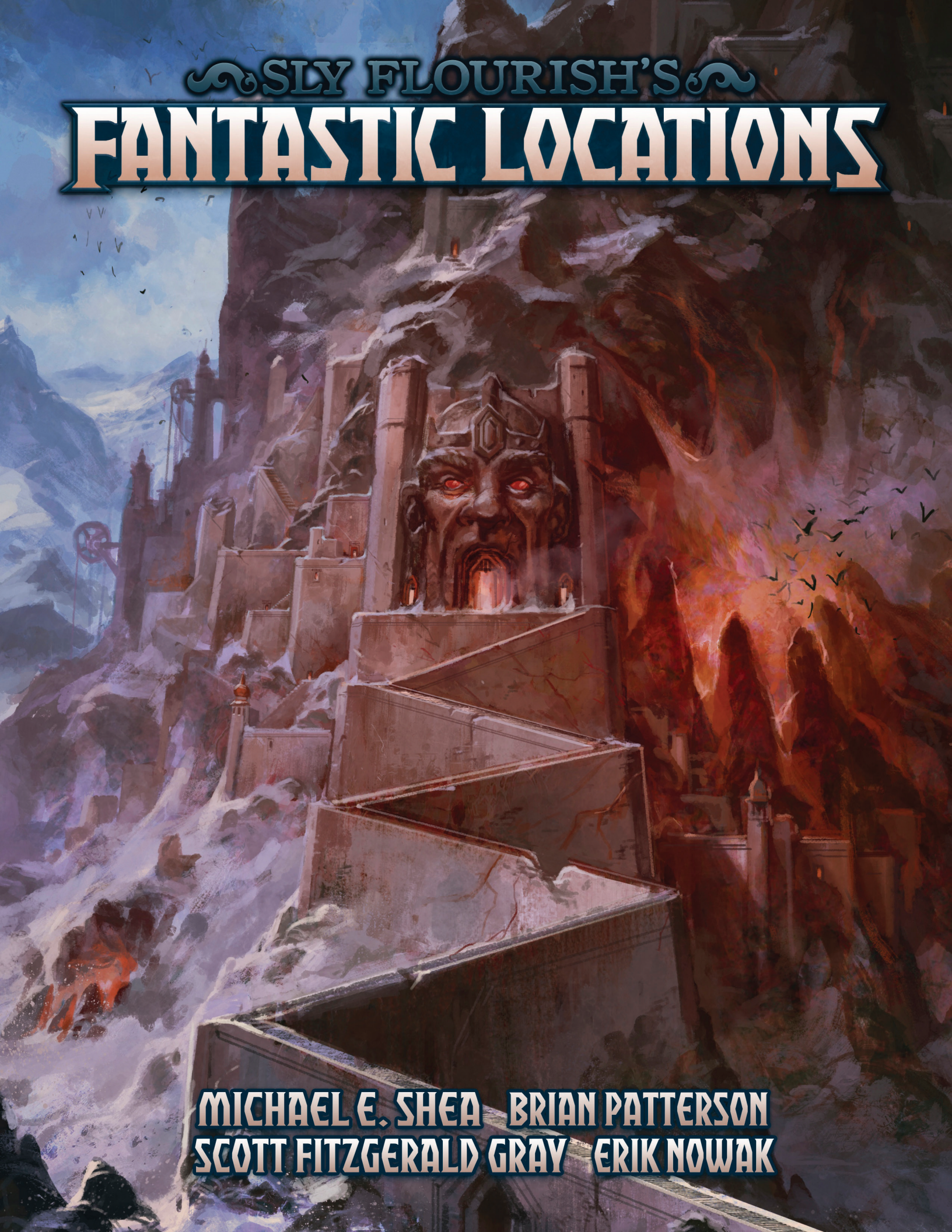
SLY FLOURISH'S
FANTASTIC LOCATIONS
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SLY FLOURISH'S FANTASTIC LOCATIONS

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Cover art © 2015 by Guido Kuip
guidokuip.blogspot.com

Editing by Scott Fitzgerald Gray
insaneangel.com

Internal artwork and cover design by Brian Patterson
d20monkey.com

Page design by Erik Nowak
eriknowakdesign.blogspot.com

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Our fantasy roleplaying games require a lot of elements to become truly fantastic and entertaining, both for our players and for us as GMs. Interesting story seeds, deep NPC personalities, thought-provoking investigation, awesome monsters, and powerful action all blend together to make our games great.

Some of these elements are easier to manage than others. We can find useful foes in any of the monster books that accompany our games. Deep and interesting NPCs require little more than borrowing cool characters from our favorite books, movies, and TV shows. However, a few key elements are harder to assemble. We often can't come up with all the important features of a setting right at the table. To make a game interesting, we need a physical background that can take our imaginations into a higher plane of thinking. We need a place to house our interesting NPCs and dangerous monsters, as well as the lost secrets our PCs choose to investigate, and we need that place to seem as real as the world we inhabit.

WE NEED FANTASTIC LOCATIONS.

In this book, you will find twenty fantastic locations. Each has been designed to inspire your imagination and give you the details you need make a location come to life at your table. Each is ready to be filled with your own stories, your own clues, your own threats, and your own devious villains.

+ + +

HOW TO USE THESE LOCATIONS

These locations are meant to aid you in building your own deep adventures, shaped from the stories developed by you and your players. This book does not contain complete adventures unto themselves. Instead, these fantastic locations are designed to be populated by your own monsters and villainous groups, seeded with your own clues, and wrapped within your own world. They're designed to be universal enough within the realm of high fantasy that you can place them in many campaign worlds without having to twist your story too far away from your intention.

Think of this book as something like a bestiary for locations. As with a monster book, you can use this book in a number of different ways. If a location catches your attention, you can make it the cornerstone of an encounter, an adventure, or an entire campaign. Alternatively, you can just keep the book handy for that moment when the campaign goes off in an unexpected direction and you need to pull out an interesting location in a hurry.

INFINITE EXPANSION

Each location is intended to serve as the foundation for a short adventure. However, each can just as easily be expanded to suit a small campaign if you so desire. Because all these locations have been designed to be open-ended, you can add to them as you like, letting them grow as your adventure expands. Every dungeon is a potential megadungeon in this way, and there is no end to the caverns, tunnels, chambers, and passageways that might lie beneath these locations.

WHERE ARE THE MAPS?

Many of these locations don't have fixed maps, but we didn't simply forget them. Rather, we wanted to ensure that you could fill out any location to suit your needs and the desires of your players. These locations contain many blank spots—areas you can fill in yourself or with which you can create connections to other places in your world. Alternatively, you might just want a focused and limited location for a quick single-session game. Either way, you can place these locations anywhere in the world you want and change their environments however you wish.

Depending on what sort of adventure you're going to run, you can quickly sketch out a set of passages, halls, or other connections that tie the chambers in these locations together. If you want a more linear adventure, this might just be individual halls connecting different rooms. A more open adventure might feature dozens of halls and smaller chambers that connect to the larger chambers of these locations.

You can plan this out ahead of time or leave it open, building the connections between chambers while the game unfolds at your table. Fill connecting hallways or passages with interesting features such as mosaics of ancient history, devastating traps, or the bodies of adventurers who passed this way before.

REALMS OF MULTIPLE USES

Each of these fantastic locations includes a description of its history but little information about how the location is being used now. As with the blank spots talked about above, we don't know how you'll use these locations, so we left their current status for you to decide. A location might be a lair for a villain the PCs are currently hunting. It might be the site of a lost artifact or a collection of relics the characters require. It might have been taken over by a band of gnolls who now use it as their headquarters.

RESKINNING FANTASTIC LOCATIONS

Though these locations are described mostly within a realm of high fantasy, they can be easily reworked for use in other fantasy roleplaying settings. With a little adjustment, they might make great locations for science fantasy settings. We've kept a wide range of worlds in mind while writing these locations, and because these locations are all system agnostic, you can use a location just as easily in whatever system you choose to run.

Whatever your world, whatever your system, you are hereby given full authority to rip these locations apart, repaint them with garish colors, or hang lightsabers from the walls. Do whatever you want to make these locations your own, and to fit them into the story you want to tell. Perhaps the Dark Abbey is better in the desert, or the Ziggurats of the Doom Priests are actually found deep underground. Every location and detail in this book is yours to use however you want to use it, to make your life easier and your game great.

POTENTIAL INHABITANTS AND AREA ASPECTS

Each fantastic location includes a list of potential inhabitants and area aspects. These can help you decide where the location might be found, and who or what might be found in it. Doing so makes it easy to fit a location into your own adventures.

The "Potential Inhabitants" section describes the types of creatures that might inhabit a location, and can help you decide what sorts of creatures make sense to run at that location. These creature tags can also help you determine which locations would work well with existing creatures you plan to use in your campaign.

"Location Aspects" and "Area Aspects" give you and your players a quick reference of the most important features of a general location or specific area. Drawn from the roleplaying game Fate Core, aspects are tools that you and your players can incorporate into the scenes that take place in a location. If you like, you can write down these aspects on 3×5 note cards or on a dry-erase battle map so that you and your players remember to bring them into the game.

You can wrap these aspects within the mechanics of whatever roleplaying game you choose. How you choose to use these aspects is completely up to you.

CONNECTORS

Many fantastic locations include sections describing the potential connectors between chambers. We've included read-aloud text you can use to describe these connectors, and to set up the ways that adventurers will move from place to place. But as with everything in the book, you are free to describe or reskin connectors however you wish. Add your own traps, encounters, artwork, and other clues to drive the story you and your players create.

DESIGN NOTES

A number of locations also feature a section titled "Design Notes." These notes offer thoughts and suggestions on how particular locations might fit into your game. A design note might suggest ways to reskin a location or an area to fit into different types of games. Another might offer thoughts about potential directions for open-ended designs.

These fantastic locations are written specifically to leave blanks for you and your players to fill out during the game. There is no canon here, and no right or wrong way to use them. These are big bags of building blocks, from which you can quickly and easily form your own memorable settings and encounters.



THE ZIGGURATS OF THE DOOM PRIESTS

Built into the cliffs of a steep mountainside, the ruins of three ziggurats rise above the jungle surrounding them. Twin waterfalls flow from caverns deep in the cliff walls between the three ziggurats, tumbling into rivers that form a natural moat around the central ziggurat. A crumbling stone bridge spans the moat, leading to a set of sturdy stone doors in the central ziggurat. Two huge pillars stand before the ziggurats, while a third has collapsed into rubble. Massive carvings of dead gods decorate the stonework of the ruins.

Thousands of years ago, the worshipers of merciless gods forced slaves to build these massive stone ziggurats and their accompanying towers. The focused zealotry of the jungle tribesfolk solidified the power of rulers known as the doom priests, creating dynasties that lasted for centuries. Ancient tombs, hidden treasure vaults, sacrificial altars, and devastating traps now fill the ruins of the ziggurats. An expansive network of caves and passageways connect the towers, ziggurats, and pits to the mountain behind them.

Potential Inhabitants: Undead, humanoids, monstrous humanoids, unintelligent monsters, constructs

Location Aspects: Isolated old ruin, hidden temple, haunted catacombs, forbidden towers

Forbidden Ziggurats Buried in the Jungle

It took centuries of rebellion and infighting to destroy the power base of the doom priests who ruled the ziggurats. Over time, the area has taken on a dark reputation that keeps local folk away. Some whisper

that the site is still cursed by the priests who died there. Others claim to hear the voices of thousands of dead slaves still screaming from the pits where they fell. The darkest rumors claim that an ancient god sleeps within the lost chambers of the central ziggurat, waiting to be woken. Whatever truth might lie behind the myths, countless souls and an ocean of blood have bathed the temples over the years, soaking into the unhallowed earth below it.

A History of Sacrifice, Slavery, and Dark Worship

For centuries, the doom priests ruled with claims of divine blood, inherited from a god demanding endless sacrifice. Inbred over centuries, the families of these doom priests were kept separate from the slaves who served them. A single king or queen ruled over the land, with a council of high priests in attendance. When the king or queen died, the high priests would select a new monarch by the same secret process by which new priests ascended to the council. This ensured a stable and insular ruling class presiding over a slave nation.

Thousands of sacrifices were conducted over the years. In addition to drawing on their slaves, the doom priests would often select sacrificial victims from their own ranks, based on political differences. Priests who opposed the will of the council would sometimes see their children marked for sacrifice, ensuring that their family lines would be ended. Elaborate machines of execution were constructed that could eviscerate dozens of people at once. The screams of the dying could be heard across all lands controlled by the doom priests, and the bodies of the dead filled endless numbers of sacrificial pits.

CONNECTORS: THE ZIGGURAT HALLS

Faded paint on crumbling stone walls depicts ancient ceremonies and rites. The smell of dust and decay fills the humid air in a 10-foot-wide, 10-foot-high corridor. A number of large wall blocks have been pushed inward by thick roots and vines.

Area Aspects: Dust in the humid air, thick roots breaking through the walls, faded paintings on the stones

These halls have succumbed to the decay of the temple. Ancient traps powered and reset by water flowing through the temple still remain operational.

HOLLOW PILLARS

Each of the two standing pillars reaches some two hundred feet into the sky. The third, lying in ruin, reveals that the pillars are hollow and filled with a network of chambers. The ruins of the third pillar have been picked clean over centuries, leaving nothing but stone behind. The large and gruesome faces of gods both humanoid and bestial decorate the highest reaches of the surviving towers. Though hollow, no visible entrances appear on the outer surface of those pillars. However, thick vines have worked their way into the cracks between their massive stone blocks.

Area Aspects: Grotesque stone heads, crumbling stone walls, thick vines

Though they have stood for centuries, the weakened walls of the pillars could crumble under a strong force, exposing their inner chambers. Those chambers show signs of having been both a decadent lair and a prison. Warm water heated by the sun outside flows into large and beautifully carved sunken baths. The rotted remains of large beds, painted wooden chests, and children's toys can be found intact within these chambers. Wooden racks hold parchment and vellum scrolls, many of which have rotted away with age and humidity. Paintings on the walls of the chambers in the pillar depict the lives of royal families from birth through death. These rulers lived wholly within the chambers of the pillars, the enlarged pupils of their eyes having never being exposed to daylight.

Massive statues guard the spiral ramps and heavy stone doors that connect the different levels of each pillar. A narrow stone staircase leads into the catacombs beneath each tower, appearing to be the only way in or out.

The upper chambers of each tower feature an altar still stained with dried royal blood, and presided over by a grotesque statue of a half-bestial god. The outside roof of each pillar holds a large iron brazier, along with chains and shackles that would once have held prisoners for sacrifice. The fires of these braziers must have made the pillars visible by night for miles around.

BURIAL CHAMBERS

The smell of rot and decay flows out from the cracked stones of the smaller ziggurats. The roots of nearby trees have pierced through the walls of these crumbled ruins, and decayed corpses tumble from the remnants of stacked crypts. Small, dark passages lead farther into these burial chambers.

Area Aspects: Crumbling stacked crypts, invading roots

The two smaller ziggurats contain the burial chambers of the doom priests, along with their earthly treasures. Shattered sarcophagi and stone chests speak to years of looting. Skeletons wrapped in the remains of elaborate costumes are chained to the walls, appearing to be servants, concubines, spouses, and children buried alive along with their dead lords. A few large stone doors flanked by armed statues appear strangely untouched.

SACRIFICIAL PITS

Foliage almost completely covers these deep pits, as though the world itself wished to swallow up their existence. Crumbling dirt and slick mud ring the edge of each pit, threatening a fall to any who stand too close. Skeletal hands frozen in death reach up from the darkness below, while agonized skulls, jaws agape, seem to seek any light from above.

Area Aspects: Hidden deep pits, dangerous edges

These sacrificial pits are scattered throughout the ruins. Some are easy to spot, while others are heavily obscured. Small tunnels at the bottom of these pits connect with tunnels leading to the pillars, the ziggurats, and other deeper caves. More than a few recent digs contain the remains of would-be treasure hunters. Hoping to find lost relics within the tunnels, they instead found only their own violent deaths.

CONNECTORS: THE TUNNELS OF THE DAMNED

Stinking of rot and death, these narrow dirt tunnels extend throughout the ground underneath the temples. Strange symbols have been carved into the dirt with bleeding hands, showing that those who once dwelled here continued to worship the dark gods responsible for their fate.

Area Aspects: Narrow dirt tunnels, bloodstained symbols

These tunnels extend for miles around the ziggurats, and often connect to the deep sacrificial pits. More distant tunnels extend into the caves behind the waterfall, and some might even connect to the lower chambers of the pillars and the ziggurats.

THE FALLS

Tall waterfalls spill out from caves high up on the cliffs behind the ziggurats, flowing into the moat surrounding the largest ziggurat. Driven by the water, the rumble of grinding stone pulses through the stonework of this ancient site. Water also flows out from the temple, returning back into the river.

Area Aspects: High waterfalls, loud rushing water, slick stone rocks, hidden water catches

Large catches use the flowing water of the falls to feed into pools, fountains, and water-powered machinery within the main ziggurat. Some of these catches continue to operate, while the passage of time has left others in ruins. The water that emerges from the ziggurat appears oily and dark, as though something within the ziggurat has tainted and poisoned it.

Hundreds of caves high up on the mountainside near the falls reveal the remains of thick veins of gold. Heavily mined centuries ago, they speak to the riches and decadence of the doom priests.

TREASURE VAULTS

Obsidian statues of beast-headed humanoids guard these stone vaults. Carved scenes of decadence and murder decorate the walls. Pillars of gold-laced sandstone hold up the cracked, vaulted ceiling.

Area Aspects: Obsidian beast-headed statues, gold-laced pillars

Golden statues and gem-encrusted jewelry and adornments reveal the wealth of the doom priests. The treasure vaults of the central ziggurat hold and protect these vast riches. Some of these vaults have been breeched and looted, while others remain heavily trapped and guarded. Their petrified guardians stand upright, wrapped in black-runed cloth and wielding obsidian weapons as sharp as glass.

MACHINES OF THE ZIGGURAT

The rumble of stone and rushing water echoes through this chamber. Water flows from spouts on the sides of the chamber, turning massive stone wheels. Notched discs of iron are caught by rods embedded in the stone wheels, turning as they pull a complex series of chains that disappear into holes in the walls.

Area Aspects: Rumbling stone gear works, large turning iron disks, complex series of chains

This chamber operates a vast network of mechanisms that close doors, power fountains, and reset traps throughout the central ziggurat. Even after the death of the doom priests centuries ago, many of the machines of the ziggurat continue to operate.

CHAMBER OF DARK SECRETS

Images of hundreds of humanoids being crushed between floor and ceiling are carved into the pillars of this pyramid-shaped room. Stone benches sit in a triangular pattern surrounding a platform of dark granite. A pedestal shaped in the form of two cupped, clawed hands with seven fingers rises in the center of the platform.

Area Aspects: Grotesque pillars, granite platform, clawed pedestal

The pedestal is the resting place of an ancient tome, thousands of years older than the stonework of the ziggurats. The book speaks of dark rites and terrible magic that will bring power to the doom priests for a thousand generations. Many of the pages are stained with blood. Others have been burned or raggedly torn as if by hands clutched in madness. Skeletons frozen in the final act of reaching for the book lay in a circle around the pedestal, their skin and bones burned to black ash.

DESIGN NOTE:
Is the book still on the pedestal? Has it been stolen and replaced with something else? Has some terrible power already been unleashed here? Does some small, intelligent creature now use the pedestal as a throne? Tune this room and its contents to the story of your own adventure.

THRONE OF THE DOOM GOD

Blood stains the pillars of this large chamber, whose alcoves reveal the leering faces of demonic statues. Crumbling steps lead to a raised platform where the statue of a many-armed god sits on a huge stone throne. Gold- and silver-lined symbols decorate the throne. Two of the statue's hands are outstretched and covered in blackened dried blood. The dark eyes of the statue appear hollow.

Area Aspects: Bloodstained pillars, leering demonic statues, many-armed god statue, gold-glyphed throne

The long-desiccated remains of bodies torn and shredded for the amusement of the doom priests and their hate-filled gods lie scattered across the chamber floor. Barbed hooks and wicked chains provide clues to the most vile of ceremonies conducted in worship of the Doom God. Hidden cubicles and passageways lead off from this chamber, including one behind the statue.

DESIGN NOTE:
Whatever other creatures might call this location home, this is a likely area for a boss monster. It's possible that an evil even worse than the doom priests resides deep beneath the throne, calling twisted and powerful monsters to this place.

THE SKY TEMPLE

A weatherworn statue of a multiarmed bestial god sits in the center of this open-sky temple at the top of the largest of the three ziggurats. An altar stained brown from centuries of sacrifice sits at the feet of the bestial god. A deep shaft in front of the altar leads hundreds of feet into the earth, below the lowest levels of the ziggurat.

Area Aspects: Multiarmed bestial statue, bloodstained altar, deep sacrificial pit

The shaft leads down into a charnel pit filled with the remains of thousands of sacrifices. A web of tunnels spreads out through the area, including passages that lead to the cracked cellars of the ziggurats. Local legends speak of flesh-eating creatures that once claimed these tunnels as their own.



THE STRUCTURE IN THE ICE

A huge excavation pit has been carved into a seemingly endless expanse of glacial ice. Large fissures traverse the ice, and the curved roofs of yurts dot the frozen landscape nearby. A wooden scaffold has been built along the edge of the excavation, and a ramp follows the wall deep into the pit. At the lowest level of the excavation, buried under ice more than a million years old, a surface of smooth black metal has been revealed. A large crack is the only mark on the structure's surface.

The remnants of countless centuries of exploration remain scattered around the excavation and frozen into the ice. However, little progress appears to have been made toward uncovering the mysterious structure at the base of the pit. Though its dark surface remains partially exposed, its secrets still hide deep below, offering limitless rewards of knowledge and artifacts for those willing to face the screams of infinity said to howl through alien halls.

Potential Inhabitants: Outsiders, demons, devils, angels, aberrations, aliens, constructs, magical beings

Location Aspects: Uncovered, unexplored, otherworldly, ancient, arctic, extraterrestrial, extraplanar

Many Possible Origins

The strange nature of the structure makes it impossible to know its origins. Many theories might exist to explain its true nature, from the ruins of ancient humanoids who populated the land millions of years ago, to a planar warship that crashed through

worlds into this location, a craft from the deep reaches of space or time, or a stronghold to godlike beings that secretly ruled over the world for millennia.

Whatever its origin, the vastness of its size and scope means the Structure in the Ice could only have been built by intelligent beings.

DESIGN NOTE:
As written, this fantastic location has a distinct feel of science fiction and alien technology that may or may not fit your game. In a straight-up fantasy campaign, you can create an extraplanar origin for the structure rather than an extraterrestrial one, and focus your details on its strange arcane properties.

If you want to add a slice of science fiction into your fantasy game, focus more on the alien properties of the structure and avoid references to pure magic. Nanobots, nuclear fusion, and computer systems might be found throughout the structure. Such technology will be so advanced as to appear magic to the characters, but will be understandable as science fiction to your players.

EXCAVATION PIT

A wide, icy path spirals down into the depths of the pit along its outer wall, creating a walkway that narrows as it descends. The vast dig speaks to centuries of hard labor. At the bottom of the pit, the walkway splits off into various caves and chambers. The uncovered structure sits at the bottom of the pit. A large crack in the metal surface of the structure has created an accidental entrance into its inner chambers.

Area Aspects: Icy spiral walkways, caves and chambers, large surface crack in the metal

Given the hardness of the structure's black metal, it isn't clear what caused the crack in its surface.

ABANDONED YURTS COVERED IN ICE

Ice-covered yurts, the forgotten shelters used by generations of explorers, dot the glacier around the two excavation points leading to the structure. Many have been frozen under the ice by the movement of the glacier, but a number of yurts of varying sizes remain on the surface.

Area Aspects: Small and large yurts, yurts frozen under the ice

Some of the surviving yurts hold the frozen remains of barbarian explorers, many of whom appear to have taken their own lives. Characters who use the yurts for shelter might hear those barbarians whispering in the night, or hear clawing sounds on the outside of the frozen yurts as unseen creatures try to reach the living within.

THE GRAVE

A large block of ice has been cut away from the glacial mass near the base of the structure. The shape of the hole that remains where the ice was removed suggests some kind of humanoid form once buried there.

Area Aspects: Mysterious grave

What became of the missing block of ice and those who dug it out is a mystery. Those who look upon the site feel a great sense of unease, as though the remnant of some malevolent alien consciousness still marks whatever creature might once have been buried here.

CREVASSE OF THE DEAD

The remains of frozen ropes lead down into a narrow crevasse. The bottom of the great rift reveals the black metal of the structure, with a triangular opening cut into its surface. The walls of the rift contain the frozen forms of countless creatures, all long dead and many extinct—including grim-faced humanoids who stare out from within the ice.

Area Aspects: Frozen ropes, narrow crevasse, frozen remains of humanoids and beasts, triangular entryway

Razor-sharp rocks and ice line this deep and narrow crevasse. The humanoids frozen fast into the walls are barbarian explorers, whose crude climbing equipment and bronze weapons can still be seen within the ice.

The bottom of the crevasse leads to the structure's only known original entrance—a triangular opening running twenty feet from corner to corner. Sharp edges on the opening threaten to sever any rope used to enter the structure. The age of the creatures around this entryway reveal that the crevasse is much older than the main dig above.

Glyph-Marked Walls of Black Metal

The massive walls of the structure dwarf any mortals who step within its entrances. As characters explore, they discover that the structure's interior spaces rise hundreds of feet high and spread for miles in all directions. No one can say how large the structure actually is—or even whether its interior matches its external physical size. The few who have come out of the structure with their sanity intact say that its interior dimensions defy reality.

The walls of the structure are built in sweeping organic shapes, and are constructed of a black metal unknown in the world. Attempts to cut or crack the metal all uniformly fail, and attempting to do so might cause unforeseen and catastrophic results.

Characters who study the black walls closely notice tiny runes covering them in intricate detail. To manually carve runes in such abundance would have taken many thousands of years. Those attempting to transcribe the runes find that no rune ever precisely matches another—and eventually feel their minds and sanity begin to unravel.

Central Hall

So vast is the chamber below the excavation pit entrance that light cannot touch its outer walls. A mist hangs beneath the entrance, hiding any sign of the bottom of the chamber, though strange echoes give signs of the area's huge and asymmetric shape. On the floor hundreds of feet below the rift, a massive statue of a featureless humanoid stands at the center of the chamber. Its arms are outstretched, with long, gnarled fingers hanging down.

> ***Area Aspects:*** Strange mist, massive chamber, featureless humanoid statue

All the surfaces of this chamber are covered in a layer of frost that has built up over hundreds of years. The faint tracks of other explorers—along with numerous frozen corpses—are scattered throughout the area.

Exploring the depths of this central hall can take hours. Doing so reveals numerous tunnels heading off in different directions, each marked by a triangular-shaped door (see "Connectors").

If the statue is observed for any length of time, its shape seems to change subtly. However, characters observing it cannot determine what manner of creature it represents.

Connectors: Triangular Halls, Doors, and Spiral Lifts

The halls of the structure are opaque black, and made of the same unknown material as the structure's exterior. The walls of these corridors angle up to create a triangle roughly ten feet on each side, wide enough for two humanoid creatures to walk abreast. Any close inspection reveals tiny geometric symbols covering the walls in incredible detail, with no symbol repeated twice.

> ***Area Aspects:*** Opaque black walls, triangular-shaped halls, tiny geometric symbols on the walls

Triangular-shaped doors block off the tunnels and chambers of the structure. When touched, a door opens from the center like a three-bladed iris, its razor-sharp panels sliding away into the recesses of the wall with a hiss.

There are no stairs here. Instead, thin walkways spiral down vast shafts descending hundreds of feet deeper into the structure. Whether those who constructed the structure used these spirals or had some other way to traverse the vertical passages is unknown.

Star Map

A narrow walkway leads to a circular platform in the center of a perfectly spherical chamber. A chrome orb floats ten feet above the platform's center. The spherical walls of the chamber seem to absorb all light, giving the impression of standing in completely empty space.

> ***Area Aspects:*** Floating chrome orb, spherical chamber, narrow walkway

When the orb is grasped, it projects a three-dimensional display of the night sky. By manipulating the orb in ways you determine (including by thought), a character can change the view, or might even open up views to other planes of existence. No force can move the floating orb from its position.

HALL OF FACES

A raised platform sits in the center of a circular room with a domed ceiling above. Four massive humanoid faces, built from the same black metal as the rest of the structure, stare out with blank eyes from the platform. When any creature approaches, large glyphs flare to life on the forehead of each of the faces.

