK lurking in the hills of Kentucky with their familiar, Samson, when the moon is full, the fog is thick, and the harvest is ripe for the Ancient Ones' return.



DONORS

A heartfelt thanks to those who donated to our project.

Alex Clippinger

Alex is a best-selling creator whose work can be found on DMsGuild.com.

David McDonough

David is a writer, editor, and creator for DMsGuild.com.

Glenn Magas

Glenn is a financial analyst, social media expert, screenwriter, and *D&D* fan based in Los Angeles.

Joe Nehmer: Joe also served *Uncaged* as an editor; learn more about him on pg. 235.

John Jusayan: John is an app developer and long-time DM. Learn more at treeness.com.

M.T. Black: M.T. Black is a prolific creator with numerous best-selling RPG titles to his name. Get a peek into the world of RPG creation via his newsletter: bit.ly/mtblacksignup.

Phil Beckwith: Phil is the owner of P.B. Publishing, which produces immersive content for *Dungeons & Dragons* 5e. Learn more at www.facebook.com/PBPublishing.

Sersa Victory: Sersa Victory is a designer of death-trap dungeons for dark fantasy tabletop and video games. His work includes *Tomb of Mercy*, *Necropolis of the Mailed Fist*, *Testament of Malice*, and the upcoming text adventure game *Ember Undying*.

The following handouts go with *Death Don't Do Us Part* by Kelly Mangerino (pg. 191).

HANDOUT 1

Mal,

After thorough investigation, all Loviatar implications regarding Lady Emerton proved true. Almost conveniently so. Unfortunately, she turned hostile and I was forced to kill her. I found frequent correspondences with Euros, though nothing implicating. I plan to speak with the Captain of the City Guard, Vargas Abel, but I fear his friendship with Euros might hinder my investigation. Either way, I'll keep you posted.

Be safe,
Deirdre

HANDOUT 2

Promissory Note

Amount: 500 gold pieces

Upon return of this receipt, the signee agrees to pay the full sum listed above.

Sign: *Vargas Abel*

HANDOUT 3

Vargas,

Colehart has been digging around. Get rid of her, otherwise you can find yourself another patron.

-Euros

HANDOUT 4

Father,

I know you have no love for me, and I thank you for never casting me aside despite my siblings' protests... Still, you consort with Her. I went to your study, I found the attic. I guess I had to know... Ever since the Iron Maiden looked into my eyes and spared me... Until that moment I suppose I wanted to believe otherwise.

Before I go, I'll do as you ask and hire the adventurers, but after, I shall take my leave.