Area Aspects: Raised platform, statues of four large humanoid faces, glyphs

Characters can only speculate as to whether these faces represent the creators of the structure or the lost gods they might have worshiped. Under the right circumstances and when asked the right questions, these faces might speak in a language far more complicated than any known by mortals.

THRONE ROOM

On the far wall of this vast chamber, a stepped platform supports a massive throne—a twisted web of black metal crowned by thirteen spikes. Statues of giants, their foreheads marked by glyphs and their hands holding all manner of strange weapons, tower over the central walkway leading to the huge throne.

Area Aspects: Glyph-marked giant statues, huge throne of black metal webwork and spikes

What forces protect this chamber, and what happens if a mortal creature ascends the throne, is left for you to determine.

VIOLET GATE

Beams of energy lance out from the asymmetrical walls of this chamber. Where they meet in its center, a pulsating oval of violet light shines brightly, illuminating scraps of paper and parchment scattered across the floor. The surface of the oval of light is so perfectly flat that it disappears entirely if gazed upon from the side.

Area Aspects: Energy beams, two-dimensional oval of violet light

When looking at the oval from the front, a character can observe strange swirling patterns across its surface. The paper and parchment scraps are the remnants of old journals that describe explorers who stepped within the oval and disappeared. Most never returned, according to accounts left behind by companions, but a few emerged again only seconds later—raving mad and looking as though they had aged decades or centuries.

PSYCHIC LIBRARY

Row upon row of carved metal shelves in this area hold tens of thousands of strange metal spheres, each of which scintillates with its own energy and light. The shape of the room belies understanding. Though its corners appear to be perfect right angles, there are far too many of them to form a simple rectangle. One might get lost in the angles of this room simply by looking too closely at them.

Area Aspects: Rows of metal shelves, thousands of scintillating orbs, strange room geometry

As characters begin to explore the area, they discover corpses—both ancient and recent—scattered throughout this room. Some appear to have died of starvation, while others fell to wounds. Among the latter corpses, many show signs of having cut off their own body parts to devour before succumbing to death.

DESIGN NOTE:
Many secrets might be found in the psychic library. What are the spheres? Do they show images of vast alien worlds? Do they contain magic or technology thousands of years beyond current understanding? Or do they fracture the minds of mortal creatures that touch them, filling them with thoughts that cannot be bound within the brain?

TIME DILATION SPHERE

A pedestal sits in the center of this hemispherical chamber, with a black orb roughly three feet in diameter floating above it. Small pieces of stone hang in the air around the sphere.

Area Aspects: Time dilation orb, orbiting rocks

As characters approach the orb, time seems to slow down, so that those closest to it see those farther away moving faster. The stones floating near the orb were thrown there centuries earlier but have yet to hit its surface.

The rate of time dilation increases exponentially as one gets closer to the orb. Characters who understand the alchemy of mathematics can determine that the sphere must be a product of centuries or even

millennia earlier than the present day. Whether the sphere contains some powerful artifact or a creature locked outside of time is unknown.

CHAMBER OF THE OBELISK

A triangular obelisk twice the height of a human stands in the center of this large chamber. The surface of each of the obelisk's three sides is relief-carved with incredibly complex glyphs. On occasion, one of the glyphs pulses with a violet light.

Area Aspects: Triangular obelisk, complex glyphs, pulsing violet light

This obelisk is some form of control structure for the rest of the chamber. If properly controlled (a task outside the capabilities of all but the most exceptional mortals), the obelisk allows the viewing and control of various aspects within the Structure in the Ice. The obelisk pulses each time something happens elsewhere in the structure (a door opening, an item being activated, and so forth).



PYRAMID OF THE NIGHT KING

A curtain of windblown sand and dust parts to reveal the ominous sight of a black pyramid rising from the eternal desert. Though the continual sandstorm that flows around it can tear flesh from bone and turn mountains into dust, the structure appears completely untouched. A large crack appears to be the only mark on its surface of black stone.

The thirty feet of the pyramid visible above the sand is merely the tip of a much larger structure, uncovered by the fury of the storm and producing a feeling of great unease in those who gaze upon it. A huge crack in the surface of the pyramid reveals that its black surface is an impenetrable shell covering cracked sandstone, and gives access to chambers buried beneath the sand. Though most attribute the crack to the structure's great age, mad sages among the desert folk whisper that this entrance appeared with the specific purpose of tempting souls to travel into the unholy halls below.

Potential Inhabitants: Undead, constructs, demons, outsiders, magical beings, desert nomads

Location Aspects: Tomb, temple, undiscovered, traps, magical

History of the Night King

Throughout the pyramid, pictographs and reliefs describe an imperial dynasty tens of thousands of years old. The last of these rulers was known as the Night King for his fascination with the transition between life and death. These reliefs and pictographs show a land of prosperity brought to ruin during the Night King's empire, as he drained his country's resources to build

dread machines, concoct terrible alchemy, and engage in horrifying experiments. His people eventually revolted, burying the Night King in a tomb of his own construction after preserving his dark history on the walls of its inner chambers.

Unholy Sandstorm

Characters whose ancestry goes back far enough might recall tales of the sandstorm that rushed over the black pyramid and destroyed the city surrounding it. Some say the storm was the creation of gods who sought to wash away the Night King's blasphemy. Others claim the Night King called its winds himself, to destroy those who sought his demise. The storm raged for decades, burying the pyramid beneath great dunes. Recent storms have uncovered the tip of the pyramid, which now rises black above white sands.

A Tomb of Boundless Ego

The pyramid is built from blocks of dense sandstone and contains over a dozen interconnected levels. Currently, only the top two levels stand above the dunes, while the rest of the vast pyramid remains hidden beneath the sand. The Night King's tomb contains vast chambers designed to bolster his ego, aid him in calling out to the voices in the darkness, and to serve his dark experiments. Images of the monarch's self-centered reign can be found throughout the halls and chambers of the tomb, in the form of huge obsidian statues and intricate gemstone mosaics embedded into sandstone walls. Those who look too deeply into those images continue to see them in their dreams and nightmares for the rest of their lives.

Dark Crevice

On one surface of the exposed pyramid, a large crevice has opened up in the stone. More than twenty feet high, the opening exposes two of the uppermost levels of the ancient tomb. All light outside the pyramid is seemingly absorbed by its black stone surface, and swirling shadows obscure the details of the chambers within the crevice.

Area Aspects: Upper part of black pyramid, large crevice in the stone, nonreflective black surface unmarked for thousands of years

The crevice appears unnatural in origin, and is a sharp contrast to how the stone that surrounds it remains unblemished despite countless years of erosion. It is clear that only an extremely powerful force could have created this opening.

Connectors: Halls of the Night King

Beautiful and intricate paintings decorate the stone walls of the halls and ramps that crisscross the interior of the pyramid. Decorative tiles on the floors are each marked with unique glyphs inlaid with gold, silver, and crushed gemstones.

Area Aspects: Intricate paintings, glyph-marked floor tiles

Numerous traps of both magical and mechanical nature once protected these halls—and many might still be functioning. In those areas where would-be grave robbers have tread, only blackened bones remain.

Chamber of the Orb

A sphere of scintillating energy radiates a kaleidoscope of colors across the walls of the uppermost chamber of the pyramid. Its light illuminates intricate mosaics of gemstones set in strange, indescribable patterns. Pulses of light travel from the sphere out to these gemstones, then flow like rivers of color down into the floor.

Area Aspects: Scintillating orb, pathways of illuminated gemstones, intricate mosaics

Some claim the orb is a mysterious power source—a construct of another world that absorbs the energy of our own world and spreads it throughout the pyramid. Others claim it is a container holding souls trapped by the Night King. Those few who have attempted to manipulate the orb have never been able to speak of their experiences.

Chambers of Beauty and Horror

The decoration and adornments of this chamber reveal centuries of unspeakable sin. Mosaics depict the Night King's acts of gluttony, lust, and greed. Immense baths still stained with blood sit within chambers of gold-laced stones.

Area Aspects: Sinful adornments, beautiful and horrible chambers, bloodstained baths, ramped halls adorned with glowing gemstones

The personal chambers of the Night King are testament to his most private and horrifying desires. Numerous such chambers exist throughout the pyramid, some holding beauty that can bring tears to the eyes of those who behold them. Others are filled with such horrors that they bring nightmares to any characters who see them.

Long ramps set within tunnels and adorned with glowing gems lead from these upper chambers to the lower halls of the pyramid. Though the gems are tens of thousands of years old, magical power still infuses them, threatening to shred the bodies and strip the souls of those foolish enough to step through them.

THE NIGHT KING'S LEGACY

Hieroglyphics decorating the walls of these chambers describe them as the final resting places of the wives and children of the Night King. One chamber is adorned with stone tombs, each of which is decorated with the visage of a beautiful queen. Other chambers hold glass cylinders within which the bodies of women and children have been perfectly preserved, staring out now with glass eyes. Some of the Night King's other offspring are entombed in terrible structures of torture, their bodies twisted into unnatural shapes and their faces frozen in agony.

Area Aspects: Stone sarcophagi of queens, bodies preserved in glass, displays of bodies twisted in torture

Each member of the Night King's family has a monument of sorts, whether a jeweled urn or an ebony sarcophagus scattered throughout these chambers. However, even those precious to him were not safe from his evil. Some of his wives and children were tended to with great care, while others were tortured and left to succumb to death and madness.

HALL OF SCREAMS

The mummified remains of twisted and disfigured monstrosities adorn this nightmarish chamber. Some are packed into large jars, their faces pressed up against the glass. Others are spread across and nailed to walls. Many of these creatures appear to have human elements to them, from half a human face fused with a web of unnatural bone, to a pair of childlike arms protruding from the chest of an insectoid carapace. Many of the malformed abominations appear to have died shortly after birth, but a few have the appearance of monstrous adults. Mosaics on the walls depict the terrible experiments conducted by the Night King to construct these horrors. Some of them, he appears to treat as a parent would treat a child. Others are shown as victims of his frustration and unbridled rage.

Area Aspects: Corpses of twisted monstrosities, alchemical laboratories, dark mosaics

The desert dwellers still whisper of the hideous experiments that created the so-called children of the Night King. It is not clear whether these beings are truly his offspring or simply referred to as such because of the attention he paid them. Regardless, they are clearly twisted lifeforms from some nightmare realm—hideous beings pieced together from the flesh of humanoids, demons, and the living dead.

BLACK TOMB

In the heart of the pyramid lies the tomb of the Night King. Gold etchings on obsidian walls depict his thousand-year reign, showing the lands he conquered, the people he wiped out, his dark creations, his fascination with death, and his explorations outside of existence. The Night King's sarcophagus is an upright block of iron that features his own gaunt, hooded visage decorating its front.

Stone guardians stand along the walls of this trapezoidal chamber. Some depict the Night King's most powerful guardians and warriors. Others depict magical beasts of the desert. One depicts an entity pulled from the depths of the Abyss. One represents a twisted being formed from the flesh and bones of the dead.

Area Aspects: Guardian statues, gold-etched walls, iron tomb of the Night King

The Night King's sarcophagus is trapped with all manner of physical and magical protections. The tomb chamber is littered with the bones of a thousand years' worth of tomb robbers who sought the Night King's treasures.

ETERNAL FOUNTAIN

A fountain carved from ash-gray marble dominates the center of this circular chamber, while pillars of gold-laced granite line the walls. Sculptures of wondrous celestials in the center of the fountain pour fresh water from their outstretched hands into the basin below.

Area Aspects: Gold-laced pillars, wondrous celestial-carved fountain, eternal supply of water

Though the pyramid is buried deep beneath the desert sands, the fountain continues to flow with fresh water. Its unseen source lies deep beneath the fountain, where a tiny rift opens up between the mortal realm and the Elemental Plane of Water. From this rift, water flows into the fountain and through various copper pipes that feed reservoirs throughout the pyramid.

CHAMBER OF WORLDS

A large rectangular stone frame sits in the center of this dark chamber, encircled by a ring of strange glyphs and runes that pulse with a faint violet light. A piercing white light shines from within the frame, flickering sporadically. The walls are lined by statues of demonic forms, which appear as though they wish to tear through the stone and into the mortal realm.

Area Aspects: Demonic statues, flickering piercing light, large stone frame, glyph-marked circle

Legends whispered by the oldest sages say that the stone frame in this chamber is a powerful portal. By using the right ceremonies and incantations, it is said that the gate can be activated and used to travel to unknown worlds. Some fear that doing so will cause a planar rift to tear open, spilling out all manner of horrifying creatures—including those with a taste for the blood of mortals gained from feasting on the Night King's sacrificial victims.



THE UNDERCITY

Deep beneath a bustling city lies a series of hidden chambers and forgotten caves. Those folk discarded, hunted, or hated by the citizens of the world above have found a place in these underground halls, forming their own loose and bloody society. Many people on the surface know of the Undercity. However, the righteous understand that it is impossible to push out all the undesirables who lurk below, and the corrupt know all too well the value the Undercity brings to the city above.

No direct conflict has yet occurred between the folk of these two worlds, for few are capable of rallying either side beneath a single banner. Most of those in the city simply pretend that the Undercity doesn't exist, or use it as a threat against unruly children. "Behave," they say, "or you will find yourself in the Undercity with the rats and the goblins."

Potential Inhabitants: Humanoids, monstrous humanoids, unintelligent monsters, cultists, thieves

Location Aspects: Lawless, active, smuggling, assassins, pirates, slavery, corruption, contraband, kidnapping

DESIGN NOTE:
As written, the Undercity can be as small as a few chambers beneath a town or as large as an underground metropolis, loosely connected to the world above through old sewers and forgotten tunnels. Whatever size you make it, you'll want to ensure that the location makes sense. For example, a low coastal city isn't likely to feature a subterranean metropolis, because such a location would be constantly flooded.

A large settlement at a high elevation (particularly one close to cliffs or mountains) makes a great location for the Undercity. However, if you run a high-magic campaign, it is possible to create a vast Undercity that would otherwise make no real-world sense.

CONNECTORS: THE SEWERS

Cracked timbers and crumbling rock line the city's ancient sewers, whose repair and modification over centuries echoes the growth and expansion of the civilization above. These tunnels twist and turn, with some narrowing to just a few feet in diameter while others expand into huge vaults. Occasional chutes drop hundreds of feet, sending sewage and rainwater down echoing waterfalls. Strange symbols etched in black and red mark the walls—directional markers for those who know how to read them.

Area Aspects: Vast drops, narrow passages, secret tunnels, directional markings

The sewers of the city above have been built and rebuilt over centuries to create a network of hundreds of passageways—many long forgotten. No single map shows all the sewers, and no living creature knows their full extent. However, some claim to have portions of the sewers mapped out and will part with such information for a price. As complex as the sewers are, they remain one of the easiest ways for creatures to travel from the city above to the Undercity.

The upper sewers are well maintained, their strong brick walls holding nothing larger than vermin. Deeper down, the walls of the sewers become loose rock and hard clay. These areas are in constant danger of collapse, and are home to larger beasts. The layout of the sewers is constantly evolving, with main passages sometimes collapsing and older secret passages becoming revealed after being lost for decades.

DEEP POOL

Waterways both natural and unnatural have carved out a rocky chasm hundreds of feet deep. A vast waterfall roars down this chasm and into a black pool far below. Dozens of rough passages branch off from various levels of the chasm. The ruins of underground buildings lie half collapsed along the edge of the chasm, their bricks and stones constantly crumbling to fall to the water below.

Area Aspects: Deep chasm, roaring waterfall, collapsing buildings, multilevel passages, the black pool

The chasm known as the deep pool cuts through many layers of the Undercity, connecting multiple sewer passages that lead off to inhabited caverns and settlements. Narrow crumbling steps, splintered ladders, and rotting ropes make for dangerous travel through this area, and creatures frequently plummet into the depths of the deep pool below—especially when enemy factions of the Undercity meet on their way through this area. Some whisper that a creature of great darkness feasts on those who fall into the deep pool, while others talk of great treasures down in the black water just waiting for someone to claim them.

FILTH WARRENS

An indescribably horrid smell rolls off the mountains of refuse in this vast chamber. Chutes descending from hundreds of feet above send an endless slurry of solid and liquid waste into this area. Unknown creatures have built a warren throughout the piles of filth, shoring them up and drying them to create rock-hard hives. Smaller structures of hardened refuse circle around a large cone-shaped mountain in the center of the chamber. Hundreds of passages—some as small as a rat; others as large as an ogre—dot the surface of the mountain.

Area Aspects: Mountain of filth, small hardened hives, large and small passages, avalanches of refuse

Dozens of tunnels from the city above lead to an enormous pile of refuse that has become the lair of some of the filthiest creatures in the Undercity, carved through with tunnels and living chambers. Not every denizen of the filth warrens is mindless or stupid. Some of the craftiest creatures know the value of hiding in the most unpleasant places, and few places are less pleasant than a mountain built up from centuries of waste. Treasure seekers also know that valuable possessions often find their way down drains and into the pools and piles of the filth warrens. However, exploring the warrens most often reveals only disease or a knife in the back.

DESIGN NOTE:
Many creatures have ruled the filth warrens over the ages, but who does so now? Are the creatures here mindless, intelligent, or

a mix? Do they rule only through fear, or do their followers believe in a dream of something greater?

WARLORD'S KEEP

A huge, grinning demon's skull leers over the central thoroughfare at the heart of the Undercity. Its sharp-toothed mouth serves as the entryway into a fortified keep built within the skull. A jagged crown on the skull's head serves as battlements for the fortress, the crown's tall spikes roiling with magical flame.

Area Aspects: Sharp-toothed entryway, spiked crown battlements, magical flame

The warlord's keep is said to be impenetrable to direct assault, and its spiked stone ramparts allow defenders to unleash all manner of terrible attacks against those who threaten them. Many have ruled the warlord's keep over the centuries. However, it is rumored that each such ruler has met a grisly end by an unknown and deadly hand that resides within the keep.

BLOOD SHRINE

Relief carvings dug into the natural cavern walls of this large chamber depict horrifying images of demons, devils, and dark gods inflicting pain and death on naked humanoids. A circular pit ten feet across opens up to darkness below, its outer edge painted in layers of ancient blood. Beyond the pit lies a single slab of black stone, with grooves carved in its surface to channel blood into the pit.

Area Aspects: Blood-spattered pit, demonic relief carvings, black stone sacrificial altar

Found at the end of a series of dark and narrow natural passageways, this ancient unholy shrine is much older than most of the Undercity. No one knows which evil god the temple cavern was originally built for, but it has served its dark purpose in worship to dozens of different gods over the years. No matter what sect has made the temple its own, a darkness has always called out to would-be worshippers from the place—a darkness even older than the temple itself.

CONNECTORS: THE LABYRINTH

For centuries, the nobles of the upper city have built secret tunnels leading into the depths of the Undercity. Ancient brick passageways connect crawl spaces underneath houses and the subcellars of stone keeps to the caverns below the city. Whether used for late-night liaisons, smuggling, or other forays into the forbidden, these passageways have been used for years as an unspoken connection between the civilized facade above and the dark anarchy below.

Area Aspects: Secret passages, hidden subbasements, assassins' network

Though the citizens of the upper city are often outspoken in their scorn and dismissal of the Undercity, many noble residences feature secret closets and hidden cellars that lead into a vast labyrinth of passages connecting to the Undercity. These passages provide the wealthy with private access to a realm that feeds their many vices, but these tunnels are a danger in other ways. More than one assassin has used these connections to steal into a target's bedroom from the Undercity, and more than one child of noble birth has gone missing in the tunnels, never to be seen again.

SUNKEN CELLS

The smell of sulfur hangs thick in the air of this large natural chamber, where a dozen rough-edged mud pools bubble and spit. Some of these pools glisten as white as ivory, others are as black as pitch, and a few glow with colored light. A number of the pools are covered with iron bars bolted to the stone of the cavern floor, as if intended to keep something in the pool from getting out. In the few pools not filled with mud, a crystal-clear blue liquid reveals the screaming skulls and grasping bones of dead creatures sprawling below the surface. A network of rusted chains and pulleys hangs from the ceiling, ending in sharp hooks dangling above each pool.

Area Aspects: Bubbling pools of acidic mud, iron bars, rusted chains and hooks, sulfuric air

Villainous gang lords once ruled much of the Undercity, using these cells as a prison for their most hated enemies. The acidic nature of the pools varies. Some will peel skin away from victims slowly, leaving them in constant agony. Others will strip a corpse to the bone in seconds.

SKULLTOWN

Along the main thoroughfare of the Undercity stands an open cavern lined with clay-walled buildings. Wooden carts laden with all manner of contraband are set up as portable market stalls beneath the overhanging upper floors of brothels above. Wooden ladders and clay stairs lead up to buildings towering five stories high. In the center of this underground town, the huge stone skull that gives the settlement its name screams up at the cavern ceiling high above. The skull's open mouth leads down into the unknown darkness below.

Area Aspects: Multistory clay buildings, old carts of contraband, screaming skull, mouth passageway leading down into darkness

It is said that anything and anyone can be bought and sold in Skulltown. Offering a view of the warlord's keep and connected to the market streets that spread around the great stone skull, this anarchic underground settlement is home to some two hundred people, and has never been ruled by any single group. The buildings here reach five stories high, and many feature additional levels below the surface of the cavern, creating cramped spaces used as shops, dens, and the sites of secret meetings.

THE BLOODY KNIFE INN

A giant blade covered in dripping blood hangs from the signpost of this three-story inn and tavern. A cracked and empty doorframe marks the entrance, and large cracks in the stone walls reveal the building's general instability. A still made of copper and brass dominates the center of the tavern's main floor. Tables surround it, with a second level above extending out as a balcony. Steam rises off copper pipes punching up from the rocky ground, some leading into the still while others rise up and through the ceiling above.

Area Aspects: Unstable stone walls, massive brass still, hot copper pipes, inner balcony overlooking the central tavern

The Bloody Knife has been the inn and tavern of note in the Undercity for centuries. Named after the legendary battles fought between many of its former owners, the Bloody Knife is known for the hot spring below it, whose waters are channeled through copper pipes into each room and into the inn's massive still. Though the source of the hot spring is thought to be natural, some speak of rocks magically radiating heat, or of the burning soul of an immortal creature buried below the inn.

FORGOTTEN COVE

At the edge of Skulltown, a dock extends out into a large underground lake of rippling black water. Creaking ships lie anchored off shore, while large boats laden with illicit goods are tied off at ragged wooden piers. Monstrous iron-armored statues stand around the cove like silent guardians.

Area Aspects: Massive iron-armored statues, the black lake, ships and boats laden with illicit goods

This cavernous cove connects to a lake or sea in the outside world, but only a handful of nefarious captains are able to navigate the dark lake. No one knows who built the immobile, ironbound statues, but some whisper that they protect the forgotten cove from those who might threaten the Undercity from the seas outside. Others believe that a secret word will bring the statues to life and destroy all who stand in their new master's way. Still others whisper that a great treasure is hidden within each statue, which can be claimed only by destroying them all.



THE DARK ABBEY

Atop a barren hill rising from the center of a dark wood stands the silent remains of an ancient abbey, its black form silhouetted against the blood-red sky. Weatherworn walls and a crumbling slate roof reveal centuries of decay, and yet the structure stands intact. Gargoyles leer out from buttresses along the monastery's outer walls and flank a gate of rusted iron. Dozens of mausoleums and grave markers dot the rocky slopes beneath the structure, twisted and shunted as though the earth itself had tried to expel them.

Numerous sects dedicated to mysterious or malevolent deities have used the Dark Abbey as a place of worship over the years, though each such sect has seen its time here end in blood and death. Explorers who attempt to uncover the abbey's secrets find their sleep filled with nightmares, and hear their companions recount how they spoke while dreaming—in a strange and terrifying dialect, and with a voice not their own.

Potential Inhabitants: Cultists, monstrous humanoids, undead, demons, unintelligent monsters, vampires

Location Aspects: Forbidden, evil, temple, sacrifice

The Center of Malevolence

Darkness flows throughout the area surrounding the abbey. Gray clouds swirl in the sky by day, turning black and red at night. Storms frequently blow in without warning, hammering the ground with lightning and sending down sheets of hot rain. The only plant life in the area is twisted and poisonous, and a strange oily substance oozes from the cracked

ground. Contact with even a small amount of this fluid brings on fever and nightmares. Ingesting it can lead to corruption and death, transforming those who ingest it into ghoulish form.

Ruined Remains

Stone walls, gravestones, and broken statues of demons and beasts litter the hillside around the abbey, which is covered in thick poisonous vines and acidic moss. The ages of these artifacts vary widely, with some only decades old and others dating back over a thousand years. If moved, many of these pieces of stonework reveal pits leading into passageways and catacombs below.

A Bloody History

No one knows who built the original abbey, though it has been rebuilt and broken down dozens of times over the past two thousand years. Some believe it was constructed on a site already stained by an unnatural darkness. Evil flourishes on this hill, which has always been used as a place of worship for dark gods. Tracing back through the history of the abbey brings up repeated stories of murder, sacrifice, and sorrow, as well as hints of dark beings that should never see the light of the world. Forces of holy light and benevolent gods have often led crusades against the abbey, but most of those campaigns have ended in corruption and death. Beings of light have successfully pushed back the darkness of the abbey and brought the site to ruin on a few occasions, only to have it eventually rise again at the hands of villainous cults, dark priests, and the evil that lies beneath it.

BLOOD THORNS

Vines as thick as a human arm grow twisted around gnarled trees. Dark veins pulse within shining red leaves, while razor-sharp thorns coated in a sticky black liquid threaten to flay the skin of passing creatures down to the bone. The scarred skulls of beasts, monsters, and humanoids lie hidden within the surrounding brambles.

Area Aspects: Thick vines, poisonous leaves, razor-sharp thorns

Most vegetation cannot survive the eternal cloud that swirls above the hill, but a terrible plant known as the blood thorn thrives here. The red leaves of its vines are poisonous, leaving large welts if touched to the skin and becoming potentially lethal if ingested. The vines are also covered in long, thin thorns, which are coated with a black poison and sharp enough to pierce leather. The remains of animals, monsters, and humanoids are often found within patches of blood thorn—along with the shining possessions of such creatures, which can lure new creatures to their deaths.

MAUSOLEUMS

The worked stone of a mausoleum lies beneath a blanket of thick blood thorns and yellow-green moss. Strange religious symbols are scribed on the mausoleum's stone door, and the remains of crumbled statues stand to either side.

Area Aspects: Thick blood thorns, crumbled statues, poisonous moss, strange religious symbols

Crypts and mausoleums litter the hillside surrounding the abbey, some of which have been freshly built and recently used. Tyrants, noble murderers, sacrilegious priests, and corrupt knights are often laid to rest here. Some of the mausoleums are vast catacombs unto themselves, while others are little more than one or two standing walls. In many places, the stone floors of the mausoleums have collapsed into pits and passages that lead into the catacombs below the hill.

CHAPEL OF EVIL

Rising out of the top of the hill like a protruding bone, the chapel of the monastery is surrounded by huge blocks of stone that mark out the position of buildings long since collapsed. Twisted demonic statues appear to move as they are observed, their gazes following observers and their grotesque grins expanding as creatures draw closer.

Area Aspects: Huge blocks of stone, grotesque statues that appear to move

For centuries, this chapel acted as a focus for evil, drawing negative energy from the surrounding lands and funneling it deep below the surface. The building holds only a handful of rooms, with chambers reserved for priests and solitary prayer sitting off from the main chapel hall. Paint and plaster peel away from the walls here, marking endless layers of frescos that immortalize the bloody rituals performed by the Dark Abbey's former masters. Carvings of screaming humanoids line the walls of its central chamber, giving intruders the sense of being surrounded.

OBSIDIAN ALTAR

An obsidian slab sits on a raised platform at the back of the room, which is scoured by an unnaturally cold wind. A statue of a monstrous robed figure stands over the altar, its four skeletal arms each positioned as if beckoning intruders in welcome. The stone tiles around the altar are stained dark red from centuries of use.

Area Aspects: Cold stone slab, monstrous welcoming statue, dark bloodstained tiles

No matter what the temperature around it, the altar remains cold. No known substance or force can damage its surface. The strange statue is a recent addition to the altar, built atop the rubble of dozens of other statues that have stood here over the years. The stone slab is the oldest part of the abbey.

CONNECTORS: THE CATACOMBS

Numerous pits and passages lead down into the vast catacombs beneath the monastery hill. Stone arches shore up walls of natural earth pierced through with gnarled roots. Hundreds of skeletons are embedded in those walls, with each skull painted with a small glyph on its forehead. Many passageways have collapsed in cave-ins, and an unnaturally warm wind blows through many of the still-standing tombs.