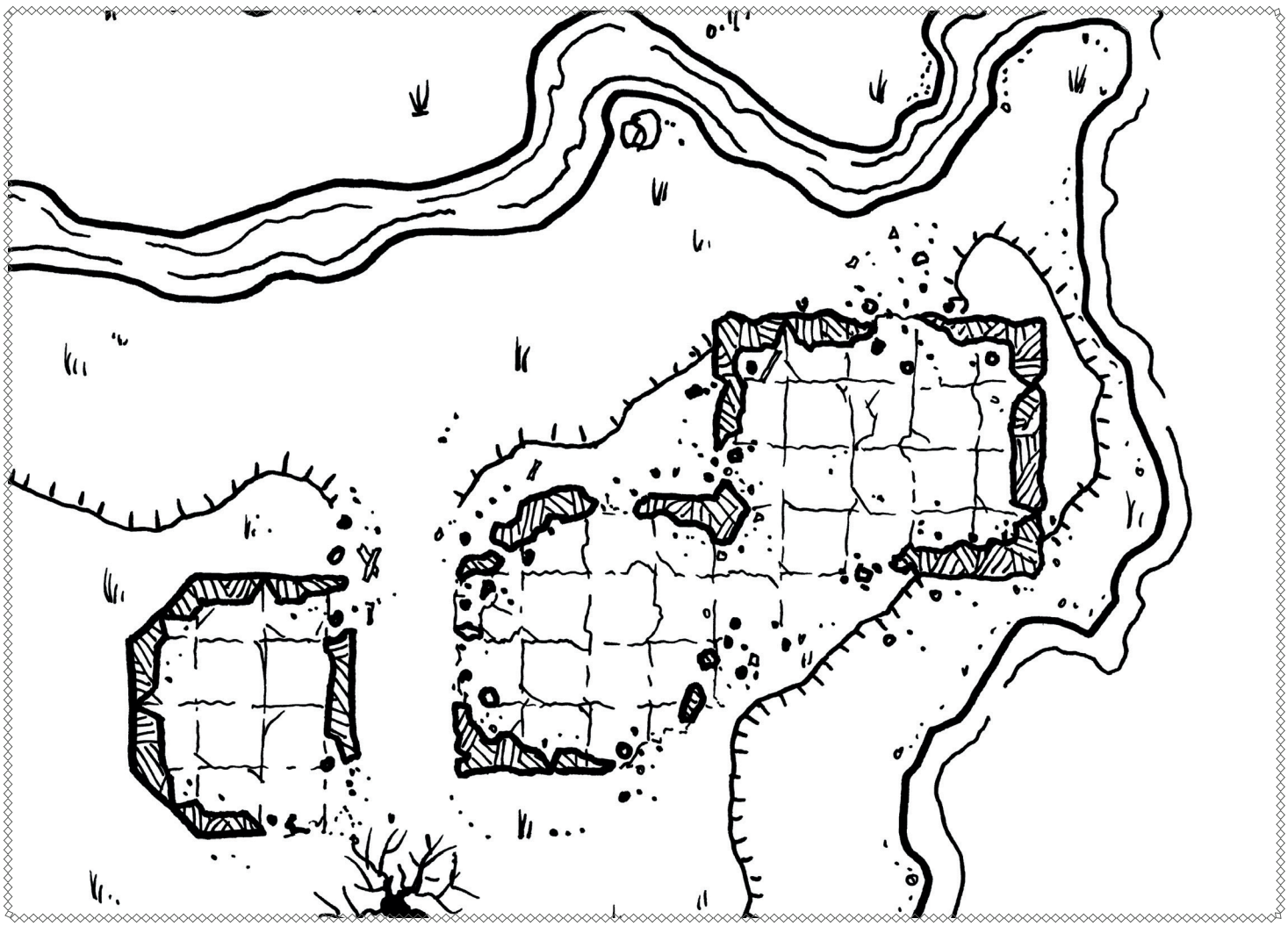
Your son,
Pearce

HANDOUT 5

Euros Moreway is a murderer and conspirator—a faithful of Loviatar. Stand with me, and bring him to justice. Stand against me, and meet justice yourselves. The proof you need is concealed in his home. I'll be waiting beside Thresh and Bone.

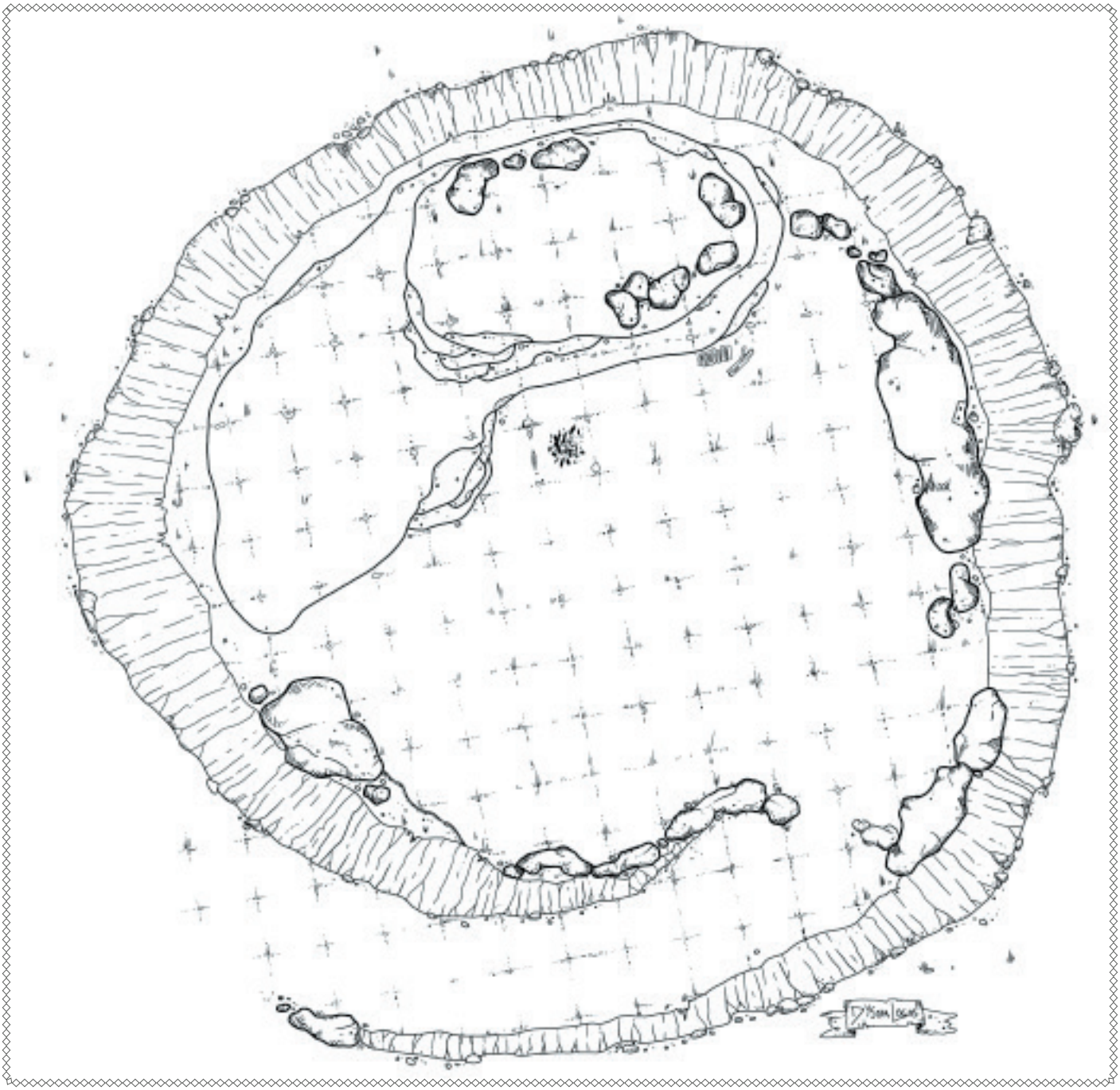
–D. Colehart

THE TEMPLE (FROM *THE LOCRIAN WAY*, PG. 51)