Area Aspects: Glyph-marked skulls, stone arches, deep pits

Numerous pits, cave-ins, and broken holes beneath the abbey and its chapel and mausoleums lead down into a vast network of catacombs. The bones of tens of thousands of humanoids line the walls, with skulls leering and bony hands outstretched. Further sinkholes and cave-ins reveal more passages leading even deeper into the hill, seemingly going on forever. Most of the catacombs are narrow and barely tall enough for a human, but they sometimes open up to earthen halls that seem too large to be constrained by the hill above them.

UNHOLY POOL

In the center of this large natural cavern, a pool of black liquid bubbles up from an unseen spring below. Rough stonework surrounds the pool—the remnants of a decrepit fountain stained black. The oily liquid leaks through the stonework, flowing along cracks in the floor and into the walls of the cavern. Strange glyphs and symbols mark the stones, and numerous depictions of huge, corrupt creatures towering over screaming humanoids are scribed along the walls. Hulking, faceless statues stand in the alcoves surrounding the pool, their hands stained dark red.

Area Aspects: Black pool, stonework fountain, faceless hulking statues, oily rivulets flowing into the walls

The markings on the stonework, as well as the statues and the images on the walls, show signs of weathering that suggest they are centuries old. The pool is much older. Any attempt to plumb its depth shows it to be nearly fifty feet deep, with signs that it opens up to chambers and tunnels below. The floor around the pool feels spongy to the touch—almost like flesh—and pulses in a regular rhythm. If any attempt is made to damage the floor, it begins to spasm as the oil in the pool grows extremely hot.

CRYPT OF THE DARK PRIESTS

Dark-red frescoes decorate the crumbling stonework of this large chamber, which features a two-step platform at its center holding three large stone sarcophagi. Surrounding the platform is a fence built of cold iron, with tiny glyphs decorating each of its spikes. The image of a robed figure, arms crossed and fists at its shoulders, decorates each sarcophagus lid. Some of the frescoes on the walls show robed figures being worshiped by thousands of followers. Others show those same figures lying prostrate in front of huge, debased gods stepping through portals. Still others show the mass sacrifice of naked humanoids to these dark gods.

Area Aspects: Cold iron fence, stone sarcophagi, detailed frescoes

It is unclear whether this room was constructed for the purpose of worship or as a place of protection from whatever lies in the three sarcophagi.

LIVING TOMBS

A high-pitched howl hangs on the wind that whips through this large cavern. Natural stone pillars rise from floor to ceiling here, each of which is carved with crude, screaming faces. Large slabs of worked stone, clearly carved by humanoid hands, stand along the area's outer walls. Where a number of those slabs have collapsed, they reveal natural alcoves cut deep into the stone behind them. The fronts of the intact slabs have been carved with the forms of figures armored in spiked plate mail and horned helmets.

Area Aspects: Screaming faces carved on natural pillars, carved stone slabs blocking natural alcoves, howling winds

The carvings on the tomb slabs are of an indeterminate age. Some of these tomb doors have crumbled over time, while others appear to have been shattered in the course of looting. In some of the looted tombs, the charred bones of would-be grave robbers can still be found.

PAIN ENGINE

A huge machine built of iron gears and heavy stone sits in the center of this chamber. A large ramp leads down into the belly of the machine, where heavy iron wheels covered with razor-sharp blades wait to be turned. Massive chains feed up from the machine into the ceiling, then back down again, controlled by an iron lever capped by a six-fingered outstretched hand. Demonic faces carved of stone surround the outer edges of the machine, their open mouths caked with dried blood and opening up to stained gutters that feed into a large, square pool at the back of the room. The ceiling above is incredibly high, and must once have amplified the screams of the creatures fed into this engine of pain.

Area Aspects: Bladed wheels, huge iron chains, bloody demonic faces, bloodstained pool

Dozens of different cults and religious sects have come to the abbey over the centuries, but none was as twisted as the cult whose members constructed the pain engine. Believing that pain was a channel to other worlds, the cultists constructed a vast mechanism of stone and iron designed to maximize the suffering of those fed into it. Huge counterweights behind the walls activate the machine once the lever is pulled.

COLD-IRON CELLS

The floor of this tall chamber swirls in dust and ash blown by a howling wind. The ceiling above is open to the sky but sealed off behind a grate of cold iron laced with silver. Eight cold-iron sarcophagi, each sealed by inch-thick iron bars laced with silver, sit in a circle on the floor. The doors leading into this chamber are all solid iron, barred from the opposite side and etched with silver glyphs. Chains of cold iron laced with silver are affixed to the smooth stone walls by huge spikes, and four more spikes jut up from the center of the chamber. Two humanoid skulls possessing oversized canine teeth have been impaled on two of the spikes.

Area Aspects: Cold-iron sarcophagi, silver-laced bars, glyph-marked doors, impaled skulls on spikes

Though no one knows who built this room, its purpose is obvious to any who have studied the undead—either a prison, a torture chamber, or an execution chamber for vampires. Certain cults who inhabited the abbey attempted to channel the blood of vampires to fuel their dark rituals, keeping the undead beings as their slaves. Whether any vampires still rest in the sarcophagi can be determined only by opening them.



THE ELVEN CITY OF MOONWILLOW

Over a thousand years, the forest has grown to reclaim much of this elven city, cracking stone and returning ancient landmarks to the earth. Massive trees wrap up and around crumbling stone columns, and the heads of titanic statues lie embedded in the ground under centuries of mold and leaf fall. Higher up, the cracked marble domes of a dozen temples peek out from beneath the forest canopy.

Potential Inhabitants: Monstrous humanoids, devils, demons, undead, unintelligent monsters

Location Aspects: Forest, ancient ruins, mountains, grove

A City of Ten Thousand Years

The long lives of the elves can be seen in this ancient city, whose stonework has stood here for nearly ten thousand years. The city's growth and decay seems to come in cycles of life and destruction, like the centuries-long heartbeat of a vast creature living beneath the forest. Signs of this process are found throughout the city, showing millennia of life, growth, and powerful magical energy followed by famine, disease, and death.

Beautiful statues and carvings are marred by the harsh symbology of devils and demons. Holy sites and groves have been corrupted by blood sacrifice. However, the greatest desecration here did not come from demons or devils drawn to the city, but was inflicted by the elves. In their desire to end the cycle of growth and destruction, the elves of Moonwillow enacted a plan to channel the energy of the mystical grove at the heart of the city, drawing it up through a

massive obsidian spike drilled deep into the earth. But when they did so, they pierced the heart of the grove and were forced to watch it die.

Lost and Abandoned

Elves now look upon the fallen city with sadness and shame, seeing it only as a symbol of their hubris. Moonwillow sits abandoned and empty, the towering relics of the elves engulfed by the return of the forest. But even having abandoned the city a millennia ago, leaving it for the forest to swallow, the elves still hope that the heart of the grove might renew itself. If it does, it might one day undo their shame and allow the city to be reborn.

Ancient Stone

The elves carved and raised the city of Moonwillow out of marble, employing both magical and physical construction. The city is tiered over the edge of two mountains that overlook the grove. Walkways of stone connect its many buildings and lead into hallways carved directly into the mountainside. Over the centuries, some of these walkways have collapsed while others are now overgrown with thick vines.

Vale of the Old Ones

The vale that marks the location of the city is protected on two sides by the tall mountains into which Moonwillow is built, while thick forest protects the other two sides. Massive trees, their long branches interwoven over centuries, make the forest almost completely impassible. Within the forest are trees said to be touched by the natural energy of the grove that was once the city's heart. These huge trees might speak to those who understand the words of nature, their voices dark and full of anger. For these ancient sentinels, the elves' betrayal of the power of the grove is still fresh.

Hall of Voices

Set atop a high flight of crumbling stone stairs, this vast hall extends deep into the mountainside. Wall niches within house thousands of urns, many of which have been shattered to spread ash to the floor. Delicate runes etched into each urn describe the remains contained within. A chill wind blows constantly through the hall, swirling dust and ash, and filling the area with a howling sound. At the center of the hall, a chamber with curved walls is dominated by a towering statue of a female elf, her hands held out in a welcoming gesture. Ash-filled tears appear to fall from the statue's sad eyes.

> ***Area Aspects:*** Thousands of rune-scribed urns, swirling dust and howling winds, welcoming elven statue

Despite the great age of the city, the long lives of the elves leave them relatively few dead to entomb. Those who have died in Moonwillow—whether naturally or unnaturally—are typically cremated, their ashes placed in urns within the Hall of Voices. Here, the spirits of the elves touch the lives of the living.

Magical enchantments protect and preserve each urn, allowing living elves to speak with their deceased ancestors. Over the centuries, many of these enchantments have been broken, and a great number of urns have been shattered to expose the dust of the dead. Even where the magic endures, conversations with the dead are typically brief and cryptic.

Grove of Chaos

Wild brush and huge trees dominate the center square of the city of Moonwillow, which presents an unearthly strange sight. Huge broken stones float through the grove, spinning slowly in the air. Bolts of electricity arc between the branches of dead trees. Once a beautiful tribute to the magic of nature and the elves, both those magical forces now seem wildly out of control.

> ***Area Aspects:*** Floating stones, wild growth of trees, lightning arcs, unstable magic, chaos rifts

The elves raised this beautiful grove to show the strength of natural and magical energy flowing together. For thousands of years, this site inspired them, but the magic of the grove has become unstable after centuries of being unattended. The energy of nature has caused trees and brush to grow with alarming complexity, even as rifts in the magical weave plague the grove with chaotic magical effects.

Timeless Cells

This round building with a collapsed roof marks the site of a wide, smooth shaft leading two hundred feet down into the earth. Large cracks mar the delicately rune-etched stone walls of the shaft, and a hollow-sounding wind blows up from the darkness below.

Area Aspects: Deep shaft, collapsed roof, rune-etched stone walls

The faint remnants of arcane energy reveal that the shaft once held a floating platform used to descend and ascend. With the platform long gone, only ropes or flying magic will allow explorers to investigate the areas below.

At the bottom of the shaft, dozens of cells connected by a network of magically protected hallways once housed the most powerful and dangerous enemies of Moonwillow. The cells vary greatly in construction, with each built to contain a particular enemy. Some chambers are crafted in the shape of small dodecahedrons, with each surface covered in metal etched with runes. Others might be vast caverns intended to encase huge monstrosities. Many of these cells are empty, their prisoners having either escaped or starved to death when the elves abandoned Moonwillow. However, some might still contain their original prisoners.

DESIGN NOTE:
Use the cells of Moonwillow to hold creatures iconic to your campaign, or to introduce new adventure hooks. One chamber might imprison a huge fire elemental, while another could house a demon driven even more insane by its long imprisonment. Another might inexplicably contain a small child, its arms outstretched toward the party. The secrets held by these cells and their prisoners are yours to develop.

BLACK SPIKE

A towering spike of black stone pierces the ground to leave an open space within the city's great grove. Large shards of cracked stone rise up from this wound in the earth. The obsidian spike narrows from top to bottom, its jagged surface extremely cold to the touch. Streams of black liquid flow through cracks in the ground around its base.

Area Aspects: Cold black spike, streams of black liquid

Only magic could have raised such a massive structure of perfectly smooth obsidian and driven it into the earth. Designed to draw energy directly from whatever source of magical power lay beneath the city, the spike instead wounded or killed that source of energy. Now, streams of toxic liquid flow eternally from the wound, and whatever magic once powered the city of Moonwillow remains dead or dormant.

TEMPLE OF THE SUN

Ivy stems as thick as a human's arm crawl over the broken white marble of this domed temple. Two tall, battered statues are set at the entrance to the temple, while three even larger statues stand within, their size and appearance marking them as gods or rulers. One is armored in plate, a long, curved sword in her hands. Another is dressed in long flowing robes and holds a tall staff in his hands. The third takes the form of a creature seemingly half elf and half tree, standing with arms outstretched. The heads of all three statues are missing. Alcoves containing broken statues of other elven gods and heroes surround the base of the temple. At the center of the floor, a large circle set with strange glyphs has been painted in blood.

Area Aspects: Headless statues, shattered dome, bloody unholy circle

Moonwillow once held many temples to the gods of the elves, each of them quite different in construction. Some are narrow towers of smoothly curving stone. Others are large, unadorned stone blocks. The Temple of the Sun was raised for the worship of many gods. A large hall takes up most of the temple, but numerous chambers used for private worship and study stand beside and behind the main hall. A narrow stairwell leads to a network of chambers below the temple, used for isolated study, housing holy relics, and conducting rituals used to speak with beings from beyond the mortal realm. While some of these chambers have been ransacked, many remain intact.

TOWER OF KNOWLEDGE

A massive block of seamless granite towers over the city. Two statues of elven sages holding tomes and scrolls flank the large, broken doors that lead into Moonwillow's great library. Glyphs on the shattered doors bubble and spew black smoke into the air.

Area Aspects: Elven sage statues, shattered doorway, smoking glyphs

For thousands of years, the Tower of Knowledge stood as the greatest single repository of lore and understanding in all known lands. Hundreds of

thousands of books and scrolls lined the halls and chambers of this ten-story-high structure. The labyrinthine nature of the library made it exceedingly difficult to navigate, but sages and otherworldly beings spent whole lifetimes helping those seeking knowledge to find the right source. Chambers still hidden below the library were said to have contained forbidden texts and tomes of terrible power, available only to a select few.

DESIGN NOTE:
If you wish to fill out the great library of Moonwillow even further, consider combining it with the Forgotten Library location.

CHAMBER OF WORLDS

Violet light flares within this circular building, whose center is occupied by a huge floating orb. Seven bronze-ringed portals are set into the walls, each filled with a swirling amber fog. Lines of electricity arc out from the portals to strike the orb. Another open portal cut into the ceiling at the height of the dome exposes the orb to the sky above.

Area Aspects: Bronze-ringed portals, orb of unstable energy, hole to sky above, chaotic gateways, violet light and amber fog

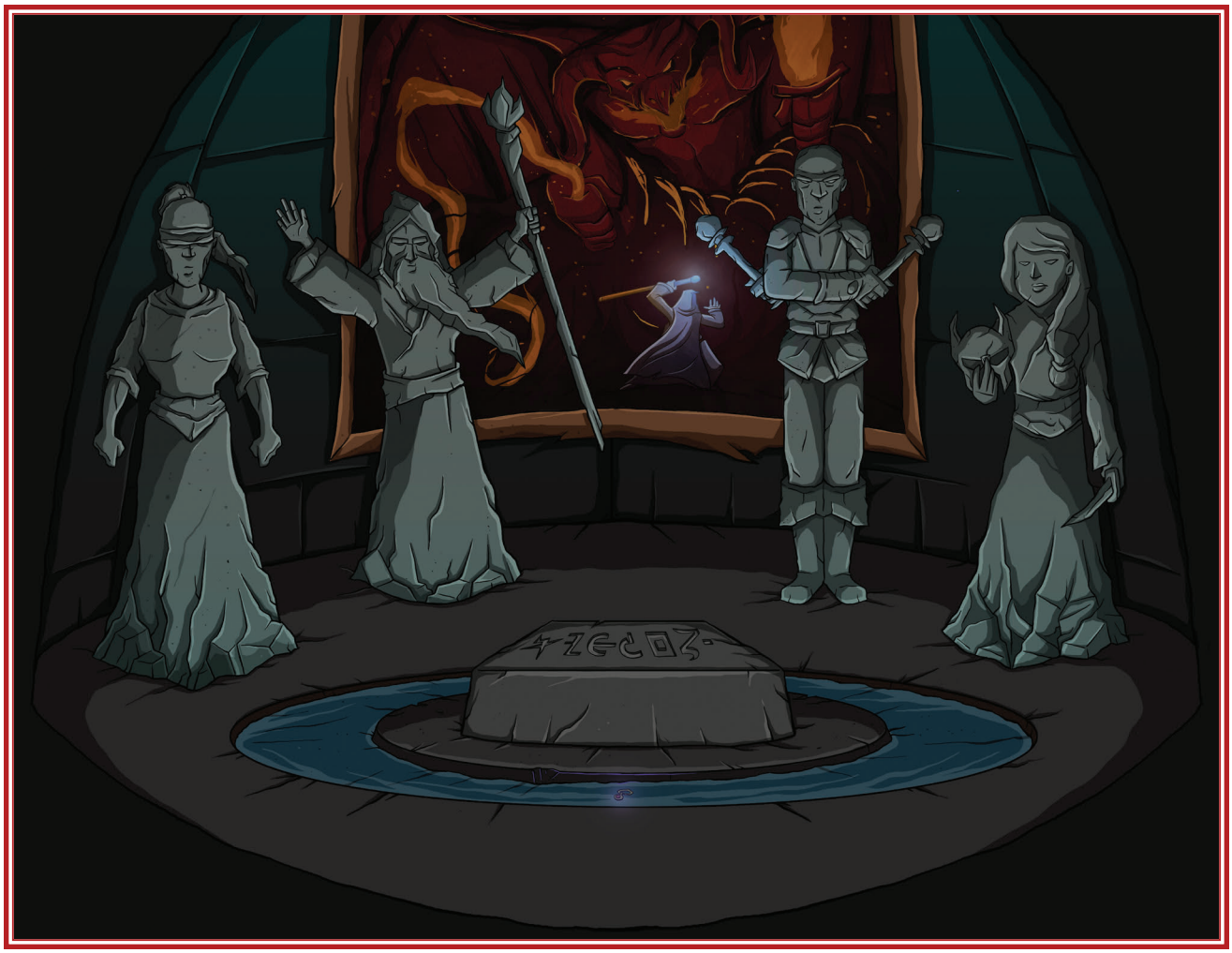
Cut into the rock of the mountains above the city, this chamber holds seven portals that once opened gateways to worlds beyond the mortal realm. The central orb directed energy from the moon, sun, and stars above to the portals. Now, the instability of the elven magic that once powered this place has turned those portals to gates of chaos, shunting their power into the orb. Whether any of these portals can be reactivated—and what dangers might arise from doing so—remains a mystery.

WELL OF DREAMS

A wide circle of standing stones surrounds a pool of pure blue water. Tendrils of black liquid twist through the pool, continually churning, splitting, and reforming—though never mixing with the water itself.

Area Aspects: Pool of blue water, tendrils of black liquid

The Well of Dreams had been used for thousands of years as a pool of prophecy, and as a place dedicated to worship and communion with realms beyond the mortal world. Now tainted by the corruption of the grove, the Well of Dreams contains only nightmares of your own design.



THE LICH'S SANCTUARY

A sphere of black iron floating in an endless void, the Lich's Sanctuary is so well hidden that it can hardly be said to exist at all. Built as the final refuge of a legendary undead archmage, the sanctuary contains everything the lich requires to support its endless solitude away from mortal realms—and to recover from destruction when would-be heroes of those realms come calling.

Potential Inhabitants: Constructs, demons, devils, undead, magical traps

Location Aspects: Astral, ethereal, extradimensional, planar, cursed tome, unknown teleportation scroll

A Keep with No Door

No physical connections exist between the Lich's Sanctuary and the mortal world. It is a completely artificial place, hidden outside the bounds of space and time. It exists in the void between realities, and is so well hidden that none but the lich can ever hope to find it. Yet hints of its location are found from time to time. Fearing that it might lose access to the sanctuary, the lich has hidden its location in ancient tomes and lost scrolls. Secret rituals inscribed therein can teleport creatures to the lich's lair—sometimes by accident. Many demons and devils lurking in their netherworlds also remember fragments of the sanctuary's location, having been bonded to help construct it.

DESIGN NOTE:
If the sanctuary is so well hidden, how are the characters meant to find it? The PCs might first become aware of the sanctuary from minions of the lich, who will have heard of the site even if they don't know where it is. Rivals of the lich might also have discovered clues to the sanctuary's location, or divine beings able to peer through the veil of the void could gain a glimpse of it. However the characters come by it, gathering the information necessary to access the sanctuary should not be easy.

Asymmetric Chambers of Black Iron

All the chambers in the sanctuary are formed around the structure's inner sphere. As such, there are no right angles in any of the rooms, whose walls are formed from dull black iron with no seams. Every surface in the structure is curved to some extent, though sometimes only slightly. No lights can be found in the sanctuary, as the lich uses its own magical illumination as it moves.

DESIGN NOTE:
You can reskin the sanctuary as any sort of extradimensional refuge, and can place it wherever it fits your own campaign. Instead of supporting a lich, the site might be the sanctum of a wizard or sage powerful enough to build such a place. It might be discovered embedded deep within a mountain by dwarves who dug too deep, or found mysteriously floating over an otherwise unremarkable village. Alternatively, characters might discover the sanctuary only after it's been ripped through the multiverse and returned violently to the real world, its iron walls cracked and its interior laid open.

CONNECTORS: TWISTED EXTRADIMENSIONAL HALLS

The halls of this strange structure are as twisted as the mind of its creator. Uneven floors flow into gently curving walls as corridors twist and turn, seeming to flow beyond the physical space of the sanctuary itself. Its construction makes it clear that whoever built this place had no use for walking.

Area Aspects: Twisted hallways, curving surfaces

The lich shaped these strange, twisted halls to its own purposes, floating through them when it moved and giving no consideration to the needs of other creatures. The flowing, organic forms of the walls are designed to confuse any intruders. The floors of the halls are always uneven, and in some cases, take startling dips down into lower sections of the sphere.

LABORATORY

A black rock spins in the center of this chamber, floating above a rune-etched circular stone table. Brass instruments hang from the ceiling and sit atop acid-stained tables along the room's walls. At the room's obtuse corners, murky red liquid fills large glass cylinders, all of which show shadowy figures moving slowly within them.

Area Aspects: Brass instruments on acid-stained tables, floating black rock over a rune-etched table, glass cylinders with red liquid and shadowy forms

The lich has spent thousands of years collecting instruments and specimens as it has explored the unknown corners of the multiverse. Within the glass jars, the dissected remains of stillborn gods and powerful creatures swirl in ethereal fluid. The black rock is said to be part of the core of the multiverse and a source of limitless energy, though even the lich knows not how to channel it.

UNSTABLE PORTAL

A low hum vibrates across the iron surfaces of this oval-shaped chamber, and the tingle of electricity flows through the air. An upright oval portal stands dark in the center of the room, its stone frame marked with deeply etched glyphs. Six obsidian obelisks carved with similar glyphs stand in a circle around the portal. From time to time, sparks of violet energy erupt from tiny cracks in the pillars and in the portal's frame.

Area Aspects: Dark oval portal with glyph-marked frame, six obsidian obelisks, static electricity in the air, cracks emitting violet sparks

The lich uses this portal to transport itself out of the sanctuary, but it has no return function. The portal is activated by channeling energy into the pillars,

opening a gateway to any world the lich chooses. Over the centuries, small cracks have formed in the portal and the obelisks, creating instability in the portal's operation.

SCRYING CHAMBER

Spheres hanging from intricate brass rings swirl in the darkness above. On the floor sits a raised stone pool filled with impenetrable darkness. Pinpoints of starlight shine from within, giving the pool the look of a hole falling into an endless night sky. Four rune-scribed circles are set out around the pool, each with a large crystal at its center.

Area Aspects: Raised pool of blackness, rune-scribed circles with large crystals, swirling brass rings

Sparing no expense, the lich created a three-dimensional map of the multiverse. Using the crystals within the magic circles as control devices, it can channel the scrying pool to any point it desires to see. It is through this portal that the lich communicates with its followers and subjects across hundreds of worlds.

ARTIFACT VAULTS

Sealed doors etched with sinister runes line this twisting hallway.

Area Aspects: Rune-etched doors

For countless centuries, the lich has collected artifacts from many worlds and stored them in these vaults in the lower levels of the sanctuary. Each vault is constructed to secure its artifact from potential thieves—and also to contain its power, since many of the relics here are dangerous to wield. The protective magic imbued into each vault is unique, and consists of both magical glyphs and guardian constructs. A handful of these vaults contain less powerful magical equipment that the lich will need if it is ever defeated.

SOUL STUDY

A howling breeze swirls around this circular chamber, ringing out like the faint screams of hundreds of tormented souls. A stone table stands at the center of the room, whose walls feature row upon row of shelves holding strange crystals and rune-scribed skulls. A strange silver mechanism sits at the center of the table, featuring a large lens aiming upward at a polished concave mirror hanging from the ceiling.

Area Aspects: Strange crystals and rune-scribed skulls, silver mechanism, lens and mirror

Dependent on the life force of others for sustenance since freeing its own soul from its body, the lich has collected the souls of hundreds of powerful mortal beings and stored them in crystals, jeweled skulls, and other artifacts. The apparatus in the center of the room lets the lich tear a soul free of its artifact for a short time, allowing it to conduct dark experiments dedicated to getting even more nourishment from a soul's life energy.

OTHERWORLDLY CRYPT

The curved walls of this hall hold hundreds of small doors, each engraved with a series of runes. Dust swirls in the air, as does the faint echo of the moaning of the dead. A black slab sits at the center of the hall, with a spiderlike machine of brass on top of it. Glass tubes filled with black liquid feed into the spider's needle-sharp legs.

Area Aspects: Hundreds of small rune-scribed doors, echoing moans, black slab of stone, spiderlike brass machine

The remains of hundreds of the multiverse's most unique creatures are stored in this crypt. Behind each door is a reliquary holding mummified organs, skulls, bone fragments, or dust. Magic imbued into the brass spider allows the lich to reconstruct the creatures interred here, or to build constructs of its own design from their bodies. It is said that the lich can reconstruct and reanimate a creature from only a single fragment of bone if need be.

DESIGN NOTE:
Is there a creature already reconstructed or partially reconstructed in this chamber? Do the PCs need to reconstruct a creature to learn a valuable clue? Or did they come here to recover a dead being captured by the lich?

SUMMONING CHAMBER

The charred iron walls of this circular chamber are studded with sharp black spikes. Sound is deadened here, with no echo at all. A circle of strange geometric symbols and unnerving script is scribed in the center of the slightly concave floor. Though the rest of the room appears caked with ash and soot, the gleaming circle is unnaturally clean.

Area Aspects: Sharp black spikes, geometric summoning circle

This summoning circle shows a quality in its construction that speaks to the work the lich has put into it. The glyphs of imprisonment show signs of having been scribed over hundreds of years, and the perfection of the circle has allowed the lich to summon high angels and demon princes alike. The black spikes on the wall absorb sound, preventing the roaring of summoned creatures from wrecking the circle.

LIBRARY

Row upon row of shelves line this large oval chamber, all of them stacked high with books, wood blocks, crystals, and other ancient objects. A massive block of black stone floats above a platform at the center of the room, its surface covered in text that grows ever smaller as it gets closer to the bottom of the block. A number of pedestals around the room hold ancient texts bound in the skin of beasts and humanoids alike. Pulsing red and blue glyphs line all the walls of the room.

Area Aspects: Hundreds of books and other recordings, block of floating black stone covered in text, pedestals with books bound in humanoid skin, pulsing glyphs along the edges of the room

The lich's library contains hundreds of different types of recordings, from traditional books to burned wooden blocks to crystals containing the resonating voices of the dead. The stone in the center is the core of its collection—a relic scribed by intelligent beings over a million years ago in a language none can understand. The lich believes that the block's writing contains the code for the creation of the multiverse, and that the one who translates it will be able to bind or unbind any aspect of reality. The glyphs that line the walls are designed to prevent any item from leaving the area.

SANCTUARY CHAMBER

Statues and tapestries adorn this chamber, depicting dozens of battles and hundreds of years of history. A stone bed stands in the center of the chamber, surrounded by a pool of shimmering blue-black liquid.