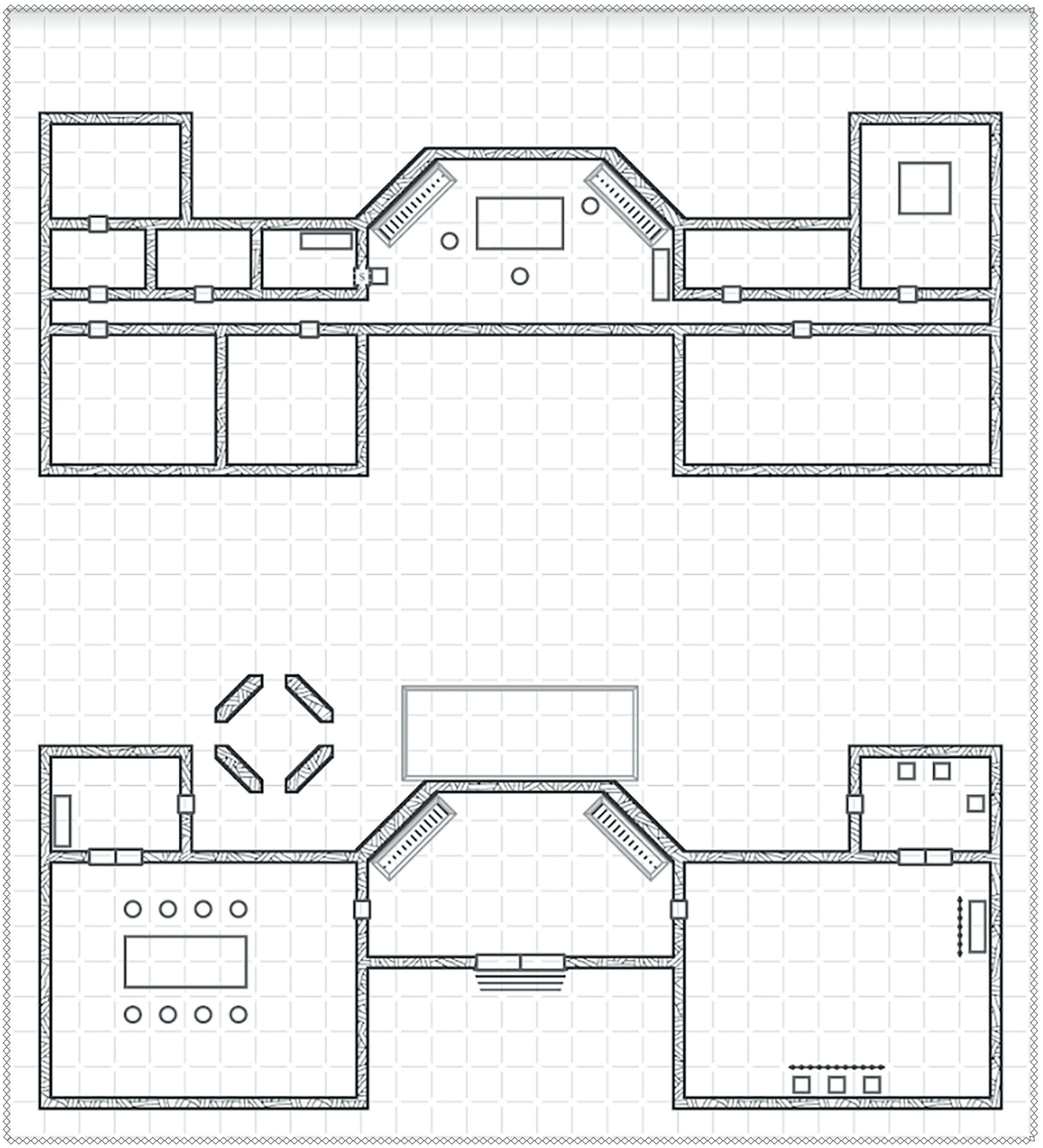
Map by Dyson Logos

THE ISLAND (FROM *THE LOCRIAN WAY*, PG. 51)



Map by Dyson Logos

HOUSE SHANDOREL (FROM *PERMANENT COLLECTION*, PG. 61)



Map by William Abeel and Leon Barillaro

SHANDOREL FAMILY BEDROOMS (FROM *PERMANENT COLLECTION*, PG. 61)

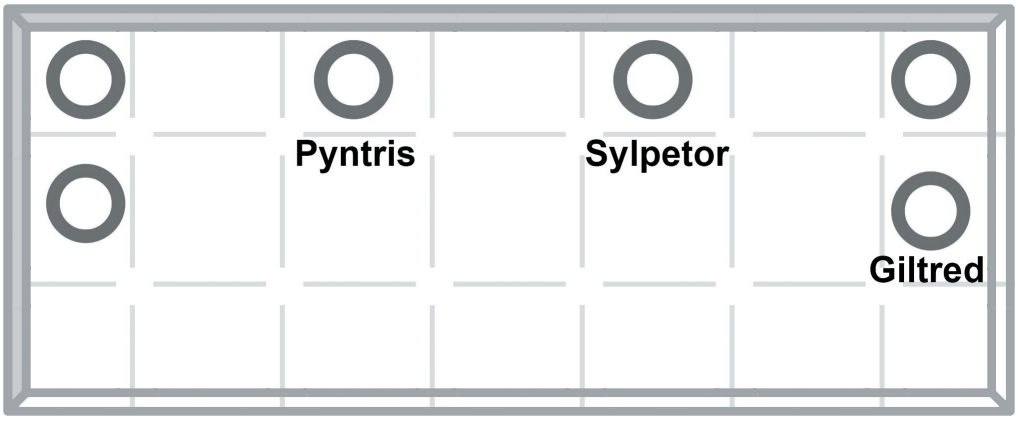


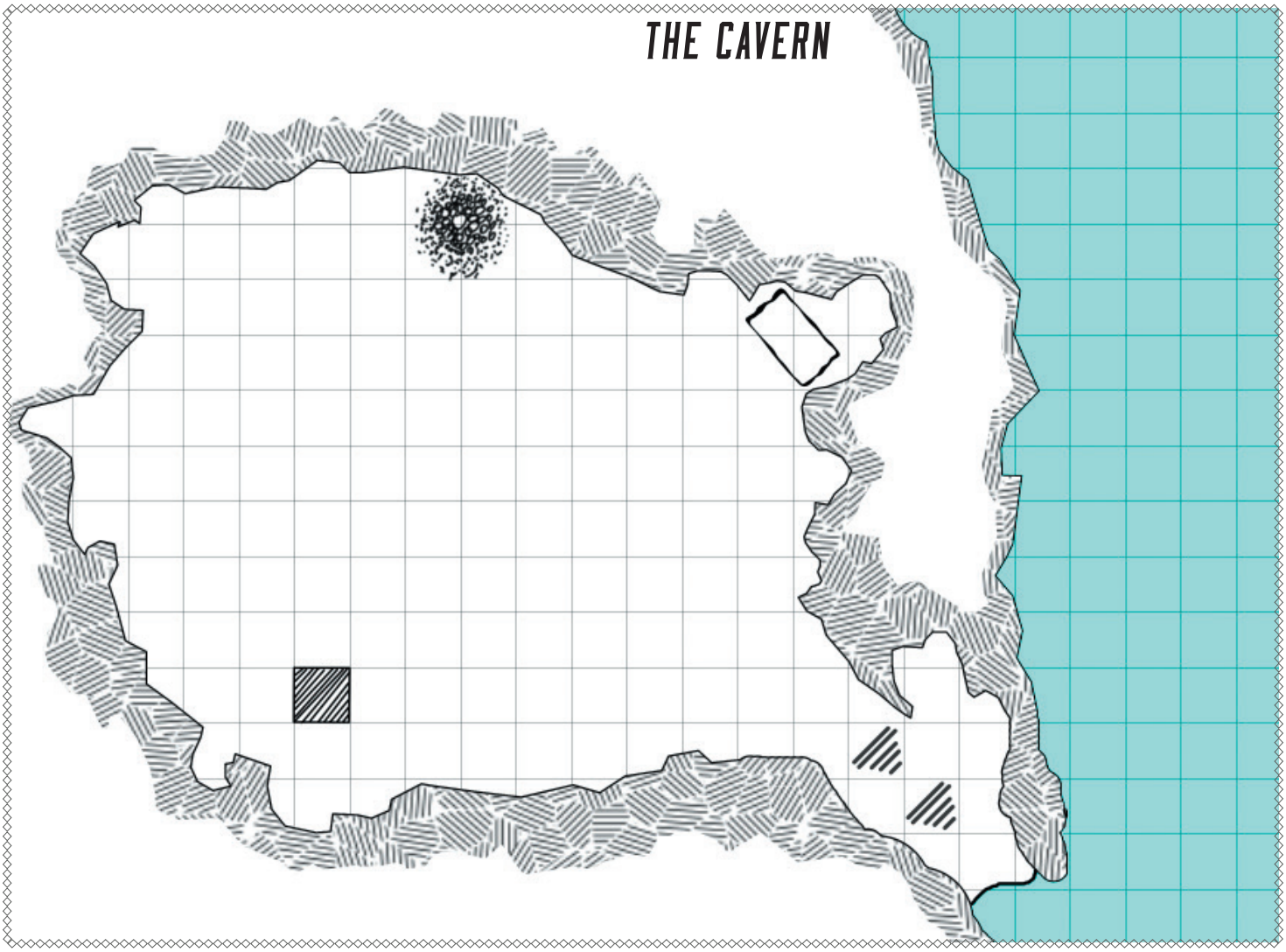
Diagram by Leon Barillaro

TREASURY PUZZLE (FROM *BENEATH THE MAELSTROM*, PG. 161)