Area Aspects: Statues and tapestries, stone bed, deep pool of black liquid

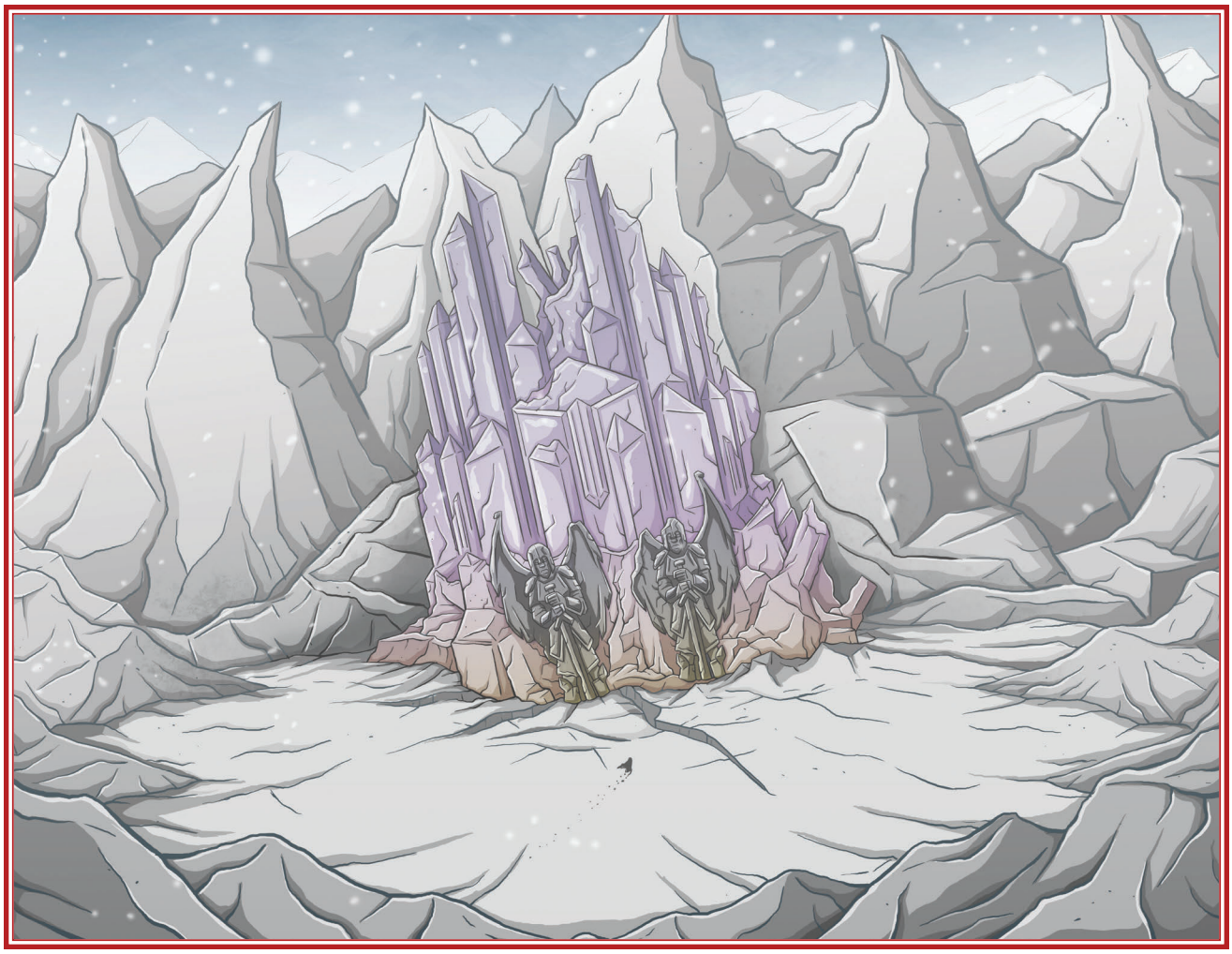
Regaining physical form after being destroyed is never a pleasant experience for a lich. This chamber was built to ease the pain of that reconstruction, both physical and psychological. By reminding the lich of its life and triumphs throughout the ages, the tapestries here help to rebuild its memories as its undead body takes form. The pool marks the entrance to the phylactery chamber beneath the sanctuary, which is filled with necrotic liquid that acts as a bonding agent for the construction of the lich's corporeal self.

PHYLACTERY VAULT

The pool in the sanctuary marks the open upper surface of a spherical iron chamber filled with necrotic fluid. Anyone able to discern what lies within the dark fluid senses an amulet of ancient design floating in the center of this pool chamber, whose interior wall is studded with dozens of iron skulls set with leering, jeweled eyes.

Area Aspects: Amulet in sphere of necrotic fluid, iron skulls with jeweled eyes

This spherical pool chamber filled with necrotic fluid is the resting place of the lich's phylactery. Some say the phylactery was once a necklace the lich had given to its beloved when it was still an archmage. Others claim it to be a family heirloom for a lineage long since dead. Some believe the phylactery was forged in the deepest pits of the Abyss. Whatever its origin, though, all those who gaze upon it know its power. The iron skulls along the wall are imbued with the lich's greatest protective magic, dedicated to guarding the undead's most valued possession and its very existence.



THE FALLEN PALACE OF THE CELESTIALS

Nestled deep in the inhospitable mountains, a crystalline citadel lies in shattered ruin. Most of its sharp spires are spread like shards of shattered glass across snowy fields, with only a few still rising into the clouds. Its sharp base has pierced the rock of the mountain like the blade of a knife, hinting at the violence with which the once-floating palace fell to earth. A precarious switchback trail cuts through the snowy rock to the center of the fallen celestial palace.

Few can say how long the crystalline palace has been hidden within the mountains, but rumors of its existence go back centuries. Over the years, many adventurers have come to the ruins in search of holy relics, the knowledge and power of the celestials, or simply high adventure. Those who hold their faith most holy seek to grow closer to their gods here, while more villainous sorts come to the palace to tap into its mystical energy. However, all explorers find danger here first and foremost.

Potential Inhabitants: Celestials, devils, demons, mutants, outsiders, dungeon delvers, subterranean foes

Location Aspects: Mountainous, secluded, celestial, otherworldly

A Wounded Consciousness

Those whose minds are able to grasp beyond the physical world claim that the fallen palace is a single consciousness. Though its intellect is beyond mortal comprehension, the structure is very much awake—but it is mortally wounded and scared. As alien as the palace appears within the mortal world,

its consciousness sees that world as equally alien. It is dying now in this strange realm, picked apart by the trivial creatures it once oversaw, and unable to do anything to save itself. Only what remains of its protections and guardians dissuade those who would wound the city further, and who would steal away parts of it as trophies.

A Construct Both Holy and Unholy

The palace was once a vast structure inhabited by celestial entities. However, the damage done to the site has opened up rifts to the underworld. Some sages hypothesize that the palace was drawn to this world as a defense mechanism during a war between heaven and hell. Many of the hellish creatures engaged in attacking the palace were drawn to this world along with it, and now lie buried in the rock below the fallen citadel.

OUTER RIFT

Enormous statues of faceless celestial beings are carved into the outer walls of the celestial palace, whose collapse has left it sloping downward at an angle. A number of narrow crevasses radiate outward from the site, showing where rock and ice gave way under its violent collapse. The largest of these extends through the palace all the way to the site's central hall. A narrow icy bridge leads over the crevasse.

Area Aspects: Icy bridge, multiple crevasses, huge faceless statues

The easiest entrance to the fallen citadel is high up in the mountains, requiring days of travel through harsh winds and snow. At the end of this narrow path, a shelf of ice has formed a bridge allowing passage from the mountainside to the palace's grand hall. A huge crack in the opaque crystalline wall serves as an entrance to the grand hall and the palace beyond.

GRAND HALL

So vast is this grand hall that swirling cloud and mist obscures much of its vaulted ceiling. Huge staircases of gold-inlaid marble lead to an upper platform, upon which sits a huge throne carved of sharp-edged crystal. Swirling prismatic orbs float above marble podiums whose tops are carved into the form of humanoid hands. Through breaks in the clouds above, a vast mosaic of shifting forms can be seen decorating the ceiling.

Area Aspects: Mist and cloud, huge staircases, crystalline throne on upper platform, swirling prismatic orbs on hand-shaped podiums, shifting mosaic on ceiling

The grand hall is the largest chamber in the palace, and connects to many other areas through arched hallways. Whatever being once ruled over this place, it ruled from here. The magic of the floating orbs and the shifting mosaic are only a hint of the magic that once filled the palace, but even that is barely comprehensible to mortal minds.

CONNECTORS: THE CELESTIAL HALLS

Vast halls of gold-inlaid marble lead from chamber to chamber in the celestial palace. Huge stone pillars carved in the forms of male and female celestials hold the arched ceiling of these halls aloft. Shafts of light shine from deep cracks in the walls, all remnants of the palace's fall to earth.

Area Aspects: Gold-inlaid marble walls, stone pillar statues, shafts of light shining through cracks

These beams of light bleed out like wounds in the shell of the celestial palace. Numerous glyphs and runes of protection still protect some of these halls against intruders.

HIGH TOWERS

Once hundreds of feet high, many of the towers of the celestial palace now lie crumbled. The few great spires that remain continue to reach for the skies above, cracked and shining in the sunlight of the mountains, and rising out of the glacial snow like bright knives. A few delicate crystalline walkways connect these towers hundreds of feet above the rocky ice below.

Area Aspects: Crystalline towers, crumbled ruins, crystalline walkways

Grand towers once adorned the uppermost reaches of the celestial palace. It was here that the rulers of the angelic city observed the lives of mortals. The chambers of the towers are vast halls adorned with floating globes of bronze, each etched with maps of worlds known and unknown. Some halls are decorated with massive statues of previous rulers, while others contain stone

mosaics depicting the eternal wars of the celestials against the demons and devils that dwell below.

WHITE SPIKE

The bottom of the once-floating palace was a huge spike of opaque white material, which was driven dagger-like into the rock of the mountain when the citadel crashed to earth. Huge cracks fan out now from the spike, leaving open passages that burrow deep into the mountain below. A deep buzzing fills the air, setting up vibrations in the rock around the spike. A dark-green liquid seeps from open cracks in the spike, flowing to create a pool in a deep cleft of the mountain.

Area Aspects: Piercing white spike, large cracks and open passages, buzzing in the air, streams of green liquid flowing into a pool

The bottom of the floating celestial palace was a huge spike made of a material unknown to mortals—a substance with qualities of both stone and metal. The spike acted as an antenna of sorts, allowing communication with the minds of celestials far away from the palace. It also provided the ability to peer into the black rifts of the underworld, and the scrying chambers and dark laboratories of the spike were used by the celestials to understand their immortal enemies. When the palace fell, the spike cracked open as it was driven deep into the mountain, exposing passages into these chambers and letting the uncontrolled elements of the area's experiments—manifesting as a magical green fluid—spill forth.

BLACK RIFT

The mountain shattered when the celestial palace fell, leaving a number of deep cracks in the earth. The largest of these cracks stretches from the lower hills deep into the heart of the mountain. Black and gray tendrils of magical energy now flow along its fractured length, causing some areas of rock to become colder than ice while others burn as hot as molten iron. Jets of divine and unholy energy erupt with no warning from this black rift and the fissures that spread out from it.

Area Aspects: Deep cracks in the mountainside, divine and unholy energy eruptions, icy cold and molten hot rock

A huge crack was set into the heart of the mountain after the celestial palace crashed down, and a mixture of divine and unholy energy erupted from this wound. This essence has spilled into nearby pools and streams, whose water is now said to cause mutation in natural creatures and open up unnatural rifts to the lower planes. Fissures and caverns spread out from the rift, many of them holding creatures corrupted by or drawn to the rift's power.

CHAMBER OF JUDGMENT

Statues of angelic paladins holding massive crystalline swords look sternly out from alcoves in the walls of this circular chamber. A high, semicircular platform fills the far side of the chamber, while a rune-scribed circle sits in the center of the floor. A steady pulse of magical energy flows through the stone and metal of the room, but a large crack splits the circle in two. Bolts of energy occasionally erupt from the broken circle, lancing out to the crystalline blades of the angelic paladins.

Area Aspects: Statues of angelic paladins, high semicircular platform, rune-scribed circle split by crack, eruptions of magical energy

This chamber once held the multiverse's most dangerous creatures in judgment before an angelic tribunal, with the circle in the floor appearing to channel some form of powerful binding magic. The crack has disrupted that magic, undoing the protections of the circle and allowing unbridled energy to flow from the wound.

HOLY ARMORY

Large iron racks stand in rows at the center of this hall of blue stone. Though most of those racks are empty, strange weapons with blades of crystal and white metal still hang on some, while large suits of plate armor stand in a few nearby alcoves. The floor here is covered in the shattered remnants of destroyed arms and humanoid bones.

Area Aspects: Weapons of crystal and white metal on iron racks, large suits of plate armor, floor covered in broken weapons and bones

Four such armories exist in the palace, with two of them partially emptied as the wars between the celestials and the forces of the lower worlds engaged in battle. One was completely destroyed when the palace fell. One remains mostly intact, its magical guards and wards still active.

CRYSTALLINE HEART

Red light floods this massive, ten-sided room, whose walls erupt at random intervals with blasts of white lightning. Transparent walkways lead into the center of the chamber, where a large crystal slowly spins in the air, its interior filled with a translucent mist. A fissure has split the crystal, and pieces of it float in orbit around it. Within the misty interior of the crystal, the shape of some creature seems to move in tortured agony.

Area Aspects: Transparent walkways, large cracked crystal, floating crystalline pieces, tortured shape in the crystal, cracks of white lightning

The energy flowing off the crystal once powered the entire palace, keeping it floating in the heavens. It is possible that the fortress of the celestials has drawn its power from the creature trapped in the crystalline heart, whether a being of celestial origin, a prisoner bound and tapped for energy, or a god trapped in the early stages of birth. Though it was damaged during the palace's collapse, the crystal remains mostly intact. However, it isn't clear how long it will remain so.

HALL OF BLOOD

This hall appears to defy the physical boundaries of the exterior of the palace. A mist obscures its huge ceiling, and hundreds of columns line its endless walls. The decaying corpses of angels and demons lie here in pools of liquid silver blood and pitch-black ichor. The floor and walls have been charred and scarred by a battle beyond the boundaries of mortal comprehension. In the center of the chamber, a mountain of celestial and demonic bodies have been twisted together into an eternal monument of wrath.

Area Aspects: Mist obscuring the ceiling, decaying corpses of angels and demons, mountain of twisted bodies of immortals, pools of immortal blood

It would appear that the greatest battles fought within the celestial palace took place in this hall, where angelic and demonic forces crashed together over long centuries. Immortal blood never meant to be spilled has eaten away at the walls here, after weapons forged of fury and wrath carved up countless celestial and demonic bodies.



THE DUNGEON OF FIRE

High in the mountains, a volcano spews black ash into the clouds as it has done for millions of years. Deep within its crater, four dwarven fortresses rise from the rock, each shaped as a massive monument and watchtower—not guarding against what lies outside the volcano, but against what resides within it. At the center of the crater, a four-sided tower is connected at top and bottom by huge chains to the rock walls. This Dungeon of Fire hangs suspended hundreds of feet above the molten stone that bubbles below.

All facets of the construction of the dwarven complex are clearly built around guard and protection. Narrow switchback paths lead from the base of the volcano to caves near the rim, which lead to the fortresses inside. Multiple layers of protection ensure that none of the creatures held in this unique prison can ever get out.

This site is over two thousand years old, and has been well guarded for most of that time. Now, though, the dungeon and its guardian fortresses lie abandoned after centuries of neglect. The strength of this place's dwarven stonecraft still holds, but the prisoners held within the dungeon are waiting for any chance to break free.

Potential Inhabitants: Dark dwarves, dark elves, goblinoids, evil humanoids, celestials, demons, outsiders, powerful monsters, dragons

Location Aspects: Mountainous, secluded, volcanic, otherworldly

Tower of Black Iron

Hanging suspended over molten rock below, a four-sided tower of black iron swings slowly, the creak of its huge chains echoing from the stone walls of the volcanic core. Eight chains once connected the tower to the four fortresses, but one of those hangs broken now, swinging slowly above the lava below. Each chain is marked with magical glyphs, while obelisks with similar glyphs extend out from the walls of the crater above, their magic glowing in orange and blue. A drawbridge of rock and iron connects the dungeon tower to a narrow ring of stone running between the four keeps. Large fissures in the rock where the chains are attached speak to centuries of use—and centuries of neglect.

Area Aspects: Huge glyph-marked chains, one broken chain, crumbling drawbridge, lava hundreds of feet below, glowing rune-scribed obelisks

Though one of the chains hangs broken, the tower remains relatively stable. However, any earthquake or volcanic eruption strong enough to break more chains could cut the prison free, sending it down to the lava below. The surface of the cold iron tower could withstand the heat of the lava, but many of the creatures within the prison would be quickly killed.

An Unlikely Alliance

The fine stonework and magical wards of the Dungeon of Fire show signs of an alliance between elves and dwarves. When the dwarves set out to construct the dungeon and its four fortresses, they built on a huge scale to ensure the strength and longevity of their prison. When the dwarven construction was complete, the elves inscribed powerful runes of protection and counter-scrying throughout the dungeon. Two powerful overlapping antimagic spheres—one originating from within the dungeon and one connected to the four keeps—ensure that sorcery cannot penetrate the dungeon. The obelisks that ring the crater target beams of lightning and fire toward any creature that attempts to fly toward or away from the dungeon, sending would-be intruders plummeting to the lava below.

CONNECTORS: THE RINGWAY

A thick, crumbling stone walkway follows the inner circumference of the volcano's crater, linking the four fortresses. Stone carvings of the dwarves and elves that built this place sit in intermittent alcoves along the wall of the walkway, whose inner edge hangs over the molten rock and lava hundreds of feet below. Signs of battle from centuries ago still mar the walkway, which has no railing or protective barrier.

Area Aspects: Crumbling walkway, statues of elves and dwarves, drop-off to lava below

This thick stone ring connects the four keeps to one another, and leads to the crumbling drawbridge that is the only access to the prison tower. Parts of the walkway have crumbled down to the lava below, creating gaps that might require ingenuity and effort to safely cross.

CENTRAL BRIDGE

A series of black iron chains hoists up an iron-reinforced stone drawbridge. Huge iron counterweights help to shift the massive bridge toward and away from the prison, while a network of gears high above switches the positions of the chains as the bridge moves. Though chipped and fractured, the bridge's huge size and immaculate construction give the impression that it has worked for centuries and will work for centuries to come.

Area Aspects: Huge black iron chains, massive iron counterweights, large network of gears

To make use of the bridge, characters at each of the four dwarven keeps must work together to unlock the mechanisms that control it. Signal fires at each of the keeps were used to coordinate this control, while the personal seals of the lords of the keeps were sent by courier to confirm each stronghold's readiness. These security measures ensured that no one group could take control of the bridge and its access to the central dungeon tower.

MIGHTY CHAINS

Each of the massive chains that hold the central tower in place is carefully marked in elven glyphs that hum when touched. A single link would likely take a team of a dozen horses to move, and how the great chains were lifted into position remains a mystery of elven magic and dwarven engineering. The collapse of the one ruined chain must have been catastrophic.

Area Aspects: Elven glyphs, huge chain links

Eight chains once held the dungeon tower in position, but one hangs broken now. What force could have shattered the chain remains a mystery, but there is no doubt as to what manner of unearthly power must have been involved. Only the grip of a titan, the combined magic of a dozen archmages, or the blade of a god could perform such a feat. The chains are constructed so as to adjust themselves as the crater wall of the volcano shifts. The engineers who built this prison considered even the movement of the world when it was designed.

DWARVEN KEEPS

Each of the four keeps that protect the outer ring of the dungeon stands as a timeless artifact to the artisanship of its creators. One is carved in the form of an old dwarf king, sitting with a stone hammer across his lap as he gazes at the dungeon tower at the center of the crater. Another is a simple pyramid of stone set with a carving of two crossed axes. A third is a great dragon, curled up tightly with one eye forever open and watching the tower. The fourth is a huge demonic skull impaled upon a spike of black iron, the black pits of its eyes endlessly watching the tower before it.

Area Aspects: Four well-carved keeps, dwarf king with stone hammer, pyramid of stone with two crossed axes, great dragon, demonic skull

The construction and design of each of the keeps was undertaken by the four dwarven kings who first commissioned the fire dungeon's construction. Each keep is large enough to garrison fifty soldiers, and contains sleeping chambers, armories, meeting halls, feasting halls, and magical laboratories dedicated to ensuring that the wards of the dungeon tower remain intact. Each keep is built to protect against threats from inside and outside the dungeon complex, with fail-safes in place to seal a keep off from outside attack if need be.

At the top of each keep, a watchtower provides a view of the dungeon tower, the outer ring, and the other watchtowers. The dwarves used complicated signal fires to communicate between towers, passing messages to each of the four garrisons guarding the central dungeon.

DUNGEON TOWER ENTRY HALL

Sharp-edged columns of obsidian and the forbidding statues of dwarven guardians line the entry hall of the central dungeon. Violet crystals cover the walls, swirling with magical energy. Lines of glyphs mark off sections of the floor where guards and prisoners once stood, separated by elven magic.

Area Aspects: Grim dwarven statues, glowing violet crystals, lines of glyphs on the floor

The glyphs and crystals are part of the meticulous process once used to bring new prisoners into the dungeon. With prisoners hemmed in by the magical barriers set across the floor, the crystals on the walls would shoot forth beams of light that would steal the strength from those they touched, ensuring a smooth transition from the outside world. After centuries, this magic has weakened, becoming both unstable and unpredictable.

CONNECTORS: THE BLACK HALLS

Elven glyphs and mechanical dwarven wards line the black iron halls of the dungeon tower. Portcullises, some raised and some lowered, block off sections of the halls and the stairways that ascend and descend the dungeon tower. Their bars are cold iron, and are marked with magical glyphs.

Area Aspects: Elven glyphs and dwarven traps, portcullises of glyph-marked cold iron

These halls display the strongest protections known to dwarves and elves. Many of these wards and traps have broken down over time, been destroyed as if by great force, or are now dangerously unstable.

DARK ARMORY

A large iron statue of an armored dwarf warrior stands at the end of this long hall, whose walls are lined with displays of arms and armor. Other weapons and armor

lie scattered across the dusty floor, along with the shattered remains of humanoid skeletons. The styles and decorations of the arms and armor speak of numerous empires and races from across countless centuries.

Area Aspects: Large iron statue, displays of arms and armor from many empires, dusty skeletons on the floor

From the relics left behind, it appears that the Dungeon of Fire wasn't built to imprison only dangerous entities, but also to store some of the most dangerous and powerful artifacts of dwarves and elves. Though well protected within the tower, this room is additionally safeguarded by physical and magical wards, which prevent the unauthorized removal of these artifacts.

PRISON CELLS

Darkness hangs heavy along the passages and staircases connecting the twenty-four cells of the dungeon. Each cell is unique in its construction, and is carved directly into the tower's iron walls. Some cell doors swirl with prismatic light. Others appear completely black. Some are barred in iron scribed with magical glyphs, while other cells appear to be open. Cracks in the iron walls of many cells speak of powerful forces straining against the bonds of the tower.

Area Aspects: Unique prison cells, glyph-scribed iron bars, unnatural darkness, doors of swirling prismatic light

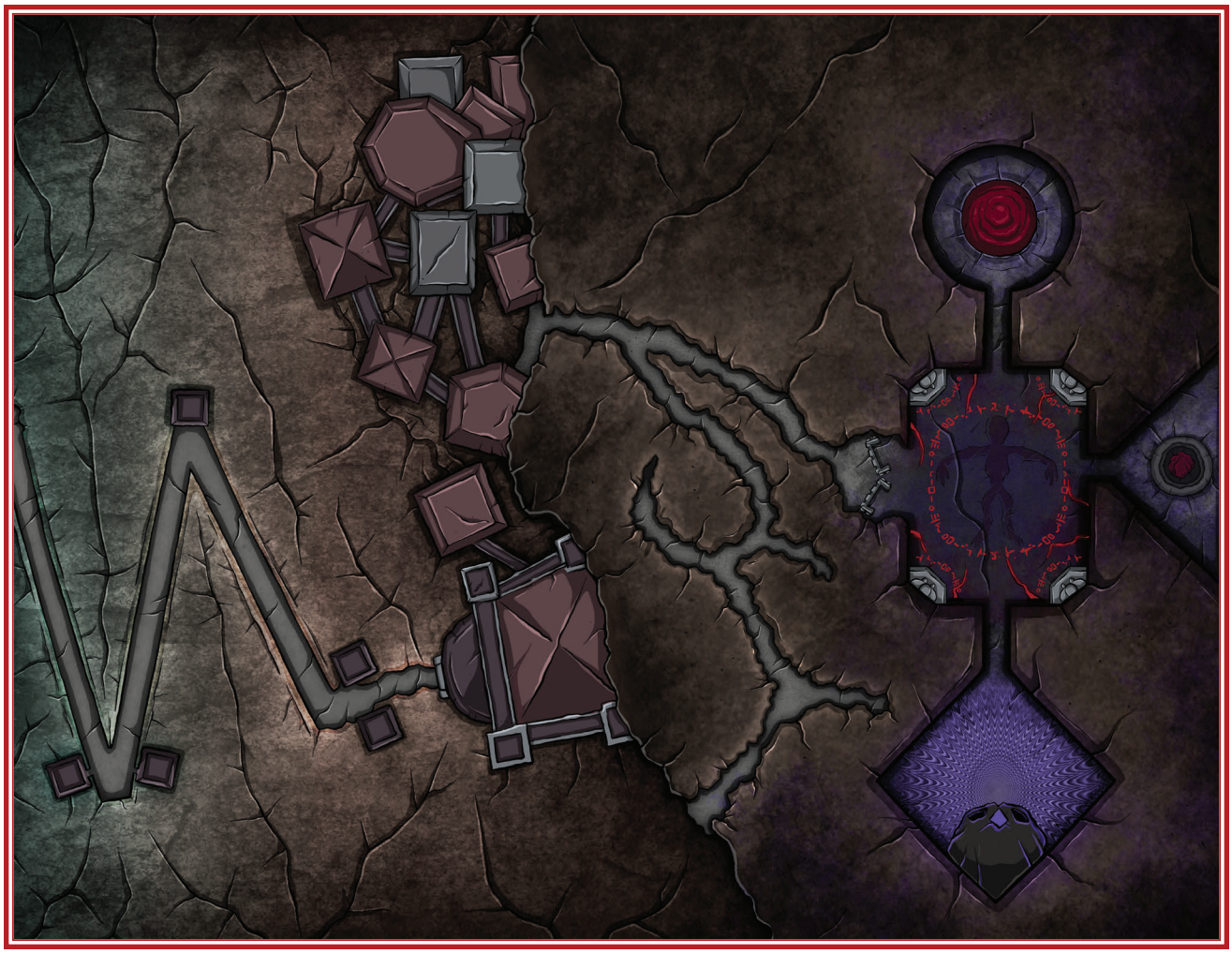
Every cell in the dungeon tower appears to have been uniquely constructed for the creature imprisoned within it. Remnants and records reveal that the dungeon imprisoned both mortals and immortals, all of which posed enough of a threat to warrant the construction of a cell built to house only them. While many of these cells are conventional prisons, others lead to pocket dimensions designed to hold much larger creatures, or creatures that cannot normally be bound within the mortal world. These pocket dimensions can be accessed only through the dungeon, and are often filled with nightmarish landscapes never meant to be seen by mortal creatures. Though some of these dimensions gave their prisoners the freedom to explore an entire world, most such prisoners likely stayed as close to the planar door as possible, so as not to lose their only tie to reality.

CHAMBER OF THE VOID SPHERES

Eight stone podiums stand in a circle in this hemispherical chamber. The walls here absorb all sound, giving the chamber a feeling of being outside of reality. A sphere the size of a humanoid skull floats above each podium, all of them glowing in different colors to illuminate the flat black of the room's iron walls with shifting light. Some of the spheres pulse slowly, while others flash with angry bursts of luminescence. Still others are almost completely dark, except for a single spark of lonely light held deep within them.

Area Aspects: Eight spheres shedding light and color, sound-absorbing walls

Each void sphere is its own metaphysical prison, trapping a victim in a realm of nothingness. The elves who created them intended the void spheres only as a means of interring the most dangerous creatures, and the timeless solitude within has the unfortunate side effect of driving those creatures mad if they weren't already so. It's up to you to determine how one might release an entity held within a void sphere—and what might emerge if this is done.



THE RED KEEP

Carved out of unyielding granite high up on the mountainside, an abandoned dwarven city and the fortress at its head are the last vestiges of a once vast and powerful mining operation. Veins of red iron lace through dark stone, and a red glow pulses from the largest of the many tunnels leading deep into the mountain. However, the site lies silent and abandoned, the chain-driven lifts that once ran up and into the mines hanging motionless. A stone walkway switchbacks its way up the mountainside to the base of the keep, rising above the rubble of walls and buildings that have fallen to the foot of the slope below.

The crumbled buildings and ruins left behind by the dwarves reveal a rough history of external conflict and internal betrayal. Dried blood still stains the narrow streets of the city, and signs of slaughter and execution are everywhere. Grim statues of dwarves, many of them headless, stand armed and protected in sinister angular armor.

A red light shines out from the thick veins of iron ore visible within the rock on which the city and the keep are built. In the brightest days of this dwarven city, its masters smelted and forged this red iron ore into powerful weapons and armor for kingdoms across the land. Closer examination shows that even where the iron ore has been dug out in years past, it has somehow replenished itself. In other places, dark rock shows signs of cracking where veins of red ore have broken out from within.

Potential Inhabitants: Demons, devils, fallen celestials, dark elves, goblinoids, undead, evil humanoids, crazed maniacs, evil cultists, aberrations

Location Aspects: Veins of evil red iron, dwarven ruins, bloody battlegrounds, isolated mountains, vertical city architecture, abandoned mines, ancient hidden chambers

DESIGN NOTE:
This fantastic location is built around the concept of a forgotten god or other powerful being trapped for millennia in a vault deep within the mountain. Consider reskinning this trapped monstrosity in a way that fits your own world and your own game. Is it a huge apocalyptic dragon? A powerful extradimensional being? Was an evil god banished here by the forces of the good deities in the early days of the world?

ENTRANCE RAMP

A wide stone ramp runs back and forth up the mountainside to the base of the dwarven city. Built of crumbling mortar and stone worked smooth from countless footfalls, the ramp is the only clear access to the city a thousand feet above. Every hundred steps, two large statues stand to either side of the ramp, most with their heads broken off and all showing signs of damage. Even damaged, it is clear that they once depicted stern dwarven guardians with ornate weapons, wearing full armor and angular horned helms that obscure their faces.

Area Aspects: Crumbling ramp, headless statues, thousand-foot drop

Unless characters want to spend days climbing over sharp and treacherous rocks, the ramp is the only clear path to the scaffolds of the dwarven city and the keep at its heart. Before the dwarves abandoned this place, it was always heavily guarded.

CONNECTORS: THE VERTICAL CITY

The high dwarven city is built up as a series of stone and hardwood scaffolds, clinging tenaciously to the inhospitable mountainside where endless seasons of ice have split the rock like the blade of an axe. Chain-driven lifts once extended across the heights of the city, which also features steep stone streets now running wet with glacial run-off. Though it must once have risen over a thousand feet high, much of the original dwarven city has collapsed to pile as rubble at the foot of the peak.

Area Aspects: Steep city streets, glacial runoff, stone and hardwood scaffolding, abandoned lifts, city ruins down below

With the chain lifts inoperative and much of the city crumbling, moving within it requires cautious climbing. As the characters explore, they see signs that the devastation here unfolded over decades of war. Only sturdy dwarven construction prevents the keep and the rest of the city from collapsing.

THRONE OF THE RED KING

High up on the mountain, the keep that dominates the city is carved directly into the rock face, with a crumbling bridge leading over a deep cleft in the mountainside toward its broken stone doors. Within the citadel's main hall stands a throne crafted of stone and red iron, and shaped into the form of a chimera. The eyes of the goat, the serpent, and the lion gleam with gemstones. An eclectic mixture of artwork and broken statues speaks to the number of kings and queens that must have sat on this red throne over long centuries. A broken balcony hangs above the main floor of the throne room.

Area Aspects: Bridge over a thousand-foot-deep chasm, throne of stone and red iron in chimera form, eclectic decor of dozens of rulers

The keep is rather small, featuring only guards' quarters, a kitchen, and a royal bedroom that looks out over the slopes below. Whispered rumors speak of a secret treasure vault that lies beneath this chamber, well protected by cunning dwarven traps. Its access point and contents are left for you to determine.

RED IRON FORGE

This scorched chamber set at the center of the city is dominated by four forges cast of black iron, their surfaces laced with veins of red. Giant furnaces and bellows once funneled their flames into the forges, bringing them to unimaginable temperatures. Black oily liquid still fills much of a large cooling bath. A red iron altar stands in the middle of the room, its concave top worn smooth and surrounded by an intricate webwork of grooves stained red-black.

Area Aspects: Black iron forges, huge furnaces, blood-grooved altar, massive bellows

The forges in this area all show signs of centuries of hard use creating red-iron armor and weapons.

Trails of blood left in the grooves of the altar hint at the dark experiments of the priests and mages who empowered forged artifacts with the life force of screaming sacrifices.

CONNECTORS: THE BREATHING TUNNELS

Thin veins of red cut through the rough granite of these tunnels, which stand outside the city and lead down to the mines deep within the mountain. A warm breeze blows through these halls, echoing like a dark whisper.

Area Aspects: Veins of red iron, whispers of a dead god

A network of mine tunnels and access passages cuts through the mountain. Over the years since the dwarven city was abandoned, many of these tunnels have collapsed. As the characters travel farther into the mountain, the veins of red iron within the marble grow thicker, leading on to the deepest passages connecting to the keep's buried vaults.

VAULT ENTRYWAY

Stone barricades protected by murder holes flank a large cleft in the wall of the cavern ahead. Hot wind blows out of the cleft, then suddenly reverses to draw back cooler air from the tunnels behind you—creating an uncomfortable sense that the mountain is breathing. The ground and walls around the crumbling barricades are darkened by long-dried blood.

Area Aspects: Stone barriers with murder holes, bloodstained battleground, hot wind of the red vaults

These barricades protected the ancient vaults of the dwarven keep for centuries. The blood spilled here comes from the hundreds of creatures who fought and died trying to protect or infiltrate these halls.

CHAMBER OF THE ENTOMBED GOD

This large chamber features inward-slanting walls carved smooth from granite, but its construction is far different from that of the dwarven tunnels that led here. The floor of the chamber is scribed with the depiction of a featureless humanoid with its arms outstretched, and encircled by a ring of strange red glyphs. Statues of equally featureless humanoids stand in the corners of the room, each with hands outstretched and palms up, and with a circle of the same glyphs surrounding its base. Tendrils of pulsing red light are laced through the stone floor, walls, and ceiling of this chamber, extending out along angled passageways that lead into adjacent caverns.

Area Aspects: Pulsing red tendrils, featureless alien statues, glyph-scribed circle surrounding the image of a forgotten god

Though its source has been buried for thousands of years, malevolent energy still flows within the walls of this large chamber. The humanoid depictions look nothing like any other living creature, and a general sense of unease fills those who look upon them. The image on the floor might be the image of the god or a warning to outsiders of the power contained within these halls.

DESIGN NOTE:
Who—or what—has made the inner chambers of the entombed god their lair? Is the area now the sanctum of insane monsters, ancient sages, or ruthless cultists? Whatever power still lingers within the chamber is overwhelmingly evil, and few can be exposed to it without succumbing to its darkness. Alternatively, that power might now be all but gone, fading within the husk of an imprisoned god and drawing the attention only of the lowest of shamans or witch doctors seeking magic now lost.

BLOOD POOLS

This wide, circular room is dominated by two large pools of swirling red liquid. The first pool occupies the center of the floor—but the second hangs suspended and upside down below the ceiling. Traces of red liquid fall at irregular intervals from the ceiling to the floor and back again, keeping both pools in perfect equilibrium.

Area Aspects: Pools of ancient red liquid, liquid flowing to defy gravity

The two pools are in a constant state of motion, as they have been for thousands of years. Any object placed into the space between the pools floats up into the air to hover at the midpoint of the room, defying gravity until it is removed from the area.

CHAMBER OF THE HEART

A deep pit opens up in the floor of this triangular-shaped chamber, its bottom filled by a dark-red mass that pulsates rhythmically. Thick tendrils extend out from this mass, pushing into the surrounding rock through cracks and fissures, and spreading out like roots within the stone floor and walls of the chamber.

Area Aspects: Beating red "heart," veins of red flowing within the stone

Every pulse from the otherworldly heart at the bottom of the pit pushes its veins deeper into the rock that has imprisoned it. Over thousands of years, these veins have slowly bored their way from the heart of the mountain to the outside.

VESSEL OF THE MIND

A huge, black, humanoid skull dominates the far side of this square chamber. The skull is partially embedded in the stone floor, leaving its eye sockets set just above the surface. A diamond-shaped hole is cut into the forehead of the skull, with a purple glow pulsing out from deep within it. Intricate geometric carvings cover the floor, shifting in some kind of optical illusion to make the floor appear as though it is dropping away beneath the viewer's feet.

Area Aspects: Huge black skull, diamond-shaped hole, intricate geometric carvings

This chamber once stored the brain of the entombed god. Its vast intellect fed into the geometric patterns scribed here, opening up gateways to knowledge that defied the limits of mortal minds. None can say whether the blood of the god solidified into the red iron ore that infuses the mountain, or whether existing veins of ore were tainted by the power of that entombed entity. Likewise, whether the brain matter in the ebony skull drove the expansion of the god's touch beyond its prison chambers, or whether that touch was simply the result of the god's chaotic nature, is for you to decide.



THE DAM OF KINGS

Stretching across the mouth of a shining sapphire lake, the Dam of Kings spans six hundred feet across and stands high above the ravine into which its water flows. The faces of four kings adorn the lower edge of the dam, their mouths opening to let the water of the lake pour into the ravine below. The hard, sinister eyes of the four kings act as vents for the forges found within the dam. A small castle sits atop the dam's wide upper battlements, which are lined with watchtowers.

No one living remembers the construction of the legendary Dam of Kings. Glacial runoff fills the wide, blue-watered lake built up behind the dam, whose shores feature a number of towns. The rumble of the dam's internal workings course through rock and soil, and can be felt fifty miles away. For closer townsfolk, the rhythmic beat has been a continual presence in their lives.

Potential Inhabitants: Humanoids, dwarves, constructs, monstrous humanoids, unintelligent monsters, water dwellers

Location Aspects: Lake, river, forgotten lands, civilized lands, temperate, mountainous

A Source of Vast Power

The Dam of Kings was built to serve many purposes. The flow of water through the dam drives the operation of the fiery forges within it, which run day and night powered by water-driven turbines and huge bellows. Its upper reaches serve as the only bridge across the thousand-foot-deep ravine that marks the end of the lake. Additionally, the upper chambers of the dam likely served as a secondary castle to a lord now long dead and forgotten.

The Kings

The dam was built over many generations, and the faces carved into it represent the four kings who reigned during its construction. When the forges are operational, fire and black smoke pour forth from their eyes. Locals refer to the kings as the four devils, both for their brutal treatment of the captives who constructed the dam and for their terrifying appearance as water and fire flows from their eyes and mouths.

BATTLEMENTS

Wide dirt roads extend out from each side of the dam's upper battlements, leading away toward dense forest on either side and making the dam the best route across the ravine. The battlements stand one hundred feet above the sapphire lake to their north and a thousand feet above the southern ravine. Watchtowers stand along both sides of the fifty-foot wide battlement. Massive stone blocks hang between each pair of towers, ready to be dropped down to create an impenetrable barrier.

Area Aspects: Thousand-foot drop above the ravine, fifty-foot-wide battlements, two-story watchtowers, huge stone blocks hanging above the battlements

Large wooden pins hold the massive stone blocks in place. A single smash with a heavy mallet against the pin in each of the flanking towers pushes out the pin and drops the grooved stone block to the battlement below. This creates a series of solid barriers across the battlement, each of which must be breeched by anyone attacking the central castle atop the dam. Dropping the barriers also blocks off the road that runs across the dam until the stones are lifted again, requiring the effort of engineering equipment and hundreds of people.

BLOODY TOWERS

Every brick in these watchtowers has been laid for the purpose of potent defense. Each tower is slightly trapezoidal in shape, with a top that hangs out over the surface of the battlement below. Crossbow slits, chutes for dropping burning pitch, and thick iron grapeshot cannons built into the walls are the key to each tower's defense. Large iron spikes surround each tower to prevent siege weapons from getting anywhere near its base.

Area Aspects: Overhanging towers, crossbow slits, chutes for burning pitch, grapeshot cannons, large antisiege spikes

Each of the dam's watchtowers is a small fortress unto itself, built to allow even a half-dozen defenders to hold out against a much larger force. Narrow stairways and halls connect armories and barracks within the tower, while trapdoors lead down into tunnels within the dam below.

THE ESCAPE

A smooth-walled fortress rises from the center of the dam above the faces of the kings, protected by the watchtowers along the battlements. An eternal magical flame burns like an all-seeing eye in the tower's face, overlooking the gorge, the lake, and the dam below.

This tower was built as a second home for the kings who oversaw the construction of the dam, and tales tell of how each used this site to escape the political pressure of the capital. The number of rooms in the Escape, as it became known, is small compared to the vast wealth of its builders, but those builders designed the tower with simplicity in mind. The Escape contains modestly decorated great halls, kitchens, bedrooms, and studies, as well as a broad stone platform that offers breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape.

CONNECTORS: THE DEEPWAYS

Tunnel passages eight feet high and ten feet wide twist throughout the interior of the dam. Each brick of their walls shows the quality of master crafting, suggesting that the amount of time required to build the dam must have been formidable. In certain areas, sections of wall have been removed to reveal complicated mechanisms of gears, chains, decaying ropes, and pressure plates.

Area Aspects: Complicated passageways, high-quality brickwork, exposed mechanics of devious dwarven traps

The passages known as the deepways wind their way throughout the interior of the dam, creating a vast network of tunnels and intersections that runs for hundreds of miles. No one, living or dead, has ever known or mapped their entire extent. The deepways often lead to chambers long forgotten, including

meeting halls, kitchens, storerooms holding materials to repair the dam, and treasure vaults protected by terrible traps. However, becoming lost in these tunnels is a life-threatening concern for those with the experience to recognize the true nature of this labyrinth.

It is said that the bottommost chambers of the deepways now lie submerged after the lowest reaches of the dam were flooded centuries ago. In the past, fissures in the rock have led monsters from the depths of the lake into the dam's lowest halls.

ROARING VENTS

Four levels of stone walkways and ramps crisscross this huge chamber, whose center is cut through by a trough of stone twenty feet wide and fifteen feet deep. Huge iron doors connected to massive gears control the flow of hundreds of thousands of gallons of water that roars through the trough, turning the fins of a titanic iron waterwheel. Beyond that, huge vents controlled by the same mechanism open up to the mouth of one of the kings on the exterior of the dam, and to the ravine below. Ten-ton stone counterweights are held up by chains with links twelve feet high, allowing a single person to turn the great wheel, lift the iron doors, and open the mouth of the king.

Area Aspects: Multilevel walkways, huge stone trough, finned waterwheel, ten-ton counterweights, huge iron doors, command wheel

Four vent chambers are found within the dam, one for each of the kings. When the water flows, it drives the massive waterwheel to drive power throughout the entire dam.

GREAT FORGES

Black soot stains the walls of this huge stone chamber. Dozens of large iron wheels and pistons are attached to complicated machinery, including a twenty-foot-high bellows that stands ready to push air into a thirty-foot-high forge. Anvils, troughs, and tables are scattered around the chamber, ready to produce vast amounts of ironworks. Large vents in the ceiling lead to the eyes of the kings on the outside of the dam.

Area Aspects: Huge bellows, large iron wheels and pistons, anvils, troughs, tables, ceiling vents

Iron, steel, and other metals are heated and hammered in this large chamber. The water rushing through the roaring vents powers the wheels and pistons here that drive the complex machinery of the forge. The complicated system gives the forge masters absolute control over the heat of the forge fires and all aspects of the forging and smithing process.

MIGHTY GENERATOR

Huge gears flank a massive construct of wood and iron, built around a large flanged iron rod set between two huge blocks of iron-laced rock. When the gears turn, driven by the power of the roaring vents, they spin the rod to generate the spark of lightning. Metal tracks lead away from the generator construct to rows of iron bars set into the stone floor, each topped by a shining metal ball.

Area Aspects: Gears and wheels, spinning iron rod between iron-laced rock, metal tracks leading to iron bars in the ground

When the roaring vents are operating, the spinning of the iron rod between two blocks of magnetic rock creates an electromagnetic charge. This charge flows into the rods on the ground, creating huge sparks of electricity. Alchemists working at the dam once stored the electricity formed from the charge into blue crystals, which they would embed into weapons, armor, and other implements.

ANCIENT ARMORY

Ancient war machines stand at rest in an armory—trebuchets, ballistae, armored wheeled towers, wheeled walls set with spikes, and many other mechanisms, all constructed of gleaming iron and sturdy hardwood. This hall stands nearly two hundred feet long and fifty feet across. Massive iron chains rise up from four huge lifts that ascend into darkness above, then return back down shafts where twenty-ton counterweights hang far below.

Area Aspects: Dwarven war machines, huge lifts to the battlements above, deep shafts holding counterweights

This armory houses machines used to defend the dam or to take that battle to neighboring enemies. The shafts of the lifts descend hundreds of feet into the dam. A complex network of gears, levers, and counterweights enables the lifts to carry immense weight up to the battlements above.

SUNKEN MONUMENTS

Black, acrid water fills this wide chamber. Huge dwarven statues cast of iron stand here at odd angles, crumbling under the continued exposure to some corrosive acid. A tall black obelisk rises out of the water, decorated in dwarven glyphs that pulse with a strange green light. In other places, raised stone daises built to support the ruined statues rise above the surface of the water.

Area Aspects: Acidic water, crumbling dwarven statues, tall black obelisk, stone dais islands

Once a hall of ancient dwarven treasures, this subterranean chamber has gradually become flooded with acidic water that has corroded and destroyed many of its relics. Some objects here still thrum with strange power, while relics of gold and other incorruptible metals are hidden beneath the surface of the tainted water.

VAULT OF THE GOLDEN DRAGON

Machinery lines the walls of this large chamber, creating a control mechanism for countless unseen traps. The tiled floor here is covered with three inches of slick, oily water, and a massive gold statue of a dragon dominates the center of the hall. Sitting on a podium of marble, the golden dragon is set in a pose of ferocious rage, mouth open and ruby eyes gleaming. Along the walls, oily water drips from spouts into catches attached to large wheels, which rotate intermittently to keep the machinery of the room in continual motion.

Area Aspects: Great gear-work machines, huge golden dragon statue, oily water

Much of the wealth of the dam sits in this great vault, its value and makeup determined by you. The treasure here is protected by the labors of the dozens of engineers and hundreds of workers who built the hall and its traps. In addition to the protections you place here, the golden dragon is a clockwork creature designed to thwart any who would attempt to steal from this chamber. It might be a simple device designed only to breathe fire, or a fully functioning automaton capable of slaying the hardiest adventurers, as you decide.



THE FORGOTTEN LIBRARY

Atop a rocky hill, centuries of wind and rain have eroded the edges of the monolithic stone tower that makes up the upper reaches of the Forgotten Library. Six stories tall and seemingly carved from a single block of granite, this structure stands as strong as it did a thousand years past, with tall, narrow windows the only markings on its smooth surface.

Built over a thousand years ago, the Forgotten Library shows the marks of centuries of conflict as it was fought over by hundreds of rulers, yet it still stands strong. The library's architects built it to withstand all those who might wish to destroy the knowledge held within. The remnants of dozens of different sects who protected the library—some good and some evil—still remain in and around its halls.

Potential Inhabitants: Humanoids, arcane constructs, demons, devils, undead, cultists

Location Aspects: Mountainous, temperate, desert, isolated, civilized

The Labyrinthine Library

As impressive as the monolithic upper keep is, it represents only a small part of the library, most of which extends down into chambers and halls beneath the rocky hill. The library has been designed in such a way that no single group could ever hope to conquer or defend the entire structure. Narrow twisted hallways, easily defended doors, and hundreds of secret passages extending for miles under the ground make it nearly impossible to control. Countless times

over the centuries, the caretakers of the library have fended off attacks by the strongest foes.

Many Residents, No Masters

Over the centuries, countless people have come to the library, whether as individuals or as groups, with the desire to protect and spread the knowledge held within. When groups opposed to each other occupied the library at the same time, philosophical conflicts often escalated to open battle or mysterious murders that would go on for decades. Some say the old tomes and scrolls of the library have absorbed as much blood as the swords and shields of war.

Built for the Protection of the Written Word

The Forgotten Library was built to withstand the greatest threats to its collections of books and scrolls—fire and water. Powered by unseen magic, vents and holes set into the walls of the library's belowground chambers draw off any excess humidity or water, and can quickly draw all the air out of a chamber to snuff out open flame before it can spread. When righteous crusaders of the past sought to burn out the library's hidden levels from the inside, they quickly found their flames extinguished and the air drawn from their very lungs.

House of Forbidden Lore

All manner of knowledge is stored in the library—both benign and dangerous. Forbidden knowledge found in the library's oldest tomes might undo a king's long lineage, or disprove sacramental truths of the land's most stable and devout religions. As well, ancient spells, dark rituals, and the voices of malevolent gods scribed in demon blood on parchments of humanoid skin can be found in the deepest stacks of the library, hidden and held away. Woe to those who lay eyes on knowledge best left unread, for such knowledge cannot be unseen.

Tower of Knowledge

A narrow switchback trail leads through the dense forest that spreads around the hillside from which the Tower of Knowledge rises. The trail is the only path leading to the tower, though breaks in the undergrowth seem to show where creatures have struck off on unmarked side trails from time to time. At the base of the tower, the path ends at a pair of large ironbound doors.

Area Aspects: Switchback trail, dense forest, iron-bound doors, narrow windows, secret tunnels

The upper tower is the only visible sign of the library above the ground. Those who lay eyes on the tower often find it underwhelming, not knowing of the vast chambers that lie hidden beneath it. Dozens of smaller hidden entryways dot the hillside for miles around, leading directly into the lower levels. However, most people use the main entrance to gain access to the library below.

Observatory

Rising from the rocky ground on the far side of the hill, away from the library tower, this large domed chamber holds an intricate machine containing multiple lenses and crystals, connected by many mechanical arms. A large crank in the center of the room is connected to a gear works that can pivot the room in any direction. The floor contains a vast map of a starry sky, etched in incredible detail. A large opening in the top of the dome reveals the sky above.

Area Aspects: Intricate machine of lenses and crystals, large crank and gear works, vast star map on the floor, large opening to the sky

A late addition to the library, the observatory is a separate building set on the other side of the rocky hill from the entrance tower. Once used by sages, scientists, and alchemists to study the night sky, the observatory is difficult to find for characters who don't know of its existence. The machine here was one of many devices installed in this chamber over the years, built to observe and tap into the energy of the stars above.

Within the Tower

Dozens of stone-carved bookshelves rise along the walls of all six stories of the tower. A number of stone desks sit in the middle of the open chamber taking up most of the first floor. Rotting ladders and stone staircases rise up to the topmost tiers of the tower, granting access to many more thousands of tomes above. The walls, shelves, and ceiling of the tower show dozens of scorch marks, but the books show no signs of damage.

Area Aspects: Stone-carved bookshelves, rotting ladders and stone stairs, scorch-marked stone, hidden door and narrow passageway into the depths

The inside of the upper tower was built for both spectacle and defense. The books lining the stone shelves here are all common fare, of the sorts readily available in towns and cities. Most have been donated by those who choose to reside and defend the true library below.

Though all the lower reaches of the library are protected against fire, the upper tower was specifically excluded from that magical protection. Crusaders who sought to destroy the library over the centuries would turn their attention to burning the tomes of the tower, all the while having no idea how little of the library's true wealth they had destroyed. When the threat had passed, damaged books were replaced by new ones to restore the tower's impressive facade.

Hidden beneath the spiral staircase rising into the upper stacks is a cleverly hidden stone door. This reveals a steep, narrow staircase passageway leading down into the depths of the true library.

GUARDIANS OF KNOWLEDGE

The narrow staircase descends into a large chamber from which numerous tunnels lead off, hinting at the scope and size of the true library hidden beneath the tower. The floor here is a mosaic of colored stones, creating a circle with a large glyph in the center of it. Two alcoves hold iron statues in the shape of faceless, featureless humanoids. Similar glyphs are stamped into metal plates above each statue.

Area Aspects: Faceless iron statues, glyphs on metal plates, mosaic glyph on stone floor

The history and creation of the statues known as the guardians of knowledge are among the many pieces of lore lost within the stacks of the library. Some believe that the guardians are simply inanimate statues built to scare away would-be intruders, while others believe they are magical constructs that guard the library from the greatest threats. Another rumor suggests that the guardians are not meant to keep anyone out of the library, but to hold something in.

TOMB OF LORE FORGOTTEN

This arched chamber appears to be a mausoleum of some sort, its walls lined with bas relief carvings. Braziers of iron stand at the four corners of a central tomb, whose stone door features the engraved figure of a wizened human male, his arms crossed over a book. That door is split by a large crack to reveal darkness within.

Area Aspects: Mausoleum, wizened figure decorating cracked stone door, iron braziers

The carvings on the walls depict the life of one of the longest-lived caretakers of the library, now entombed in the sarcophagus. Those who entombed his remains left the caretaker's private journals in the tomb, then sealed it with a curse so strong that no one has yet managed to infiltrate it. The crack in the door is a sign of a previously attempted incursion, but what happened to the creatures that attempted it remains for you to decide.

SCROLL STACKS

An open stone walkway spirals down this five-story circular chamber, with no barrier between the edge and the drop to the bottom. Hundreds of alcoves are carved directly into the rock wall along the walkway, each containing dozens of scroll tubes of ivory, leather, bone, and metal. A central column rises from the bottom to the top of the chamber, carved of stone and set with bronze inlays depicting hundreds of figures of humanoids, beasts, angels, and demons.

Area Aspects: Spiral stone walkway with no railing, stone alcoves with scroll tubes, five-story central column of bronze and stone

Thousands of scrolls are stored in this chamber, each protected by magical defenses that allows it to be read but not to be removed from its alcove. Though some of the tubes are empty, the scrolls that remain here represent knowledge and lore spanning thousands of years. The magic protecting the scrolls can be overcome, but only with significant difficulty and only on one scroll at a time. Taking any significant number of scrolls from this area would require huge amounts of time and effort.

ARTIFACT VAULTS

Hundreds of iron doors, each etched with a unique set of glyphs, line the walls of this stone chamber. Some of the doors stand open, with recent footprints showing in the dust of the floor before them. Others appear as though they have not been opened in long years. In the center of the chamber, an iron statue of a four-armed human male kneels on the ground, heavily muscled and blindfolded. Delicate glyphs are etched across the skin of the statue, whose hands hold a pair of curved scimitars.

Area Aspects: Hundreds of glyph-etched iron vault doors, glyph-etched four-armed statue wielding scimitars

In addition to books and scrolls, the library held many artifacts left for storage. The architects of the library built magical vaults to house these artifacts, each of which is keyed to a small, glyph-etched relic that gives the creature holding it access to the vault behind the door. The glyph-marked statue might have been a guardian of the vaults, or was perhaps placed here only as a warning not to disturb any vault without the proper glyph-marked key.

GUARDED TOME

A massive iron vault hangs above a broad pit in the center of this large chamber, suspended from and anchored to the surrounding walls by rune-etched chains. The pit below the vault descends into shadow lit by the glow of firelight. The door of the vault features an intricate web of articulated arms connected to both the chains and a large keyhole shaped for a three-bladed key.

Area Aspects: Iron vault hanging suspended over bottomless pit, door of intricate articulated arms, three-bladed keyhole

This vault once held a tome of unspeakable power—a book deemed so dangerous that this special chamber was constructed to ensure it did not fall into the wrong hands. If the complex lock is unsuccessfully picked, or if its key is turned in the wrong direction, the chains uncouple and the vault drops into the pit, falling hundreds of feet into a pool of magical fire designed to dissolve the vault and its contents. The key was once in the possession of the head librarian, but its present location remains a mystery.

TIME VAULTS

The walls of this long chamber are etched with intricate writing and pictograms. Seven huge golden cylinders stand upright in the center of the chamber, each showing no detail except a thin seam four inches from the top. One cylinder has fallen over, and appears to have been cut open with great difficulty. Numerous skeletons are strewn across the ground nearby.

Area Aspects: Huge golden cylinders, broken cylinder surrounded by skeletons, intricate carvings on the walls

The cylinders contain the manuscripts and artifacts of seven particular points in time, all deemed to be of great importance by those who created the time vaults. These materials were placed in the golden canisters, which were then filled with a poisonous inert gas that would protect the contents from decay and prove lethal to anyone trying to open the cylinder. If carefully studied, the pictograms describe the construction of the time vaults and provide archaic instructions for opening them.

MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES

Hundreds of strange artifacts line the walls of this multilevel chamber. A large ceramic mask with a black-feathered headdress dominates the far wall. Weapons and suits of armor centuries old stand at closer attention. Pedestals hold ceramic vases, statuettes, and items of jewelry from ages long lost. A crumbling section of wall splits the chamber in two, its stones decorated with silhouettes of gods, kings, and warfare.

Area Aspects: Strange artifacts, ancient weapons, suits of outdated armor, crumbling section of wall, large ceramic mask

The Forgotten Library holds countless artifacts representing the ages of the world, and the societies that lived and died across those ages. Most of these relics are of little worth except to those with a passion for ancient history. What traps or wards the librarians used to ensure these artifacts remained undisturbed is for you to decide.



CASTLE OF THE MAD KING

High up on a moor blanketed by thick grass and large rocks, a castle overlooks the surrounding plains and valleys. The structure appears to have been ruined and rebuilt countless times, with relatively new construction adjacent to sections that show the weathering of centuries. The castle has the appearance of a child's toy, with little rhyme or reason to its design, and not a single right angle to be seen in its patchwork walls. Two tall towers rise on its western side, while another lies in ruin to the east—all of incongruously different design. Atop a squat central tower of red-black stone stands a huge statue of a scaled bull, with horns as sharp as knives and deep black pits for eyes.