		WATER-FALL			HIDDEN DOOR
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| |	| |	| |			
| |	| |	| |			
| |	| |	— —	POOL OF WATER		
STATUE		DOOR			

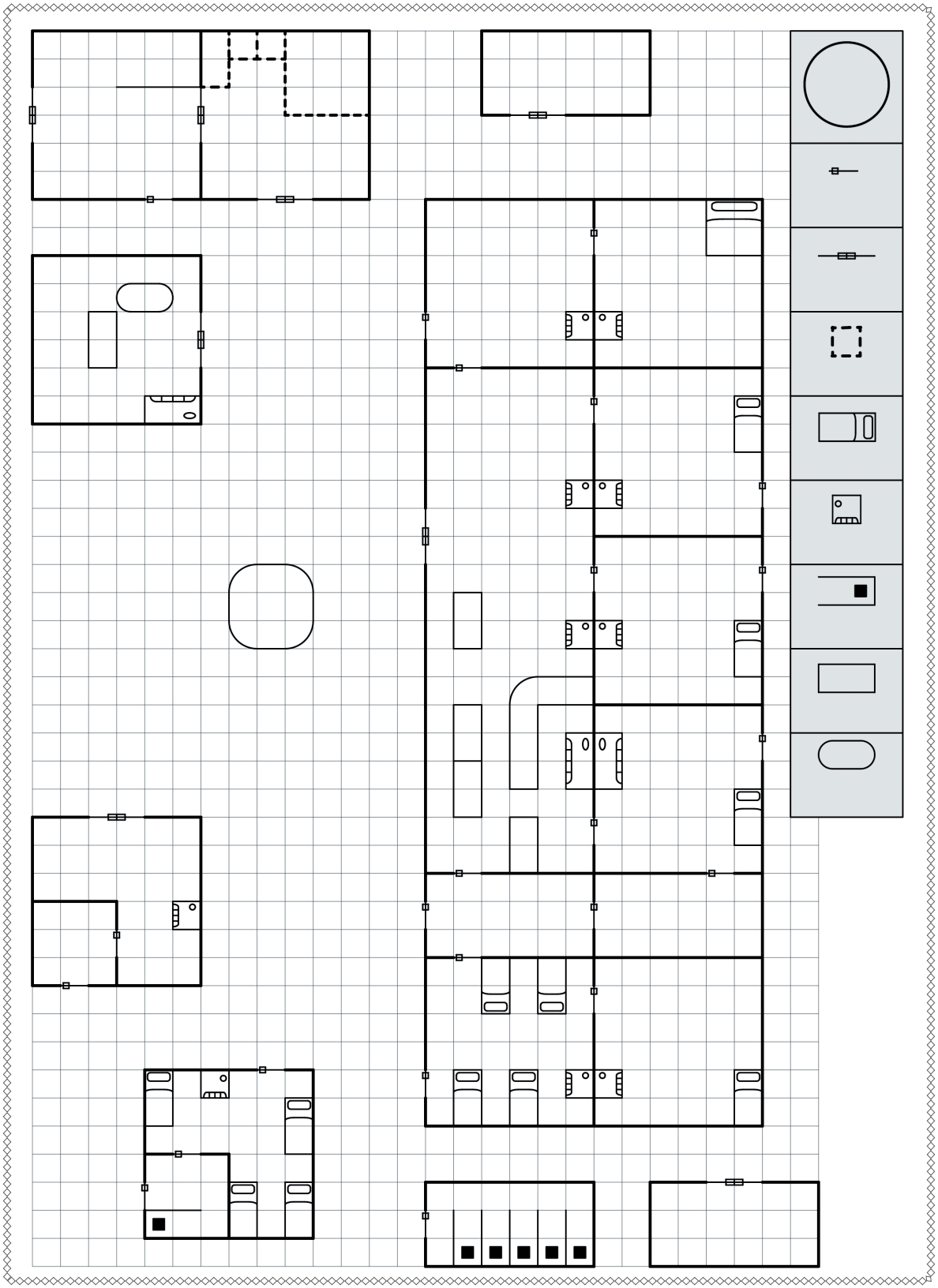
Diagram by Christine Prevas

THE CAVERN (FROM *TOOTH AND FIN*, PG. 133)



Map by Jazz Eisinger