Generations of kings once called this castle home, and each such generation found madness within its twisted walls. Each ruler added on to the castle, hoping to drive out or control the curse that seemed to settle here. Instead, all these monarchs found death in this place—often at their own hands.

Potential Inhabitants: Cultists, demons, devils, monstrous humanoids, undead

Location Aspects: Temperate, civilized outskirts, city

Madness Hidden

For countless generations, the rulers of the castle hid their growing madness behind the facade of royalty and pomp. They held ceremonies, wed their sons and daughters, and received homage from the small folk. Their growing insanity was kept in the shadows, behind locked doors and soundproof chambers where

the dark presence at the castle's heart drove them to greater and greater atrocities.

Every few generations, the townsfolk would revolt and drag the current mad king from the castle, screaming, covered in blood, and condemned to be burned alive. Decades would pass. Rumors would die with the villagers that told them. And then a new king would come, claiming ownership of the castle and beginning the cycle again.

DESIGN NOTE:
In your own campaign, the cursed castle could have a long history of kings, queens, princes, and princesses who slowly went crazy inside its walls. Some members of the royal line might have escaped from the madness by fleeing the area. Some might have returned years later. You can fill out this history with interesting personalities tied to the backgrounds of the PCs or notable NPCs. Alternatively, you might choose to leave the lineage ambiguous if the castle is just the backdrop for a straight-up adventure.

The Unknown Force Below

No one knows what drives the owners of the castle to madness and self-destruction. Some claim that a gateway to hell sits buried deep in the castle's seemingly endless subbasements. Some speak of an ageless creature bound below, its nightmarish whispers echoing faintly through dark halls. Some say that a subtle poison in the water of the castle's wells will rot the minds of those who drink it. Engineers, explorers, and adventurers have all explored the depths of the castle in search of the force behind the madness, but none have found any answer—at least none of those who came out alive.

HALL OF BROKEN PILLARS

Cold air blows through this large chamber, which is lit by sunlight slanting in through holes in the wall and the castle's rotted ceiling. The stonework of the floor is uneven, and set in a pattern that inspires a sense of nausea if gazed upon too long. Each of the walls here is angled slightly off from the others, with the uneven lines of their stones making them appear even more askew. Six huge pillars carved in humanoid form and with the regalia of monarchs once held the ceiling in place, but each has been shattered precisely below its head, decapitating the depicted royalty.

Area Aspects: Rotted ceiling, uneven nauseating stonework, pillars of decapitated monarchs

This entrance hall provides a first glimpse of the twisted architecture present throughout the castle. Built and rebuilt over centuries, the hall now lies in the same ruinous state as much of the rest of the castle. Numerous stairwells and corridors lead off into other areas. Holes in the floor descend into the basements, and to a seemingly endless expanse of subbasements below.

CONNECTORS: HALLS OF MADNESS

Narrow corridors, ramps, and stairwells connect the rooms and chambers of the ruined castle. The rough stonework appears consistently unstable, and is marked by glyphs, runes, and occasional dark-red handprints—including some seen impossibly high up on the ceilings.

Area Aspects: Narrow passages, unstable stonework, glyphs and runes, red hand prints

The halls of the castle are as mad as its former rulers. Some go on for what seem like miles, while others twist and turn to quickly hit dead ends. The glyphs and runes that mark the walls carry a strange sense of foreboding, but their meanings are long lost to time.

GUEST ROOMS

An upper hallway leads to a series of elaborate guest rooms. Each has been decorated according to a particular theme, including one room that resembles a cabin on a ship, and another decked out to appear as a cave dwelling. Most of these rooms have succumbed to the elements, with water running from cracked ceilings onto moldering mattresses and rotted furniture.

Area Aspects: Thematic guest rooms, cracked ceilings, moldering mattresses, rotted furniture

A series of secret tunnels and spyholes can be found in the walls between the guest rooms, once used for secret liaisons or more-nefarious purposes.

TWISTED GALLERY

The continual assault of water and time has destroyed much of the artwork in this strange gallery. Paintings on the walls depict royalty in fine dress, their faces black with mold but the rest of their images surprisingly untouched. A statue of a proud king stands in the center of the gallery, his wrists and neck bound by thick, thorny vines growing up from cracks in the floor.

Area Aspects: Royal paintings with black moldering faces, king's statue bound in thorny vines

Some unknown force causes the mold and vegetation that has taken over much of this twisted castle to be strangely attracted to the visages of the rulers who once dwelled here.

IRON BULL

A splintered ladder leads up into the belly of the great iron bull statue that stands atop the castle. From within, spyglass lenses set into the beast's eyes offer a close-up look at the distant landscape beyond. A bellows is attached to the inside of the statue's mouth, along with a complicated tangle of metal tubes and steel canisters.

Area Aspects: Splintered ladder, spyglass eyes, flaming bellows

One of the mad kings had the idea to craft the iron bull as a device able to breathe fire or poisonous gas using the right mixture of chemicals. This king enjoyed watching the fear of the farmers and villagers below as the bull came to life, belching smoke and fire into the nighttime air.

DARK KITCHEN

Large rusted knives, shears, and hooks still crusted with black blood hang from the walls of this large kitchen. A stone slab sits in the center of the room, stained dark from years of use. The stench of death rises from a deep pit in one of the kitchen's far corners.

Area Aspects: Bloody slaughterhouse equipment, bloody stone slab, carrion pit

The size of the kitchen and its tools are a sign of the large creatures once butchered and served here. The pit in the corner leads to a network of underground sewers thick with the stench of death—the lingering effect of corpses and body parts having been disposed of here for centuries.

MURDER ROOM

Sharp hooks on iron chains hang from the ceiling of this dark stone chamber. A network of gutters in the floor leads toward a wrought iron grate covering a large drain. An iron sarcophagus lies open along one wall, revealing razor-sharp spikes within. A dozen articulated arms ending in sharp blades protrude from a blood-crusted iron construct across from it. A stone table stands in the center of the room, its surface slightly concave and with iron manacles set at each of its corners.

Area Aspects: Sharp hooks and iron chains, wrought iron grate leading to large drain, iron maiden, bladed torture construct, stone table with manacles

Few who see this room can fathom the number of murders that have taken place here. Its construction speaks to a sick and twisted mind bent on violent pain and death. The construct was engineered to automate the most painful deaths imaginable, invented and commissioned by one of the mad kings who ruled here. The shattered bones of hundreds of victims can be found in a disposal vault beneath the large drain.

SUNKEN CELLS

Rows of iron bars sit flush with the floor in this long stone chamber, covering a number of sunken pits. Hooks and chains lead from the bars to a network of cranks on the walls, one for each of the cells. The bars of three of the cells have rusted through, leaving open access to the pits they once covered. A fourth cell looks as though the bars have been shattered and pushed outward from the inside, their splayed ends now razor sharp. On the far wall, a lever controls the rusted iron door of a reservoir whose water would once have flowed in to fill the cells in the floor.

Area Aspects: Sunken cells, whole and broken iron bars, hooks and chains, lever and reservoir door

This room once held prisoners of the castle's mad rulers in its sunken cells. Opening the reservoir would flood the cells nearly to the top with fetid sewage water, forcing prisoners to press up to the bars indefinitely if they wished to stay alive. No clues hint at the identity

of the creature that broke out from the shattered cell, but the violence of its escape hints at the vengeance it sought—or might still be seeking.

ALTAR OF THE WHITE KING

Light seems to fade to darkness in the cracks, corners, and crevasses of this chamber of unworked stone. Black oily mud drips thickly along its rough walls, against which a number of skeletons are slumped. In the center of the chamber's far wall stands a monstrous, misshapen sculpture built of mud, skin, and bones. It appears as a creature draped in rotting hide, its long hands and taloned fingers outstretched. The sculpture's partially exposed side reveals a rib cage with far too many ribs and a hipbone seemingly designed for four legs. The skull appears to be that of a horned bull with no eye sockets and a grinning mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth. An altar encircled by runes sits before the sculpture, its surface caked with blood.

Area Aspects: Cracked and unworked stone, oily mud dripping down the walls, skeletons slumped along the walls, misshapen skeletal construct in the center of the room, altar encircled by runes and caked in blood

Many of the monarchs of the castle worshiped the White King—a god known only to them, and perhaps the source of the maddening whispers that spoke to those who ruled here. Those monarchs often portrayed themselves as the most pious people in the land. They hosted all manner of religious leaders over the years, arranging grand ceremonies for the common folk and private audiences for the royalty. More than one of those religious leaders found themselves in this chamber before they were due to depart the castle. After being sacrificed on the altar of the White King, their disappearances would be covered up by talk of bandits or assassination.

HEART OF DARKNESS

A deep network of narrow shafts leads far below the surface of the moor on which the castle is built. All of these passageways eventually open up into a large chamber of black volcanic rock, situated directly beneath the castle. A deep spiral pit has been dug into the center of this cavern, exposing a cylinder of black metal still half-buried in the rock. The depth of the cavern and the cylinder's placement in the rock suggest that this artifact might be thousands of years old.

Area Aspects: Network of deep shafts, volcanic rock, spiral pit, ancient cylinder of black metal

Explorers and archaeologists made a fantastic discovery in the course of implementing the plans of one of the castle's mad kings. Digging deep beneath the castle, they found a clearly artificial object that must have been buried there long before any civilization could have constructed such a thing.

DESIGN NOTE:
Is this cylinder an important campaign hook for your game, or simply something the PCs stumble upon? Does it contain a trapped demon? Dangerous matter from another world? It might be a vault designed to defy time, containing a weapon never meant to be found. Or perhaps it holds nothing at all, and is simply a malignant catalyst for the darkness in the hearts of those who once ruled here.



THE OBSIDIAN ENCLAVE

Ageless volcanic cracks line the walls of this large subterranean chamber, where a small city opens up within an expanse of obsidian stone. A green glow illuminates the spires, ziggurats, and enormous statues that stand here, all carefully carved out from the volcanic rock. Narrow bridges of black stone cross over bottomless chasms, and bolts of purple lightning arc out from dark stone ziggurats to fill the air.

Though this enclave has seen many residents over the past two thousand years, none know of its original creator. Much of the small city's purpose remains a mystery, and it is unclear whether it was built according to plan or simply found in its current state. What is known is that the enclave sits atop a nexus of magical energy, and those seeking arcane power find it in abundance within the city.

Potential Inhabitants: Subterranean creatures, evil wizards and sages, aberrations, demons, devils, constructs, liches

Location Aspects: Underground, unnatural, otherworldly

A Place of Dark Science

Unlike the base temples maintained by many of the subterranean races, this enclave has been built as a place for darker experiments meant to shape reality itself. Wizards, sages, students, and priests of science seek out this site as a place where the boundaries of the multiverse lie thin. Here they find a place of quiet study, where they might delve into mysteries beyond mortal comprehension without

being bound by moral or religious limitations. Over the thousands of years of its existence, the enclave has been sought out by countless beings in search of knowledge. What becomes of these knowledge-seekers afterward is anyone's guess.

DESIGN NOTE:
Who built the enclave and who rules over it now are left for you to decide. Its original architects might have been an order of dark-elf wizards, or a force of ancient psychic creatures known for spreading madness and death. Dark dwarves or shadow dragons might rule here now, so change the decor and depictions of the location to best fit the story you're trying to tell.

ONYX ZIGGURATS

Two ziggurats stand within pools of black liquid, their tops set with obelisks of black iron. Large, mysterious glyphs have been carved into each step of the ziggurats. A deep crack splits the left structure, showing a depth that suggests both ziggurats are solid stone. The air around the structures is charged with electricity, and the stone hums with deep energy. Spheres of purple lightning form at intermittent intervals, spinning around the ziggurats before being blasted apart by bolts of energy arcing out from the iron obelisks.

Area Aspects: Iron obelisks, steps marked with glyphs, deep crack, spheres of purple lightning

These platforms appear to be an open laboratory for conducting experiments with electricity. The shape and construction of the ziggurats channels a mysterious mix of physical and magical energy.

BLACK SPIRE

This square spire rises four stories above the surface of the enclave cavern, but its true height is hidden by the chasm it rises from, with the bottom of the structure disappearing into darkness below. Narrow windows, doors, and balconies have been carved into the spire's smooth surface, and its top ends in a razor-sharp point. A single narrow bridge spans the chasm, ending at a set of black iron doors.

Area Aspects: Narrow windows, bottomless chasm, narrow bridge

The spire served as the residence and private chambers of some of the first wizards to make use of the enclave—and who might have been the ones to build it, according to some tales. Its perfectly smooth surface is unmarred by time. A number of chambers can be found inside the spire, including an alchemical lab, a summoning chamber, a residence, and a library. Deep below the surface level, rumors tell of a dungeon and a menagerie of unspeakable horrors.

EMERALD POOLS

Green light shines from the waters of numerous oval pools set into smooth, cracked stone. The water in most of the pools is perfectly still, while others ripple and foam with occasional violence. Some spew geysers into the air, spraying the nearby stone with droplets of incandescent liquid. Lines of glowing green moss extend like tendrils from the green water, and hang down from the ceiling of the cavern above the pools.

Area Aspects: Green illuminated pools, violent eruptions, glowing green moss

Underground volcanic activity fills these pools with a strange, hot, green incandescent liquid. None living know the origins of the pools, or even whether the activity here is natural or magical in nature. Some say a rift beneath the pools leads into a paraelemental plane of existence. Others talk of the twisted heart of a dark titan bound below, pierced through with volcanic glass so that its eternal blood spews up into the pools. Whatever its source, the green liquid in the pools is known to produce unique alchemical effects for those willing to acquire and experiment with it.

PITS OF DECAY

Crumbling stone rings the edges of a dozen deep black sinkholes. Wisps of gray mist hang within the pits, and the smell of decay rises thickly from their depths. Large cracks in the sinkhole walls show the shadowy entrances of chasms and chambers far beneath the enclave's surface. A treacherous stone bridge crosses over the largest of these pits, with the center of the bridge widening into a large circle.

Area Aspects: Deep sinkholes, gray mist, large cracks in the walls, treacherous stone bridge

These naturally occurring pits have long been used by the inhabitants and explorers of the enclave for discarding the results of unwanted experiments. On

occasion in the past, some of these experiments have risen from the pits as twisted nightmares of pain and fury, only to be put down again by the might of the knowledge seekers who spawned them. In darker times, the largest pit was used as a site of sacrifice, with unwitting victims tossed or dangled down to appease the horrors below.

PETRIFIED TITAN

The black stone form of a huge humanoid appears frozen in place, clawing its way from the depths of a dark, oily pool. The titan's gaping mouth appears twisted in pain, and deep grooves carved in intricate patterns swirl across its stone skin. One gnarled hand extends out, struggling to reach above the floor of the cavern.

Area Aspects: Giant humanoid statue in dark oily pool, intricate patterns on skin, petrified hand reaching out

As old as the cavern itself, the so-called petrified titan is said to have been a god called into a world in which it could not survive. Drawn from its homeworld and caught between two planes, the titan remained stuck in place as two parts of the multiverse split apart, tearing the god in half and leaving its stone corpse behind. Some sages believe that a spark of the dead god's life force remains in the stone heart of its petrified form, though no one has successfully located or extracted it.

MYSTERIOUS IDOL

A large step pyramid ends in a broad platform, upon which sits a statue of darkness and nightmare. A slight vibration courses through the stone around the idol, with that stone showing enough difference from the idol to suggest that the statue was brought here, not built here. The squat, froglike idol has eyes that appear as shining spheres of jet, and tendrils of black smoke flow from its gaping mouth. The stone around the base of the idol has been stained with dark liquid.

Area Aspects: Alien stone idol, vibration in stone, eyes of shining jet, smoke flowing from mouth, stained stones

The enclave is primarily a place of study, and this religious icon was brought here long ago by creatures hoping to research its otherworldly power. Many have sought to determine the origin of the idol and its symbolism without success. Others have conducted dark and terrible experiments here, determining that filling the idol with mortal blood allows for the channeling of a dark magical energy.

EARTHMOTE OF THE ELEMENTAL LORDS

Formed of granite and obsidian, the Earthmote of the Elemental Lords turns slowly, suspended high above the ground. Towers of black obsidian and cracked glass crown the earthmote's upper reaches, and a domed structure of brass sits at its center. Four altars, one dedicated to each element, surround the brass dome. Water flows out from rivers coursing through the rocky base of the mote, falling hundreds of feet to vanish into mist before ever reaching the ground.

Tens of thousands of years ago, a number of elemental lords realized that their combined strength was greater than their individual power. Believing themselves to be of a higher mind than more primal elemental beings, they created an alliance and built a place outside the elemental planes where they could shape their plans for power. A grand hall was created to cater to their elemental needs, surrounded by residences suiting each lord's tastes, and all built upon a huge rock floating high above the ground.

Potential Inhabitants: Elementals, wizards, evil aerial beings, dragons

Location Aspects: Floating island, otherworldly citadel

The Shattering of the Alliance

For centuries, the alliance flourished and the elemental lords' conquests expanded. Soon, however, dissent and treachery began to arise among the lords. In a terrible confrontation, a lord of fire and a lord of earth engaged in a battle that destroyed them both. The fury of fire sliced open the central grand hall, while the stubbornness of earth cracked it wide open. With the alliance shattered, the earthmote was abandoned.

A Search for Untapped Energy

The vast energy contained within the earthmote came to the attention of wizards and sorcerers who sought it out. For centuries, competing archmages battled over the site, seeking alliances with dragons and giants to aid their cause. Though no single arcanist ever controlled the earthmote for long, a council of wizards managed to build a university of high sorcery within it. However, after two centuries, infighting and treachery saw it burned to the ground. Remnants of this period can still be found within the earthmote's caverns and chambers.

ALTARS OF THE ELEMENTS

Four altars, each dedicated to one of the elements of earth, air, fire, and water, surround the bronze dome atop the earthmote. All of the altars were damaged in the battles that shattered the alliance, and each now pulses with barely contained elemental energy. The altar of flame burns continuously, shooting black ash into the air. The altar of water flows and surges, sending forth great pulsing waves. Fierce winds surround the altar of air, creating frenzied blasts of razor-sharp stone. The endless rumbling of the altar of earth sends deep tremors through every part of the earthmote.

Area Aspects: Burning fire, pulsing waves, storm of razor-sharp stones, deep rumbling

During the days of relative peace between the elemental lords, these altars sang in perpetual harmony with one another. All stood here proudly to represent the origin of their masters, and as the defining icons of the alliance of their kind. Then came the battles that tore the alliance apart. Now, each altar stands in defiance of the others on the surface of the earthmote, unleashing elemental fury at each other and at any creatures that draw too close.

CHAMBER OF ALLIANCE

The vast bronze dome atop the earthmote stands within a ring of dark marble. Two massive brass doors are engraved with iconography of the elements—flames, cyclones, waves, and mountains. The interior of the dome is a vast hall constructed as three tiers that descend down from the doorway. A circular table of shining metal on the lowest tier has been cracked in half, its surface covered in ice crystals. The floor below the table is rent by a larger crack, which vents steam and a glow of molten rock that illuminates the chamber. Around the table, pools of oil bubble across the lowest tier.

Area Aspects: Brass doors with elemental iconography, floor of three descending tiers, cracked circular table covered in ice crystals, deep crack glowing with molten rock, pools of bubbling oil

This great hall was constructed for meetings between the elemental lords and their councils. The crack in the central table, and the great gash torn into the floor below, reveal that the alliance did not end well.



Embassy of Flame

Twin circular towers of black obsidian send long shadows over the brass dome atop the earthmote. Deep cracks cut through the surface of the towers, revealing glowing streams of molten rock. Ornate doors lie in ruins at the base of each tower, while hot smoke pours forth from within.

Area Aspects: Cracked ornate doors, cracked obsidian towers, streams of molten rock

The condition of the two spires that made up the embassy of flame is testament to the battles that took place on the earthmote, when the pounding of elemental stone fists broke through the towers' obsidian doors to create explosive results. A ball of living flame still resides in a chamber in one of the towers, originally used as a source of energy for the ambassadors. Another chamber features a circular doorway of fire, once used as a gateway between planes but now filled with dangerous chaotic magic.

Pillars of Storms

Bolts of electricity crash between two towers of opaque glass that thrust up from the surface of the earthmote. Broken shards splintered off both towers swirl around them, and cracks in their surfaces reveal partially exposed chambers within. Seemingly at random, bolts of blue-white lightning erupt between the towers, smashing together to form an unstable rift in the air. Beyond the rift, images of another world can be seen.

Area Aspects: Swirling storms and floating rocks, bolts of blue-white lightning, stormy planar gate

The pillars of storms once served the ambassadors of the plane of air, before being shattered by the blasts of fiery energy whose marks can still be seen across their cracked surfaces. The elemental energy held within the towers erupted violently during the attack, sending colossal blasts of blue-white energy through the rest of the earthmote. Though that initial storm has long calmed, destructive energy still courses through the ruins of the towers and the nonfunctioning planar gate between them.

Chamber of Endless Waves

Wet, salt-filled air has etched the walls of this large chamber smooth over millennia. A blue glow fills the area, emanating from the center of a huge roiling pool of deep-blue water. Geysers of corrosive saltwater boil up from the great pool, sending waves of water out to its edges. The pool flows out into four rivers that course through a network of passages, eventually flowing out of the earthmote and into the sky.

Area Aspects: Corrosive geysers, four powerful rivers, deep blue pool

Once the enclave of the elemental ambassadors of water, this saltwater pool has become ever more corrosive since the battles that damaged the earthmote. It is said that the pool's water can strip a creature to the bone or dissolve base metals in just a few seconds of exposure. Though the rivers are not large, the current within them is quite strong, driven by the power of elemental water.

Caverns of Stone

A network of vast caverns spreads deep below the surface of the earthmote. Though clearly artificial in nature, the caverns appear naturally formed, opening up to dozens of chambers in all directions. One such chamber houses a huge pool of bubbling mud, while another is dominated by an enormous stone colossus, its arms crossed over its huge chest and its featureless head tilted downward.

Area Aspects: Naturally shaped caverns, pool of bubbling mud, giant colossus statue

Stubborn and taciturn, the ambassadors of earth kept their embassy utilitarian. The mud baths served as a connection to their home plane, while their tactile connection to the granite walls of the embassy allowed them to hear and sense activity throughout all other areas of the earthmote. The earth lords were the chief architects of the floating fortress, and their caverns fill much of its interior.

ELEMENTAL GEODE

The center of the earthmote opens up to a diamond-shaped chamber with no horizontal surfaces. A large, many-faceted, blue-white stone floats within the chamber, circling and twirling in erratic patterns.

Area Aspects: Diamond-shaped room, floating blue-white stone

An investigation of the magical nature of this room reveals that the stone acts as the anchor for the elemental earthmote, keeping the mote floating above the surface of the world below. Built of rock and water, fueled by fire, and enchanted by air, the geode acts as a pillar of stability within the earthmote. If its energy ever becomes disrupted, the entire earthmote would come crashing down.



THE THEATER OF THE MIND

A diffuse light emanating from its stone facade illuminates the majestic entrance of this great theater. A glowing dome of blue glass stands atop the building, while a large staircase below leads to three sets of gilded exterior doors, each of which features an alcove above where an angelic statue stands. Two much larger statues stand at the corners of the theater, whose stonework shows a strength and stability that has lasted for nearly a thousand years.

The Theater of the Mind has stood strong on this spot across the rise and fall of many kingdoms. Beginning first as an open-air arena, it soon became a palace celebrating the greatest performances in all lands. Over the centuries, as the earth shifted and the open arena sank into the ground, architects and engineers built a new majestic theater atop the first.

Grand effects of illusion magic always came easy in this place, revealing stories beyond the dreams of any of its patrons. Few know the true origin of this strange magic. Over the years, as surrounding societies came to shun magic, the theater would fall into disrepair, only to be reborn years later in even greater splendor.

Potential Inhabitants: Undead, demons, devils, magical beings, constructs, magical cults, players and performers

Location Aspects: Illusion magic, deep chambers, aristocracy, buried secrets, grand theatrics

The Grand Illusion

Throughout its history, the theater has served as an escape for those who attended. Many of the directors of the narratives portrayed here were known to be masters of illusion, penetrating the minds of their audiences with stories that could be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. Some of these stories forever changed the lives of those who viewed them, sending them on personal crusades or into depression so deep that they starved to death.

Though the theater has changed considerably over the years, its power to touch the minds of its audience members has always remained strong.

LOBBY

A large statue of a bowing figure wearing a grinning mask dominates the center of the theater's huge lobby. Gargoyle grotesques leer down from the vaulted ceiling. Two stone staircases lead up each side of the lobby to balconies and hallways above the grand hall. Two more statues—one of a woman in a sweeping gown and the mask of a tiger; the other, a man wearing the mask of a boar—stand on either side of the large double doors leading into the main theater.

Area Aspects: Grotesque gargoyles, shifting masked statues, shifting colored lights, interesting smells

Built with the grandeur of royalty and class, the lobby fills those stepping into it for the first time with a sense of wonder. More than once, patrons have remarked at the apparent movement of the gargoyles and the two statues, whose poses seem to change and whose gazes seemingly follow those who pass by. The illusion magic of the theater often manifests in the lobby, sending streamers of colored light across its vaulted ceilings and filling it with faint scents connected to the performance about to be witnessed.

MAIN THEATER

Steep tiers of upholstered seats surround three quarters of a circular stage in the center of this vaulted chamber. Decorated pillars rise up along the walls before arching inward as buttresses, joining in the center of the ceiling. Statues of masked cherubs sit at the base of these pillars, some showing smiling childlike faces, while others reveal grotesque twisted forms like melted wax or horned grinning skulls. Curtains and tapestries of royal red hang around the chamber, rippling and flowing in a warm magical breeze.

Area Aspects: Tiered upholstered seating, decorated pillars, masked cherub statues, rippling curtains

For centuries, the theater has been host to the most fantastic and imaginative stories told in all lands. Its audiences have long been enthralled and forever changed by the tales they witnessed. Behind the curtains, the fourth quarter of the stage leads into the back rooms of the theater, while a large, well-concealed platform in the center of the stage leads down into the trap room below.

DESIGN NOTE:
Depending on how you want to use the theater in your own game, it might be a ruin rather than a well-maintained and active site. You can also decide how extensive you want the theater's illusion magic to be, so that the building might have been abandoned for decades yet still look as fresh as the day it opened. Either way, decorate the theater with paintings and statues of major figures in your game world, be they kings, gods, heroes, or villains.

PRIVATE BOXES

Private box seats hang above the main theater, their stonework woven through by delicate swirling gold inlay. Paintings of heroes and villains decorate the walls of each box. Brass mounts on their railings contain many-faceted crystals that paint the walls of the boxes in prismatic light.

Area Aspects: Private suites of box seats hanging above the floor, paintings of heroes and villains, prismatic crystals

Only the most wealthy and powerful could afford to witness the fine works of the theater from these private boxes. Some say that the paintings in each box whisper to patrons, engaging and entertaining them throughout the show. The crystals are said to be viewing devices that allow patrons to feel as though they might be standing within the story taking place on the stage.

BACKSTAGE

The majesty of the main theater stands in stark contrast to the old stone walls of the backstage area. Ropes and chains hang from the shadows of the ceiling. Corridors lead off in many different directions, some of which have collapsed into rubble, even as others strain against ancient wooden beams. A large stone monument sits behind the curtains, pulsing with strange glyphs and runes.

Area Aspects: Twisting corridors, ropes and chains, glyph-marked stone monument

The majesty of the theater and lobby are forgotten in these utilitarian corridors. This network of halls has been built and rebuilt dozens of times over the years, yet much of the original stonework of the theater remains.

The glyph-marked stone monument is an amplifier that channels and focuses a source of magical power deep beneath the theater. It radiates strange pulses of illusion magic that have made the shows of the theater of the mind breathtaking for centuries. Yet along with the wonderful dreams contained within the monument, horrible nightmares also lurk.

PROP ROOM

Rough brickwork surrounds tight corridors of freestanding wooden shelves and plaster statues of terrifying monsters. The contents of the shelves and their strange configuration lack any coherent organization, forming a twisted maze of narrow passages. Each shelf is lined with dozens of props, from fine goblets of crystal and bronze to plaster skulls with smoke coming out of their eyes.

Area Aspects: Monstrous statues, shelves forming tight corridors, shifting knickknacks

The artifacts in this room are universally imbued with mysterious magic. Some are the products of the powerful illusion magic of the theater, while others generate their own illusions. Those who know the power of the prop room always seem to find what they need within it, while those who do not understand it become inevitably and hopelessly lost. The plaster statues in the prop room always seem to be watching those who travel through its maze of shelves.

DRESSING ROOMS

A large chamber and a number of smaller rooms surrounding it all serve as the theater's dressing rooms. Gowns and outfits of all makes and many ages hang on long poles propped between stone walls. Mirrors line nearly every surface here, making it hard to tell which rooms are real and which are merely reflections. Globes of light float through the air, painting each room in strange, multicolored patterns. Faint whispers can be heard echoing off the mirrored walls.

Area Aspects: Hundreds of costumes, vast array of mirrors, floating multicolored lights, whispered words

For centuries, the best actors in the world prepared for their parts in these dressing rooms. The magical light here always seems to cast the perfect amount of radiance, while the mirrors give each actor the most desired view. The mirrors shift positions within the dressing rooms, making it difficult to know a room's true size, and obscuring whether visitors are seeing reality or a reflection. The whispers of practiced lines from centuries of recitation echo through the space, continually reflected back and forth. Some say those who don the costumes here feel themselves slip into the minds of the characters who wore those adornments in real life.

TRAP ROOM

Large stone pillars hold up the vaulted ceiling of this broad chamber beneath the main theater. Huge chains grooved into large pulleys extend from the ceiling to the stone floor below. The chains are attached to two large iron cranks along the walls of the trap room, and connect to four points of a large stone platform sitting in the center of the chamber. A faint whistling sound can be heard in the trap room, originating from beneath the stone platform.

To the side of the huge stone platform, a ten-foot-high circular bronze pool is flanked by two huge statues. One statue resembles a twenty-foot-tall god, wings sprouting from her back and a sword in her hand. The other represents a twisted demon with splayed bat wings, holding barbed whips in each of his four clawed hands.

Area Aspects: Large iron cranks, deep bronze-walled pool, statues of a god and a demon

This room serves as the trap room for the main theater above. The statues and the pool can be moved to the platform, then raised up to the main floor by turning the cranks. Large retractable pipes are used to fill the pool with water while on the platform. Heavy counterweights aid in lifting the platform up to the ceiling above, but are clearly not sufficient to balance the immense weight of the water-filled pool. The mechanisms by which the platform can lift nearly a hundred tons of water remain a mystery.

When the platform is raised above the floor, a large crack is revealed beneath it, and the noise of the wind whistling out from it grows louder. The crack opens to a rough passageway leading down to the ancient theater below.

ANCIENT THEATER

Streams of water falling into pools below echo off the curved walls of this massive chamber. Amphitheater seating built of cracked stone surrounds a circular floor. Huge stone pillars carved into the forms of titans stand along the outside edge of this ancient theater, holding up its rough stone ceiling. Ribbons of swirling black smoke circle the upper reaches of the chamber, dancing and intertwining with one another. Twelve upright square blocks are set against the lower tiers of the seats, adorned with relief carvings of masked men and women.

Area Aspects: Crumbling stone seats, titanic carved pillars, ribbons of swirling black smoke, large stone blocks

Buried under the rock above for centuries, this ancient theater is the original Theater of the Mind. Thousands of spectators once came here to allow the illusory power of the theater to take their minds away from the hardship of their lives. The large stone blocks are the tombs of the most famous actors who once performed here, all of them accomplished in tricking and guiding the minds of their audiences. The swirling smoke is the remnant of the ancient illusion magic of the theater, and is able to manifest into all manner of shapes.

HIDDEN SHRINE

The secret shrine at the heart of the theater is activated by a trigger or mechanism of your choice. You might connect such a mechanism to the titan-carved pillars that surround the outer ring of the theater.

The ground rumbles as the floor of the theater breaks open along a central seam. Through this hidden trapdoor, a pillared shrine rises. In the center of the shrine stands a podium surrounded by a pool of black liquid, and upon which sits a one-foot-tall idol. Roughly humanoid in form, the crouching figure has a long, extended forehead and eyes that are huge shining orbs. Its thin, spindly arms have too many fingers where they hug its long legs to its chest. Three of the pillars surrounding the podium are cracked and fallen into ruin, but the five that remain stand in the shapes of cloaked figures facing outward, their arms tapering to deadly blades where they cross each figure's chest.

Area Aspects: Statues of bladed and cloaked figures, strange large-headed idol, black pool

The original builders of the theater found the idol buried in the ground here, and recognized the magic in it that manifested as a strange psychic dreaming in creatures nearby. The first theater was built around the idol. When the new theater was constructed above the old, its masters placed the idol into the shrine, then buried that shrine beneath the theater. Over the centuries, successive generations of the theater's masters have constructed magical devices that tap into and amplify the power of the shrine. From time to time, the original shrine is raised up for special ceremonies that forever change the minds of those who witness them. The bladed statues are said to protect the idol from any creatures that would do it harm.

THE PRIMEVAL ROCK

Like a blunted spearhead thrust up from the ground, the landmark known as the Primeval Rock stands nearly two hundred feet high in the center of a broad crater. A waterfall flows down the edge of the crater, forming a river that winds through a floodplain built up along the crater floor, then disappears into the base of the rock.

Dozens of cutouts form windows in the rock's dark-gray surface, and hint at hollow spaces within. A strange pattern of silver lines is cut into its exterior, and though the rock and its symbols are clearly millions of years old, those symbols appear to be intelligently formed.

Potential Inhabitants: Primitive tribesfolk, intelligent beasts, lycanthropes, goblinoids, evil humanoids

Location Aspects: Desert crater, hidden and isolated, primitive lands

Over a million years ago, this rock crashed down upon the world, destroying everything around it and forever changing the surrounding lands. Though it would appear to be a meteorite, the face of the rock contains strange glyphs and sigils bespeaking some form of terrible intelligence. Many whisper that the Primeval Rock was called down by a powerful and apocalyptic spellcaster. Others say it was a final and ultimate attack by the gods themselves on a sacrilegious world. Whatever its origin, the rock has called for centuries to lycanthropes and other creatures whose blood holds the power of nature and beasts.

Ancient Power

Throughout its existence, the Primeval Rock has exuded a strange power that has been sought and used by many. Some say that this site was the place where the bloodlines of humanoids and beasts were first joined together in a dark and bloody ceremony. Beings once dwelt within the rock who clearly shared the traits of humanoids and monsters, as shown in the numerous depictions painted across the interior walls of the structure. Though that interior stands in ruins now, its power remains strong, and many would love to untap its potential.

WINDING RIVER

A winding river flows out from a waterfall at the edge of the crater, making its way through a five-mile-long floodplain before disappearing into a dark cave at the base of the Primeval Rock. Primitive dams and waterways once brought water to fertile fields around the rock. Now those fields are dead and dry, the dams broken through and the waterways filled with dust. At the center of many of those fields, tall humanoid effigies stand, their thin arms held high in the air.

Area Aspects: Winding river, shattered dams, dusty irrigation channels, primitive effigies

This river once served the many clans that called the Primeval Rock home. Primitive dams redirected water into fertile fields, each marked with the effigy of an ancient deity who demanded sacrifice for continued prosperity. The river leads down into a cave, from which it flows into the lower chambers of the rock.

DWELLINGS

Deep clefts cut into the surface of the rock mark out the dwellings of its former residents. Set high up as a defense against the beasts that hunted the crater floor, these dwellings were reached by crude wooden ladders whose remnants are now scattered around the base of the rock. Each dwelling featured modest rooms for cooking and sleeping, with walls decorated in silhouette images of great hunts, strange ceremonies, and a blood-red moon. Firepits in each dwelling burn with a low blue flame emanating from a block of glyph-marked iron. The flickering light seems to make the paintings on the walls shift, move, and dance.

Area Aspects: Broken ladders, dancing cave paintings, glyph-marked iron block, eternal blue flame

Dozens of these dwellings adorn the outer surface of the rock, and numerous passages connect these areas to an inner network of larger chambers. As the blue flame flickers, the paintings on the walls move through a short animation of the ceremonies depicted—a strange byproduct of the primitive magic held within the rock. If a glyph-marked block of iron is taken outside the Primeval Rock, its flame winks out.



CONNECTORS: NARROW PAINTED PASSAGES

Warm gusts of air flow along the cracked walls of these narrow passages. Dark paintings on gray stone adorn the walls, depicting bestial humanoids engaging in endless slaughter. Other paintings depict images of bloody ceremonies centered around a tall figure with a long, horned head and clawed hands.

Area Aspects: Terrible paintings, narrow corridors, cracked walls

These twisted passages and narrow stairwells run all throughout the Primeval Rock. Deep cracks in the stone show where veins of iron have been opened up and mined. Many of these cracks conceal terrible traps—from mechanical devices to powerful runes of dark magic—meant to thwart would-be intruders.

CHAMBER OF THE BEAST

The vaulted ceiling of this chamber reaches nearly forty feet high. A large firepit sits at its center, and a number of petrified corpses lie crumbling in alcoves lining the walls. At the far side of the chamber stands an effigy of petrified wood and bones claimed from hundreds of humanoid bodies. Its long arms stretch nearly a quarter of the way around the chamber, and its head seems to be constructed from at least five bestial skulls, their long horns intertwined as though they had grown together.

Area Aspects: Corpses in alcoves, huge central fire, giant bestial effigy

This was the central chamber of worship and ritual for the primitive humanoids who once called this place home. The bones use to craft the effigy came from the conquered leaders of enemy tribes. The corpses are the previous leaders of the tribe, who were embalmed and placed within the alcoves so their dead eyes could watch the rise of future generations.

CHAMBER OF THE DARK CRYSTAL

A violet light shines out from a large crystal sitting at the center of this dark chamber, illuminating walls that swirl with moving images of battles and bloodshed. Within those images, bestial shapes feed humanoid figures blood from clay pots. Soon, those figures break open to release large horned beasts. At irregular intervals, bolts of violet energy arc out from the central crystal to strike the wall, leaving behind a glowing glyph that quickly fades. Clay pots like those in the pictograms surround the dark crystal.

Area Aspects: Dark crystal, swirling pictograms, violet bolts, glowing glyphs, clay pots

Even when the rock was occupied, few members of the tribe ever laid eyes on this chamber. The pictograms and the contents of the chamber reveal its use as a site of bestial transmutation for the most powerful warriors of the tribe. Those warriors gave up their lives to become something greater and more powerful, their blood channeling a potent mixture of humanoid and beast.

Only when struck by a bolt of violet energy did the black blood within a pot become capable of converting the creature drinking it. No one has yet determined the true origin of the crystal and the magic contained within it.

THRONE CHAMBER

A throne of iron and stone sits atop a rock platform at the far end of this chamber. With no seams where its different sections and materials join together, the throne and platform give the appearance of having been formed in place untold years ago. A number of runes circle the floor, each formed from veins of iron in the rock. At the center of the runic circle, a pool is filled by a steady drip of red liquid from the ceiling above.

Area Aspects: Natural throne of iron and stone, circle of strange iron glyphs, pool of blood under dripping ceiling

The strange formation of this chamber gives evidence to the idea that the Primeval Rock somehow knew a leader would one day rule within it. Though seemingly formed of natural rock and veins of iron, the throne, the pool, and the ring of glyphs are clearly not natural formations. Visitors to this chamber feel as though a bestial consciousness lives within the stone itself.

REFUSE PIT

The bones of huge beasts jut out from hundreds of years worth of refuse at the bottom of this deep pit. Streams of water pour down from rifts in the pit walls, filling the bottom of the pit with a pool of foul black liquid.

The bones of smaller beasts, humanoids, and creatures unknown litter the pit. Broken stone idols of dead gods lie among the heaps of refuse.

Area Aspects: Old bones of beasts and humanoids, foul water of the dead, idols of dead gods

The residents of the Primeval Rock used a single deep refuse pit for their waste, which they filled with hundreds of corpses of beasts, sacrifices, and tribesfolk deemed unworthy of proper interment. Some say the whispers of the dead still echo in this cursed pit—the faraway screams of beasts and humanoids whose lives ended in too terrible a fashion to allow them any rest.

CAVERN OF THE BEAST

Smoke flows across the floor of this chamber, whose center is filled with a large steaming pool. A deep rumble rises intermittently, after which a low geyser of hot water bursts from the pool, filling the air with the smell of sulfur. Deep gouges break the wall's smooth surface, some still holding the shattered remains of sharpened claws nine inches long. Cracked stalagmites litter the ground. The bones of huge bestial creatures and humanoids lie in piles along the outer walls of the chamber.

Area Aspects: Steaming pool, sulfuric smoke, torn claw marks on the walls, cracked stalagmites, bones of humanoids and beasts

It is unclear what manner of creature called this area home, though it might have served many different creatures over the years. A primal hatred lives within the walls here, filling the minds of intelligent creatures with visions of horrifying brutality.

TOWER OF THE MOON

A narrow set of crumbling steps leads to the upper reaches of the rock. One can behold the entire crater from this point, with nothing standing between the smooth upper surface and a plummeting drop of over two hundred feet to the jagged ground below. Atop the rock stands a broad platform, its surface carefully etched by an intricate map of lines and ellipses that intertwine with incredible articulation. Iron manacles have been hammered deep into the stone of the platform, their chains rusted but still impressively strong.

Area Aspects: Precarious steps, astrological map, iron chains and manacles

The bestial tribes that called the Primeval Rock home used this open area to worship the full moon. They howled at its bloated form as it rose over the lip of the crater, painting the top of the rock in pale light that shone off the veins of iron in its surface. The intricate carvings form an incredibly accurate map of the starry night sky, complete with timetables for the risings of the full moon. The manacles were used to tie down those newly indoctrinated into the tribe's magical blood rites before their hideous transformations.

THE BLIGHTED EVERTREE

In the midst of a dead forest, a single tree towers above all others. A deep crack splits open its hundred-foot-diameter base, opening to darkness within. The great tree's upper branches reach out even beyond the five-hundred-foot height of its main trunk, and gnarled roots as thick as trees themselves twist out from its base to pierce the ground nearby. Once a bastion of life, the Evertree now stands corrupted and dying, its ash-gray bark lined and split by smaller cracks like open wounds.

Potential Inhabitants: Corrupted natural beasts, evil humanoids, undead, demons, devils, otherworldly beasts

Location Aspects: Ancient corrupted tree, decaying forest, pillar of unlife

According to the oldest legends, the Evertree might well have been the source of much of the early sentient life of the planet. All manner of fey creatures once sprouted from its branches and from the heart held deep within its bark. Its roots drew life from the world itself, while its upper reaches channeled and transformed the energy of the sun.

Then the corruption came.

A nethermancer—a being of black heart and dark magic—discovered the tree and saw within it a source of life he could twist into unlife. This practitioner of eldritch horror called forth a beast from beyond mortal worlds and trapped it within the heart of the tree. There, the ever-flowing blood of this vile abomination corrupted the life-giving energy of the tree and all that came from it.

For centuries, the black blood of corruption has destroyed the forest and the lands around it, as a horrible symbiotic bonding of life and death mix together within the depths of the Evertree.

Once the Mother of the Fey

Long ago, all manner of fey were born from the Evertree. Drops of honeydew hanging from its branches gave rise to faeries, while dryads and sprites sprouted from acorns and seedpods within the heart of the tree. All manner of fey beasts can likewise call the Evertree their mother and father, and have done so for uncountable years.

A Construct of Nature and Corruption

Throughout the Evertree, one can find evidence both of its original purity and of the corruption that has enveloped it. The liquid of life that once flowed within the tree is now transformed to inky black liquid that threatens the hearts and minds of those who touch it. Black roots run like veins throughout the tree's bark and core, sometimes twisting free to grasp at living creatures that walk nearby.

CONNECTORS: THE ROOTWAYS

Dark wood lines the circular tunnels that twist throughout the Evertree, and which shift and groan as the tree sways. Tiny veins of black liquid can be seen within all the surfaces of the wooden tunnels, and needle-sharp thorns grow from gnarled roots along their walls.

Area Aspects: Shifting and groaning tunnels, black veins, needle-sharp thorns

The huge crack in the exterior of the Evertree leads to the chambers within it, as might any of the smaller cracks if you so determine. The great tree grew in such a way as to allow the movement of humanoid beings within it. Many of these naturally occurring tunnels remain open even after the great tree's corruption, though some have rotted and fallen through, while others might close up in hostility to those who travel through them.

DARK NURSERY

A thick, sticky liquid coats the walls of this round chamber, flowing slowly to congeal as a misshapen mass at its center. Thick roots have grown through the walls, forming a smooth dome that is the area's ceiling. Partially transparent seedpods hang from these roots, filled with swirling black and yellow liquid.

Area Aspects: Sticky walls, hanging seedpods, oily yellow and black liquid

In years past, these roots formed droplets of fey life, with each slow-growing seedpod holding the budding soul of an unborn sprite. As the Evertree fed it life,



each seedpod grew bigger until eventually dropping to the ground, bursting open and bringing the sprite into the world. With the corruption of the Evertree, these seedpods have become tainted and poisoned, giving birth to twisted monstrosities or bringing death to those who touch the corrupted fluid within them.

BLACK POOL

The ceiling of this chamber appears transparent, revealing an alien starscape rotating overhead. A raised pool at the center of the chamber has been formed naturally from large twisted roots, and holds black liquid that reflects the starscape above. Statues of cloaked elven forms shrouded in vines and moss stand along the outer walls of the chamber.

Area Aspects: Old elven statues, natural pool of black liquid, astral ceiling

This pool once gave the fey who lived in the Evertree a glimpse of other places and other worlds. The druids of old used the pool to view the past and many possible futures. The starscape once represented the night sky above the tree. Now, through the tree's corruption, it reveals a disturbing and alien world.

VIOLET GARDEN

Large, glowing black stones set into the ceiling fill this chamber with a dreadful violet light. Huge mushrooms carpet the ground, their caps colored green and blue under the strange light. Between the mushrooms rise plants with thick stalks, each sporting a huge flower with black petals and a violet center. Veins of black liquid rise up the stalks and into the flowers.

Area Aspects: Towering flowers, mushroom carpet, black sunstones

The stones in this chamber once channeled the light of the sun, reflecting it throughout day and night to aid the growth of some of the most rare and beautiful plants in the world. Now the corruption of the Evertree has twisted the stones' energy to channel the sun of a different and darker world. The flowers, once gleaming in yellow and red, are tainted by corrupted blood and a black sun.

CHAMBER OF THE GUARDIANS

The hulks of three petrified trees are bound to the walls in this large domed chamber, their branches reaching out as though struggling against their bonds. A stepped platform in the center of the room holds an upright triangular stone with a square cut through its center. Swirling lines mark the stone's surface. Vines and roots have circled around the stone, running down the steps of the platform to the chamber's wooden floor.

Area Aspects: Petrified guardians, ancient keystone, binding vines

Long ago, these trees acted as the guardians of the Evertree, protecting it from intruders. When the nethermancer first came here, he called upon his twisted magic to bind the guardians to the walls, forcing them to stand helpless as they sensed the Evertree's corruption. The stone on the central platform is an elven artifact brought here to bind the life of the Evertree with the kingdom of the elves. Elven magic still resides in the heart of the stone, though it is buried deep.

THE GREEN LAKE

Sharp roots burrow down from the ceiling above this wide chamber, dripping green liquid that spills into a vast lake. Phosphorescent algae spreads across the lake's surface, illuminating the chamber with a strange green light. Small islands of gnarled roots break the surface of the lake. The entire chamber gives off the feeling of a submerged forest deep in the heart of the Evertree.

Area Aspects: Calm green lake, floating algae, root islands, sharp roots dripping from above

The deepest reaches of the Evertree's roots surround the underground lake created to give it sustenance for all time. The lake is vast, its dripping roots fed by the rainwater of the lands above for miles around. In days of old, elves who sought the wisdom of the Evertree would use pole boats to cross the vast lake and uncover its secrets. What corruption has now fouled the lake, and what creatures live in its depths, remains a mystery.

CHAMBER OF THE GREEN KING

Floating green globes illuminate this large chamber, revealing a throne formed of natural roots sitting atop a raised platform of wood and leaves. A humanoid form sprawls atop the throne, barely visible under ancient moss and lichen. Four huge mushrooms of green, black, red, and yellow rise from the central floor of the chamber. Alcoves in the outer reaches of the room hold six more humanoid figures, their forms seeming to blend into the roots that hold them fast.

Area Aspects: Natural throne of roots, floating emerald spheres, the Green King, bound legends

The Green King, a druid of great power and wisdom, once resided in this chamber. For centuries, he and the Evertree bound themselves together in a symbiotic relationship that preserved the life of both creatures. Before the Evertree's corruption, other druids came to this place to change the nature of their being, sacrificing their physical bodies in the alcoves around this chamber as they joined the natural order of the Evertree and the world around it.

DESIGN NOTE:
What happened to the Green King and these druids during and after the corruption? Are their souls lost? Did they go mad? Did they simply wither away and die, leaving only the husks of their bodies buried in the depths of the Evertree? The Green King and the druids aren't necessarily intended to wake up and tussle with the PCs (although they surely can if you wish), but what happened to them can play a part in the story you wish to tell.

THE SKYGAZE REACH

A hollow branch opens up into a great nest formed of smaller dead trees woven together into a bowl. The view from the edge of the nest reveals the entire forest around it—once thick and lush with life, but now twisted and dead. The bones of dead beasts and humanoids are woven throughout the twisted dead wood of the nest. At its center sits a petrified egg, with black veins flowing through its stone shell to weave into the wood below it.

Area Aspects: Thick nest of dead wood and bone, strange petrified egg

Once the lair of a mighty creature in league with the Evertree, this nest has served all manner of terrible beasts over the years since the tree's corruption. Some say that a voice calls out from the depths of the petrified egg, while others speak of the egg as a beacon to destruction, or a presence from another world far darker than this one.

CHAMBER OF THE NETHERMANCER

A cold chill fills this dark chamber deep in the heart of the Evertree. Here, natural wood has been turned into a fleshy, bruise-colored mass that pulses and secretes a vile oil. Pseudopods push out from the fleshy walls in a half-dozen places, reaching into the chamber. An oval sphere eight feet high dominates the center of the area, filled with a liquid that gleams like twisted starlight. Nearby, bound in cold black iron, an oversized acorn hangs from three long chains, its surface scarred by its bonds.

Area Aspects: Oil-secreting fleshy walls, reaching pseudopods, the nether vessel, the acorn of the Evertree

In this chamber, the nethermancer practiced his horrid art, drawing the unfathomable energy of the netherworlds into the life of the Evertree. The vessel in the center of the chamber allowed the nethermancer to deal directly with the darkness, birthing creatures not meant for any world. The acorn held within it the new life of the Evertree. Some believe that the nethermancer held the acorn hostage, while others maintain that claiming the acorn gave the nethermancer dominion over the birth of a new Evertree, from which he could expand his dark practice.

CORRUPTED HEART OF THE EVERTREE

Thick-spined vines twist throughout this large chamber, forming a web whose edge pins the corpse of a dark being to one wall high above the floor. The corpse's unnatural shape is like some mockery of life, with bones bending in strange directions and black tentacles reaching out where thorns have pierced its form. Its head hangs low, revealing an oversized cranium. Streams of black blood flow from the creature's wounds, dripping in rivulets onto the floor and flowing away into the walls of the chamber.

Area Aspects: Corpse of the corrupter, thorny vines, rivulets of black blood

Centuries ago, the nethermancer called forth this creature from the depths of the outer worlds and trapped it here. The creature's blood has continued to flow through the Evertree, corrupting the force of life within it. Whether the being still truly lives is questionable, though its blood appears to flow eternally into the tree. Together, the tree and the corrupter have formed a dark symbiosis that has lasted for centuries.

STORMWATCH TOWER

Like the blade of an impossibly large stone axe, a wedge-shaped triangular peak thrusts up from a mountainous valley to dominate the landscape around it. The tip of this mighty edifice stands higher than any of the surrounding mountains, and is set with a tall tower that oversees everything below it. Partway down the mountain's great height, the remains of an iron and wooden airship have been half-embedded into its rough stone surface. A narrow and precarious stone staircase snakes up the base of the rock to a set of large iron doors, which lead to the lowest levels of the many chambers carved out within the ancient peak.

Potential Inhabitants: Evil humanoids, elemental beings, underdark denizens, undead, monstrous humanoids

Location Aspects: Mountainous valley, isolated mountains, rock canyons

How such a large airship became embedded into the solid rock around it remains a mystery. An even greater mystery is the powerful magic that allows the ship to control the weather, and which has long since been channeled by those who claimed the wreck and the mountain around it.

It was only after discovering this wreck and its powerful magic that the explorers of a long-forgotten human empire transformed the mountainous slab into a mighty watchtower. Miners and masons spent decades carving out the inner chambers of what came to be known as Stormwatch Tower, while wizards and scientists learned how to channel the power of the wrecked ship and the storms it called.

The power held within Stormwatch Tower attracted enemies over time. Saboteurs and assassins sneaked into the base of the tower through unexplored and dangerous tunnels beneath the mountain. They cut apart the tower's defenses from the inside out, slaughtering its guardians and painting the mountainside with their blood. Over the centuries since, the tower has changed hands many times—abandoned for long years before returning to the ancestors of the kingdoms that originally built the mighty fortress.

Calling the Storms

The fantastic and strange airship, dubbed the Stormcaller by those who discovered it, continues to draw energy from the mighty storms that sweep regularly through the valley. Over the century it took to complete the construction within the mountain, its builders learned how to not only survive such storms but how to harness them with the magic of the airship, powering complex machines and wondrous experiments.

DANGEROUS CLIMB

A steep, narrow stair winds up the cliff before reaching a large stone door a quarter of the way up the mountainside. Painted symbols showing many different levels of quality and iconography decorate the cliffs. Many sections of the stair appear charred, with lighter shades among the soot revealing the shapes of humanoids burned by great heat. Overhanging rock above the stairs threatens to break free at any moment, sending an avalanche down on creatures that ascend them.

Area Aspects: Narrow stairs, threatening overhangs, burned walls, strange iconography

This great stair is a primary defensive feature for the whole of the peak. It forces creatures to climb single file while providing perfect visibility to the high tower above, and to multiple hidden drop points and murder holes along the face of the peak. Rocks, arrows, and burning pitch can be easily dropped down on enemies hoping to take the tower by way of the stair. Rumors say that as their comrades fell by the score, humanoid shamans attacking the tower etched deadly shadows onto the walls as a last sign of defiance before their violent deaths.

DESIGN NOTE:
Is the tower abandoned when the characters come calling, or is it currently inhabited? It's your choice either way, but each choice has implications for your game. If the tower is inhabited by moderately intelligent humanoids, their ability to make use of its defenses might make gaining access to the interior a serious challenge. Alternatively, being inhabited by creatures not smart enough to properly defend it makes the tower more easily accessible to the PCs.



IRON LIFT

Cold air rushes up a shaft rising hundreds of feet into the tower above. A half-dozen massive iron chains hang down the shaft, five affixed to massive counterweight rocks bound in iron bands. One chain is attached to a wrought-iron cage ten feet square. A rusted iron lever is connected to a network of taught, woven iron cables that extend up through that chain. A series of five numbers appears on the lever.

Area Aspects: Iron cage lift, huge stone counterweights, complicated control mechanism

This lift is one of the many strange inventions built by the engineers of the tower. A set of counterweights connected to a gear mechanism high up in the tower directs the lift to travel up or down. The operation of the lever and the meaning of the numbers on it is left to your determination. After suitable experimentation by the player characters, shifting the lever causes electric sparks to arc through it, sending a signal to the gears above to shift the counterweights and send the lift upward. As the lift moves up and down, the counterweights continually shift and reset, maintaining the precise balance that keeps the system in working order.

TUNNELS BELOW

The lower shaft of the iron lift leads down into the depths of the mountain. Three huge blocks of stone bound in iron lie here, along with the remains of the snapped chains that once held them aloft. The twisted wreckage of at least two fallen lifts spreads beneath and around the stones, their metal shredded into jagged spikes. A huge crevice opens up under the wrecked lifts, with a wash of cold air rising from unseen caverns below.

Area Aspects: Fallen counterweights, wrecked lifts, huge crevice

Over the centuries, more than one disastrous accident has afflicted the lifts, sending a cage and its occupants hundreds of feet to the bottom of the shaft in a twisted mass of iron and blood. The fall of the counterweights has opened up a deep crack in the earth, exposing a massive network of underground caverns and tunnels. It is from these tunnels that assassins gained access to the tower and destroyed those who held it. Some say those assassins were monstrous in nature, while others whisper of an otherworldly origin.

THE TOWER

A four-story tower sits atop the bladelike summit of the mountain, overseeing the landscape for miles in all directions. The four-sided block tower tapers as it gets closer to its peak. There appears to be no way to reach the tower from the triangular peak below it, which drops off as sheer cliffs on two sides, falling some two thousand feet to the ground below, and by a slope of dangerously sharp rubble down its third side. An area of grass surrounds the tower, giving it the appearance of an island floating high above the lands below.