SERPENT'S TOOTH (FROM *SERPENT'S TOOTH*, PG. 143)



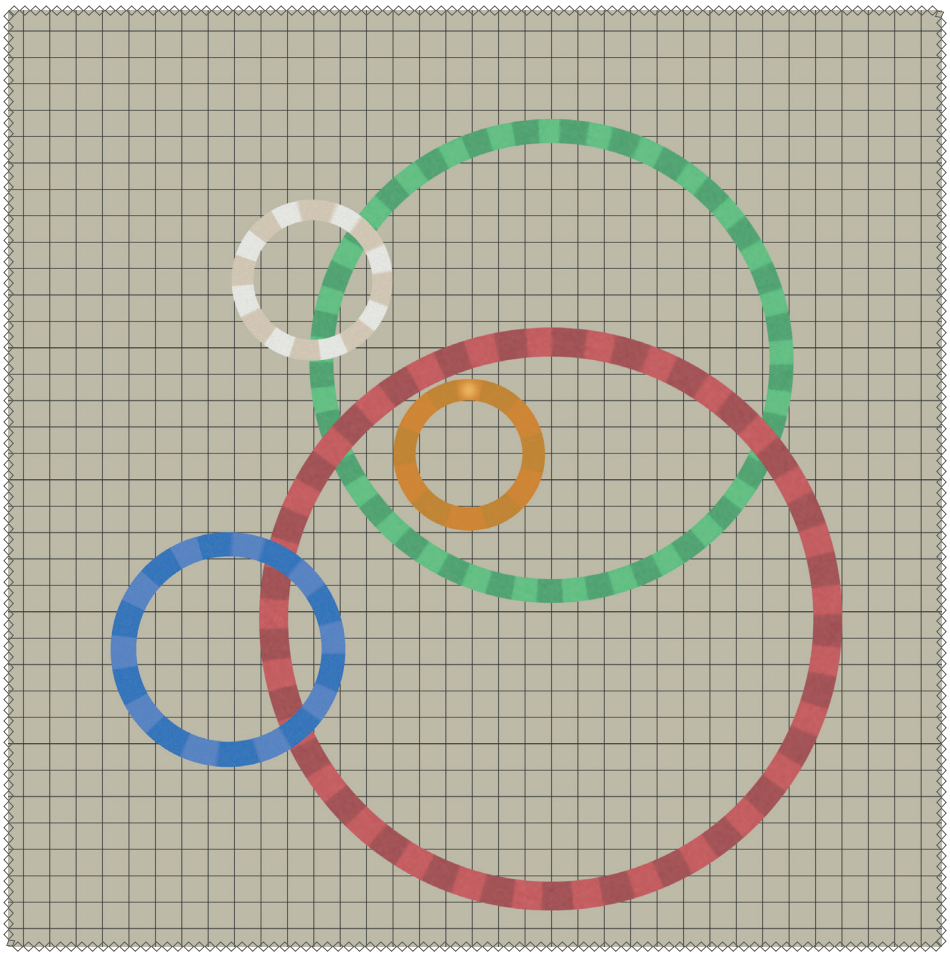
Map by Monica Evans and Tim Christopher

THE MOREWAY MANOR (FROM *DEATH DON'T DO US PART*, PG. 187)



Map by Kelly Mangerino

URANIA'S ORRERY (FROM *QUEST FOR THE MUSES' WREATH*, PG. 209)



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