Area Aspects: Four-sided tapered tower, two-thousand-foot drops, grassy island high above the ground

Nature sharpened the "blade" of the mountain's sheer summit on two sides, but the engineers of the tower disliked what was originally an easy climb up the third side of the peak. They spent nearly a century breaking that slope down with hammers and explosives, until a two-hundred-foot drop ending in sharp jagged rocks remained to protect the tower on the mountain's third side.

THE WATCH

Powerful winds blast this platform, which sits at the open top of the block tower rising from the height of the peak. Offering an unparalleled view across the valley and its surrounding lands, the platform juts out from the edge of the tower, connected to it by a narrow stone walkway hanging over the two-thousand-foot drop below. A pillar in the center of the platform is topped by a large crystalline sphere. A groove in the pillar marks the location of an opening in the bottom of the hollow sphere, which seems designed for some object to be placed within it.

Area Aspects: Open platform atop tower, crystalline sphere, powerful winds

This platform, known as the Watch, oversees the valley and its surrounding lands. In times when evil masters held the tower, they would commonly throw victims from this lofty perch, watching as they plummeted along the cliff side and smashed into the ground below. The crystalline orb, known as "the beacon," magically amplifies any light source placed within it, shining so brightly that it can be seen for miles in all directions.

GREAT CAPACITORS

Two huge glass cylinders in this stone chamber are filled with liquid, into which barrels of brass and copper have been submerged. The room is filled with a resonant hum, and the smell of ozone hangs in the air. Brass pipes connected to the tops of the cylinders disappear into the walls in all directions, feeding out into the rest of the tower. A series of large metal switches hangs on one wall, all of them interconnected by copper wire. Stone plates above each switch might once have described their function, but any writing on them seems to have been purposefully scrubbed off.

Area Aspects: Giant brass and copper capacitors, network of brass conducting pipes, wall of switches

The massive cylinders and their barrels form two giant capacitors, designed to store the electrical discharge of the storms that come frequently to the tower. Capable of holding vast amounts of energy indefinitely, the capacitors power various devices throughout the tower, the largest of which is the great lift. Safety was not a primary concern of the capacitors' creators, and many of the tower's former masters had no idea how these devices worked. As a result, countless people have died trying to discover their secrets.

SHATTERED AIRSHIP

One of the many passageways within the peak opens up to what appears to be an open-air platform or watchtower—but which in reality is the deck of the shattered airship.

Petrified wood and iron form the shattered hull of the airship embedded in the side of the mountain. The rough stone face engulfs the entire bow of the ship, holding the exposed stern hanging out over the ground more than a thousand feet below. Bolts of electricity intermittently arc among a series of black iron rods that line the ship's exposed railings. A huge chrome hemisphere takes up much of the furthest reach of the exposed stern.

Area Aspects: Shattered hull, bolts of unstable electricity, large chrome hemisphere

Over the years, many have speculated on how the airship could have crashed so drastically yet not been wholly destroyed. Most believe that the craft somehow teleported into the mountain, most likely killing its crew. Many of the tower's previous masters used the exposed stern of the ship as their personal audience chamber, no doubt relying on the view to intimidate anyone addressing them. The hemisphere at the rear of the ship is a magical device that absorbs the incalculable energy generated by the storms constantly drawn to the ship.

ENGINE ROOM

A deep hum sends vibrations through the iron walls of the lower hull of the wrecked airship. Within that hull, three large chrome orbs spiral around one another in a pattern whose complexity defies the understanding of any engineer or sage. The orbs float above a large brass pedestal, which is connected to the rear ceiling of the engine room by a one-foot-diameter bar of shining chrome. Glass windows in the brass pedestal reveal red and black clouds swirling together—and an undefined shape shifting in the shadow within the clouds. A network of thick brass rods has been welded onto the sides of the pedestal, and feeds down through the shattered hull into the rest of the tower.

Area Aspects: Three spinning orbs, brass pedestal, miniaturized storm field, brass conductor rods

This room houses the mysterious magical-mechanical engine of the crashed airship. No one has ever deduced exactly how it works, but many speculate that some entity has been trapped in the pedestal. The energy contained within the pedestal calls the storms that power the ship. The energy of these storms is then directed back into the pedestal, which creates the magical lift that once held the ship aloft and propelled it. The three spinning orbs appear to be part of the ship's piloting and control mechanism, though no one has yet determined how they work. The brass conductor rods connected to the pillar feed into the great capacitors deep within the tower.

TEMPLE OF THE WIND

Powerful gusts of wind blow across the flat stone surface of this platform, which appears to float out over the edge of the mountain. Open on three sides and exposed to the sky above, the platform gives any creature walking on it the feeling of standing at the edge of the world. The center of the platform holds a pool of rippling blue water that flows to spill over its edge, disappearing to mist below. At the head of that waterfall, a statue of an angelic female floats in midair. The statue's arms are held out, beckoning observers to step forward into her embrace.

Area Aspects: Welcoming statue, infinity pool, gusting winds

The original architects of the tower built this temple to a goddess they both worshiped and feared. Gusting winds here can easily knock creatures off their feet. Some believe that if the wind is embraced in the correct manner, its gusts will hold worshipers aloft and carry them into the infinite embrace of the beckoning goddess. Countless followers of the goddess stepped toward that embrace, only to fall to their doom.



THE INFERNAL MACHINE

Noxious gas flows from large vents, rising as green and yellow clouds above a great machine that dominates the wasteland surrounding it. Three huge wheels of stone and iron line each side of the massive construct. Jaw-like plates at the front of the machine house bladed wheels fifty feet high, which look as though they could devour a castle without slowing down. A swiveling iron turret sits at the front of the Infernal Machine, while above it, a large orb of glowing darkness floats in midair like a hole in the world, held at the center of three spinning rings.

Potential Inhabitants: Demons, devils, cultists, evil humanoids, undead, giants, constructs, evil gods

Location Aspects: Wastelands, isolated areas, abyssal or infernal planes

The Infernal Machine is a construct with a single purpose: to destroy civilizations. Larger than many fortresses and powered by the energy of souls, the machine seeks constant nourishment in the pain and death of mortals. It is said that hundreds of empires across many different worlds have fallen under the stone and steel of the machine's jaws, their occupants fed into the belly of the beast so that their lives might power the construct for its next conquest.

Devourer of Empires

Little is known of the construct's origin, but its purpose cannot be doubted. It is a machine built to devour civilization wherever it stands. For untold centuries, the Infernal Machine has chewed out the heart of empires across this world and others. It defies

understanding how a single machine—even one as massive as this—can crush whole civilizations until their last members stand screaming, the skin falling from their bones as the Infernal Machine eats the last of their fallen cities.

DESIGN NOTE:
The current state of the Infernal Machine is an important consideration when using it as a location. It might be first seen roaring through fertile lands, destroying everything around it as it heads toward a city the PCs love. Or it might be found half-buried in the center of a wasteland, sought by different groups for either destruction or reactivation. Whether the machine is active or inactive—and who controls it, if anyone—will determine how you drop it into your campaign.

Traveler of Worlds

Those who have seen the Infernal Machine have described how it travels on its massive wheels. But ancient books and the tales of wise sages speak also of the machine's ability to step from one world to the next. Its motivations for choosing one empire over another aren't clear, nor is its method of travel between worlds. Some who study the powers of the mind say that such a power lies deep within the belly of the Infernal Machine, creating wormholes through which the machine rolls forward from world to world.

GRINDING BLADES

Jaw-like plates stand as high as the towers of many castles on the front of the great machine. Within the area marked out by these plates, huge stone wheels spin, each set with heavy iron blades that interleave like razor-sharp gears. Each wheel must weigh a hundred tons or more, yet they spin so quickly that the force required to move them defies the mind.

Area Aspects: Jaw-like plates, massive stone wheels, heavy iron blades

This is clearly the business end of the Infernal Machine. The wheels are said to be able to crush the strongest stone, rip through wood like a scythe through wheat, and grind any substance into liquid and dust. The physical remains of anything destroyed within the grinders are fed into the machine, with the souls of creatures slain by those great gears flying into the glowing orb at the top of the construct.

THE SOUL SPHERE

Three concentric rings of rune-marked iron spin around one another in midair atop the machine. The rings start, stop, and change direction seemingly at random, with no clear pattern seen in their movement. Within the rings floats a sphere of glowing darkness, like a hole in reality. Occasional wisps of white flow into the sphere to be quickly lost in its endless depths.

Area Aspects: Spinning rune-marked rings, sphere of glowing darkness, wisps of absorbed light

The magic of these rune-marked iron rings holds the sphere in equilibrium, their spinning maintaining perfect balance and position for the dark orb against the violent movement of the machine beneath it. The sphere draws in the souls of those devoured by the machine, feeding them into the soul tanks within the construct.

DEADLY VENTS

Massive exhaust pipes extend from the rounded back of the Infernal Machine, the stone and steel around them caked with a yellowish substance. Vent covers open and close to permit the pipes to spew their poisonous vapors into the air. A series of rotating plates near the vents on the surface of the machine controls intake and exhaust. Huge metal fins set around the pipes radiate intense heat off their surfaces.

Area Aspects: Poisonous gas, indeterminate vents, huge radiator fins

The Infernal Machine destroys in many ways. Beyond its gnawing maw and its crushing wheels, the machine's locomotion creates a poisonous exhaust so deadly that no living thing survives after it passes. In areas ravaged by the construct, no plant will take root for fifty years or more.

HELL CANNONS

Each of the four corners of the construct houses a massive black iron cannon powered by a most terrible combination of engineering and alchemy. A complicated arrangement of pistons and levers gives each cannon great mobility within its housing. A black metal chute feeds a slurry of molten stone and metal into the chamber of a cannon. A pivoting ice-cold chrome rod then slams into a small hole

in the back of the cannon, creating tremendous pressure that fires a molten slug at incredible velocity.

Area Aspects: Huge cannons, chutes carrying molten slurry, ice-cold firing rod

It is rare that the Infernal Machine faces any serious threat, but these cannons can destroy any resistance with an endless onslaught of molten rock and metal. Blasting through stone walls ten feet thick and burning entire regiments of troops alive, these hell cannons can create nearly as much devastation as the machine's jaws.

CONNECTORS: THE MACHINE WORKS

The outermost layer of the construct is a chaotic mass of interconnected gears, levers, and machinery. Huge iron pistons feed into vast compression chambers, creating a deafening roar. Noxious fumes fill every available space, and everything drips with a thick layer of oily sludge—the liquefied remains of the dead whose souls feed this horrible construct. Narrow walkways weave throughout the mighty machinery and lead deeper into the machine, with little regard to the safety of anyone who dares to traverse them.

Area Aspects: Deafening machinery, massive pistons, noxious fumes, thick oil of the dead

While the machine is in operation, the machinery of the construct's outer layer is deafening. Narrow spaces cut through all these areas and lead deeper within the machine, allowing potential caretakers to service its countless mechanisms. Troughs and funnels pour the liquefied remains of the machine's victims onto its many moving parts, ensuring its smooth operation for all time.

SOUL TANKS

A pale-blue light fills this large chamber, revealing iron racks climbing from floor to ceiling that hold thousands of glass canisters. Most of these are filled with a glowing, swirling blue liquid, though some are dark. A platform of iron gear works sits in the middle of the room, a raised hole at its center. An articulated iron arm hangs from a manifold bolted to the ceiling, its jointed hand set with four interlocking fingers clearly built to grip one of the canisters in the racks. One wall of the chamber features a number of open pipes, each the same width as the glass canisters.

Area Aspects: Glass canisters filled with swirling blue liquid, gear works platform, articulated iron arm, transfer pipes

These tanks contain the souls of those devoured by the Infernal Machine and captured by the soul sphere floating above. Excess souls are stored in these tanks as reserve fuel while the machine moves ever onward. Empty tanks are refilled as the soul sphere absorbs more of the dead.

When the machine is in need of fuel, the articulated arm pulls one of the canisters from its rack and feeds it into the central pipe, where it heads toward the hell engine for consumption. The destinations at the end of the other pipes might be additional areas of the machine where the soul energy is used, stored, or filled, and are left for you to determine.

THE HELL ENGINE

A huge column of tapered glass dominates the center of this circular engine room. Shaped something like an hourglass, the column has an upper chamber filled with swirling blue liquid, a stream of which pours down through a narrow space to the lower chamber. Violent red energy roars in that lower chamber, like a continuous explosion. The bottom of the lower chamber has the appearance of a portal leading into a wasteland of red rock, swirling black clouds, and lakes of lava and blood. A web of twisted chrome bars spreads out from the bottom of the glass column to the walls of the room.

Area Aspects: Unstable portal to hell, funnel of souls, cold superconducting silver bars

The engine of the Infernal Machine is powered by souls fed into a portal to hell. Every soul sent to hell creates a huge surge of energy that feeds into the rest of the machine through bars of superconducting silver. Though it would be easy to expect the heat of the fires of hell to melt these bars, they are instead extremely cold. The bars extend throughout the machine, powering the engines that keep it rolling forever forward.

THE DIRECTOR

A huge chrome skull resembling that of some horned beast sits in the center of this chamber, connected to a network of large chrome bars and spikes that pin it in place. Ruby spheres sit in the skull's black eye sockets. A deep hum fills the chamber, felt not by the body but by the mind. A half-dozen circular mirrors hang at angles around the curved ceiling of the chamber, their surfaces reflecting distorted images of the skull.

Area Aspects: Large chrome skull, red ruby eyes, telepathic hum, circular mirrors

This chrome skull houses the mind of the Director, the entity responsible for the unfathomable programming and endless destruction of the Infernal Machine. Those few who know of the inner workings of the machine say that the Director does not wield traditional magic to control it, but instead employs a form of telepathic energy rarely seen in the world. The Director can use this telepathic energy to not only move the machine and operate its hell cannons, but to transport the construct across space and time as it seeks out new empires to devour. Each of the mirrors in this chamber acts as a scrying device for the Director, giving it a view of potential targets across the multiverse.

GREAT FURNACE

If the construct were a gargantuan beast, this chamber would be the fiery stomach digesting the results of its eternal hunger. Heat blasts out of a sunken pool in the center of this chamber, whose scalded iron walls are illuminated by a flickering orange light. A gantry above holds tons of rubble, ready to be dropped into the bubbling pool of liquid rock and metal. Exhaust pipes draw off the noxious gases that rise from the molten pool, while a pair of massive leather-lined bellows slowly rise and fall, pumping air that keeps the unseen fires roaring hot.

Area Aspects: Massive molten pool, pumping bellows, noxious gases, ventilation pipes, massive gantry

The crushed rock, metal, wood, and bone devoured by the Infernal Machine ends up in this furnace. Though the machine has no need of the energy gained from burning such waste here, the molten stone and metal slag left over feeds the construct's horrifying hell cannons and aids in any potential repairs to its outer shell.

INFERNAL EYE

At the top front of the construct, a rotating turret set with a single circular window houses the Infernal Machine's solitary eye. A thin layer of frost covers the inside walls of this chamber, within which a huge, multifaceted white diamond sits atop a pedestal of silvery chrome. A number of freezing cold rods rise from the floor to the diamond, which is surrounded by a rotating chassis holding a concave mirror. The chassis gives the mirror a free range of motion, shifting the walls of the room in accordance with its position, and always ensuring that the mirror faces the window through which it fires a beam of pure white energy.

Area Aspects: Huge white diamond, cold superconducting rod, concave mirror on rotating chassis

This beam represents the mightiest weapon of the Infernal Machine. Powered by the same soul energy fed into the construct's hell engine, this weapon fires pure white energy that can cut through almost any form of matter. The rotating turret, typically controlled by the will of the Director, can aim the beam in a wide range of positions, sweeping across great distances with ease. The weapon is expensive to fire, however, exhausting much of the energy the construct can produce.

RUNNING FANTASTIC LOCATIONS

The introduction of this book summarized how we hope these fantastic locations will provide a modularity and a flexibility that lets you easily fit them into your own campaigns. In this chapter, we'll go deeper into this topic and discuss the many ways you can twist, mash, cut up, and rebuild these locations for your own use.

FOCUSING ON THE ART

We're certainly proud of the descriptions of these fantastic locations, but we're equally proud of the artwork—and we encourage you to use that artwork all on its own. Instead of using the descriptions of the locations, you can use the art as inspiration for your own locations, and as handouts for your players to fit those locations. Sometimes all it takes is an interesting piece of art to get your imagination fired up and inspire your own ideas, and that's a fine way to use the art in this book.

USING A SINGLE ROOM OR CHAMBER

Many times in our games, we just need an interesting place to host a particular scene and don't have the time to whip one up ourselves. Almost any of the specific rooms or chambers in these fantastic locations can be run independently in your own game, as a small part of a larger adventure. Maybe you really dig the sunken cells in the Undercity, but there's no reason those cells have to be connected to the rest of the Undercity. So feel free to add that site as a location into which the PCs stumble as they explore some underground caves. Or maybe the PCs actually start in the cells. That sure beats meeting *in* a tavern!

A HANDFUL OF ROOMS FOR A QUICK ADVENTURE

If you happen to be running a single-session adventure or just need something interesting to fit in between the major arcs of your existing campaign, you can trim down any of these locations into just a few chambers for the PCs to explore. For example, looking at the Ziggurats of the Doom Priests, you might decide that the only chambers the PCs investigate are the sacrificial pits, the tunnels of the damned, and the chamber of dark secrets. The PCs can enter through the pits, travel under the ziggurat through the tunnels of the damned, and climb up an ancient well into the chamber of dark secrets, where they face the guardian of the powerful artifact they seek.

Following the way of the Lazy Dungeon Master, we can write out a few quick lines on a 3×5 note card to outline how we'd use this abbreviated location in our single-session game. It might look something like this:

Start: PCs save explorer from savage cannibals.

- Explorer describes a marvelous jeweled skull that resides in a forgotten ziggurat
- PCs discover the Ziggurats of the Doom Priests
- PCs find access through a sacrificial pit
- PCs battle ghouls in the sacrificial pit
- PCs travel through the tunnels of the damned and discover dangerous glyph traps of necrotic energy
- PCs go up through sacrificial well into the Chamber of Dark Secrets
- PCs fight ghosts of the doom priests and recover jeweled skull

That's all you need for a quick adventure using the Ziggurats of the Doom Priests location.

Also keep in mind that none of the locations have to appear in any particular order. You can mix and match the chambers in any location, as best fits the pacing of your own game.

EXTENDING PAST THE PAGES

We built the locations in this book with the intention of having a lot of blank spots that you can extend in any direction you want. Every castle built on a mountain has a potential network of caves under it, in which adventurers might get lost for years. Every elven ruin has another unseen and unexplored building buried under centuries of overgrown forest. Every cursed monastery has catacombs below it that extend ever deeper into the earth.

We intended for these fantastic locations—and each of their individual elements—to act as a catalyst for your own imagination and your own adventures. Each location can act as the seed for a much larger area. If your group is enjoying digging deeper into the exploration of any of these locations, extend away. Use what you know of the location and your own ideas to build new rooms and seed new plots. You can use the ideas in the "Building Your Own Fantastic Locations" chapter to get tips for building these new areas quickly and easily as your group journeys ever onward.

BUILDING ON ASPECTS

Every location and every room in this book includes area aspects. These serve as a summary of each location, but they can also be treated as nails on which you can hang your own ideas. Most importantly, these aspects are designed so that the player characters can do something with them. Each aspect is a real thing that the PCs can interact with, either negatively or positively.

Different game systems have different mechanics for handling physical objects. You might tie one or more skill checks to an object to allow the characters to manipulate or destroy it. You can add magical effects to these aspects to make a battle in an area more interesting. Some aspects will be useful to the PCs. Some will be detrimental. It's up to you to decide what makes sense for the location and the story.

For example, in the Elven City of Moonwillow, a huge black spike has pierced the earth. Streams of dark liquid pour out of this unnatural wound. Let's say that the PCs run into a band of demonic mercenaries around this spike. As you look at the battle, you determine that the liquid of the streams is a deadly poison. Any creature that touches a stream or drinks from it must make a saving throw, a resistance check, or whatever your fantasy RPG uses to allow characters to shrug off dangerous effects. Failure means that a character becomes deathly ill. Furthermore, the demonic mercenaries seem to be feeding off the energy of the black spike. While they fight in proximity to it, their attacks are stronger. However, a mage might be able to manipulate the strange magical field of the spike with a suitable skill check, reversing the polarity of the spike's field and making the demons' attacks weaker.

This is just one example of how to tie in-game effects to the aspects of a location. Another DM might come up with entirely different ways to affect a fight around this huge spike and its deadly black streams. With any of these locations, the potential is limited only by your own imagination.

PUTTING A DESERT UNDER THE SEA

Though we've established a particular area or feel for each of these locations, you can place them in any environment you want. The Pyramid of the Night King, for example, might be sunken deep beneath the sea instead of hidden in a huge desert. Some of the flavor of the text will need to change to give players the right sense of this new location, but such changes should be relatively easy to implement.

Likewise, any single room in any of these locations can be lifted and dropped into an entirely new environment. When using a single room or chamber for your own adventures, don't feel limited by the existing environment or setup.

YOUR LOCATIONS

All of the ideas discussed above are an attempt to reinforce the notion that these locations are now yours. The most important game is your own game. Creating an enjoyable game for you and your players trumps anything else that anyone has ever written, including this book. You are free to twist, crush, strip, tear down, reassemble, repaint, and run these locations in any way that makes your own game awesome. Take this freedom. Make these locations your own. Then, together with your players, build a new world.

BUILDING YOUR OWN FANTASTIC LOCATIONS

We slaved for years to bring these fantastic locations to you, our eyes bleeding and our fingers gnarled from all the typing and drawing. The whole purpose of this book is to take one of the hardest parts of running a great fantasy RPG and prepare it for you. That said, we understand that you can't live with just these twenty locations for the rest of your GMing lives. You'll want to build more, and we want to give you the tools to help you do so. In this chapter, we'll go over how we built these locations and give you an outline to help you build your own locations, with as much or as little effort as you want to put into them. Grab your shovels and prepare your spells—it's time to build something fantastic.

WHERE TO START?

There isn't a perfect single place to start building your fantastic location. You might start with a room. You might start with the environment in which that room sits. You might start with the history. You might start with just a single image in your mind. Many times, if you're on the spot to come up with a fantastic location, you'll start with the overall theme. What is this location? What makes it fantastic? What is its rough history? Any of these questions can start to drive the creative process.

One great trick is to mash up a number of different starting points together. Perhaps you saw a great image on the Net of an old abandoned train used during World War II. Maybe you saw a giant sinkhole hundreds of meters deep in an otherwise shallow bay. So what if, in ages past, a magical rail engine powered by elemental lightning exploded as it crossed over the bay? The force of destruction was so great that it blew open a sinkhole over a hundred meters deep, into which the engine sunk to become forever lost in the depths.

Mashing up a couple of ideas ensures that you aren't just falling into a single overused stereotype. Likewise, even mashing two stereotypes together can create something entirely new.

MAKING IT FANTASTIC

Lots of things make locations fantastic, but there's one really easy option:

Make it big.

Scale is a great way to make a location fantastic. Think about the Argonath in The Lord of the Rings. Would those stone sentinels be as fantastic if they were only a few meters high? Make them the size of mountains instead, and you've got something awe inspiring.

Making something otherworldly is another great way to heighten the fantasy of your locations. Unknown magic, forgotten gods, and unexplained or unnatural effects can get your players wondering how a location actually works.

Just as we mix up themes for our overall location, we can mix size and mysterious magic together to make something fantastic. Imagine a castle, high up on the edge of a cliff, that appears to perpetually float in a state of destruction. Huge watchtowers are suspended in pieces, hanging off the edge of the cliff. Great splinters of rock spin slowly just off the edge of the thousand-foot drop to the ground below.

THE BIG PICTURE

Next we go with the big picture. When the PCs crest a hill and see this location, what jumps out at them? What makes them say "Wow"? What is the overall sense of the place?

We don't need to (and probably shouldn't) write huge amounts of text for this. Following the way of the Lazy Dungeon Master, we can jot down a few key aspects of the location that will grab people's attention. Here's an example:

The Hidden City

- City carved into the rock of a mountain behind a thousand-foot waterfall.
- Dozens of apartment-style chambers built in tiers cut into the mountain.
- Nearly invisible when looking at it from any other angle.
- Stone fortress at the top of the mountain, shaped like the face of a woman. The waterfall parts over her forehead, appearing like ever-flowing hair.

This gives us an overall idea about the location. As we're writing these aspects down, more ideas come to mind. How do people get to the hidden city? What color is the stone? These are the sorts of details we can give to our players as we describe the location.

DESIGNING SPECIFIC LOCATIONS

With the main idea jotted down, we can dig into some of the specific locations the PCs will visit. We start by listing a bunch of potential areas as they come to us, giving them evocative names. Sticking with our hidden city idea might generate the following:

- The Treacherous Pathway
- The Rainways
- The Queen's Fortress
- The Hanging Apartments
- The Deep Tunnels
- The Riverboat Lifts
- The Black Throne
- The Sky Altar

This list gets us started in fleshing out a fantastic location. For locations you create yourself, you might find that these brief ideas let you tap into other interesting details already squirreled away in your brain. The list reminds you of what's going on, but you don't have to write out every little part of it. We did so for this book, but we don't expect every GM to build a location with as much overall detail as we put into these locations. Jotting down just a few words is often enough.

ADDING LOCATION ASPECTS

For each of these locations, we can drop in two or three location aspects that fill in some of the details of the location. More importantly, aspects are things the PCs can interact with. Fantastic locations aren't just pretty places to look at, they're places to *do* stuff. These aspects inspire players with ideas and incentives for what they want to do.

Aspects sometimes come into play when things are done to the characters, rather than as a result of what the characters do with the aspects. Sometimes it's both. For example, say we make a note of having a "crumbling slick walkway" for the treacherous pathway. That aspect will be a definite hindrance for PCs trying to make their way to the hidden city. But it might also be a pain for the gnolls who are attacking the PCs. And during the fight, creatures on either side might go slip-sliding into the jagged rocks of the river below.

Let's take a look at some aspects for the locations we have above:

The Treacherous Pathway

- Crumbling slick walkway
- Stone faces in the walls

The Rainways

- Spiraling stone streets
- Gutters of continually flowing water
- Statues of ancient heroes

The Queen's Fortress

- Fortress hanging over the edge of the cliff face
- Water flowing like hair over the carved female face
- Eyes acting as windows into the upper levels

The Hanging Apartments

- Small apartments hanging over the edge of the cliff
- Narrow stairwells with steep steps
- Natural water flow through the apartments

The Deep Tunnels

- Narrow tunnels dug deep into the mountainside
- Glowing gems that illuminate the passageways
- Network of vertical shafts carved out by water flow

The Riverboat Lifts

- Rotting luxury riverboat hanging over the river
- Five-hundred-foot chain lift to the river below
- Huge iron gear works using counterweights to move the lift

The Black Throne

- Throne carved from a single black obsidian block
- Sun-touched gemstones in upper windows
- Statues of cloaked guardians

The Sky Altar

- Statue of many-armed female goddess with a fish-like lower body
- Narrow waterfalls flowing down the walls
- Infinity pool pouring over the edge into the river below

Coming up with aspects for every specific location takes a little bit of time, but it helps build the overall blueprint for the rest of the location. A single page of notes is usually enough to run an adventure of two to four hours in length.

Just to reinforce it once again, you don't have to write out full text for these aspects. Since you're using these locations for your own game, you just need reminders of what's there. These aspects help remind us of the important details, giving us the starting point for our description of the location, and providing information the players can use to interact with the location.

THAT'S IT!

In the process of building our fantastic location, we have an overall theme. We jotted down our notes regarding the important parts of the location. We have eight specific places the player characters can visit, and we have enough details to describe those locations and how the PCs might interact with them.

Building a location like this is a good exercise when you're bored and looking to expand or enliven your roleplaying games. Designing a location like this—initially free of both monstrous inhabitants and plot or story threads—gives you something you can use in lots of different ways. Maybe you'll fill it with a clan of vicious troglodytes. Maybe it's a location for elves in seclusion. Maybe it's a ruin now home to the remains of a water-worshiping cult. However you want to use it, you have a nicely detailed location that didn't take hours to build out, and which will still evoke interest from you and your players when you bring it to the table.

When it comes down to it, the fantastic locations that matter the most are the ones we hold in our heads. Good fantastic locations become real places to us—places that live in our minds and the minds of our players. There's no limit to what we can build.

NOW GO. GO BUILD SOMETHING FANTASTIC.

+ + +

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