

THE CALL OF ATROPUS

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A maddening adventure for characters levels 5-7.



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INTRODUCTION

This section contains all of the background information you need to run this adventure. Included are: a plot overview, notes on how to use this module, details on adjusting the adventure's difficulty for lower or higher level parties, and suggested adventure hooks.

See Appendix A for a list of monsters used in this adventure, Appendix B for treasure, and Appendix C for maps.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Every 256 years a bright red comet streaks across Torilian skies. Different cultures call the astral body by their own names, but on Faerûn it is called the Phoenix. Sages have studied the comet for centuries and offered competing views as to its origin. Some say it is a piece of the Plane of Magma cast forth from the elemental chaos. Others say it is slag from Moradin or Gond's foundries. Less religious scholars believe it to be simply an errant piece of Realmspace with no greater meaning. They are all wrong.

The comet is a piece of the undead primordial and Elder Evil known as **Atropus**, the World Born Dead. Few Torilian scholars have delved deeply into the origin and agenda of Atropus, but those who have believe the being is a mistake Ao the Overgod made when creating the first deities - a stillborn god. The primordial drifts through Realmspace heralding the rise of undead and eldritch horrors wherever it goes. Its true goals, if it even conceives of such things, are unknowable. Warlocks make pacts with Atropus in hopes of gaining a fraction of his power. They all die babbling madmen.

It is the year of the Phoenix. Scholars from across Toril have renewed the conversation around the comet and the workings of Realmspace. In darker corners, terrible and twisted things stir, awoken from long slumbers by the call of Atropus.

USING REALMSPACE IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

This adventure draws upon a specific bit of Forgotten Realms lore known as Realmspace. This term refers to the planetary bodies and astral space (called wildspace) between them of Toril's solar system. You do not need to run a planetary campaign to use this adventure, but it could be a launching point for an astral jaunt!

For more information on Realmspace, see the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* second edition supplement *Spelljammer: Realmspace* as well as the 2nd and 3rd edition *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*.

GAZING INTO MADNESS

Nearly 700 years ago **Erdanis Felahil**, an acclaimed moon elf astronomer and wizard, built an observatory in the Cloud Peaks, just north of Amn. He studied the movements of astral bodies and published a number of works that underpin contemporary works on Realmspace, the Astral Plane, and cosmology.

As his curiosity grew, Erdanis began to ask questions concerning the creation of Toril, the Prime Material Plane, and even the gods themselves. Unlike some wizards who seclude themselves in hopes of obtaining secret knowledge to leverage into terrible power, Erdanis' goals were much more benevolent. He shared his knowledge freely and welcomed dissenting views. Still, he delved into places no mortal should.

Erdanis discovered an arcane means to peer back in time. Any learned diviner could boast such an ability, but not to the extent of Erdanis. He claimed to have viewed eons past, before Toril crawled with life. What he saw there, including Ao's folly in creating Atropus, rent his mind asunder. He feverishly worked day and night to conceptualize the knowledge he so quickly gained. Soon, madness took him, the curse of his discovery obliterating his body. He rose again as a malevolent ghost burdened with aberrant knowledge - an allip.

The undead Erdanis slew his assistants and continues to haunt the observatory, waiting for an opportunity to share his forbidden knowledge.

PERILOUS RESEARCH

A half-elven researcher from Candlekeep, **Valathuriel Selevarun**, has staked her scholarly career on understanding not only Realmspace but other crystalline spheres. She is familiar with Erdanis' work and has spent the last several months tracking down the location of his abandoned observatory. She has been unable to find reports of the observatory being looted and hopes that by staging a field expedition to the area she can uncover Erdanis' unpublished works.

Unlike many of her colleagues in Candlekeep, Valathuriel is not well versed in the arcane arts, so she hired a dwarven brother-and-sister adventuring duo called Hammer and Anvil to accompany her to the ruin. The trio set out three tendays ago and have not been heard of since.

Valathuriel and her hired companions did not fare well at the observatory. They were quickly set upon by star spawn, hideous eldritch creatures drawn to the location by the comet. The dwarves fought bravely but were overcome. Erdanis' tortured soul sensed that Valathuriel had a strong mind and took her alive, hoping to part his secrets so he could cross into the afterlife. The allip kept her prisoner for twenty days before her mind finally broke. Now, she is forced to work through the night decoding the madness of Erdanis' mind.

Atropus, acting through the comet overhead, sensed Valathuriel's broken mind and has granted her arcane power. The Elder Evil hopes that once she learns the ritual to commune directly with it, she will be his conduit onto Toril.

USING THIS ADVENTURE

You should read through this module at least once before running it. While the adventure is fairly simple, some of the creatures employ advanced tactics to create a more memorable experience.

This module assumes you have read and have access to the *Player's Handbook* (PHB), *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG), *Monster Manual* (MM), and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* (MToF). Many of the creatures in this adventure appear only in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.

Combat encounters have detailed tactics for every creature. It is recommended you follow these in order to create a challenging and memorable experience for your players. At the end of each encounter there are notes detailing how to adjust the combat for strong or weak parties.

This module uses a style familiar to official *Dungeons & Dragons* products. Creatures appear in **bold**. Custom creatures and NPCs are marked with an asterisk(*). Their stat blocks are found in Appendix A. Spell names appear in *italics*. Magic items used as treasure appear in **both bold and italics**.

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

Text that appears in a box like this speaks directly to the DM. These sidebars will include: rules reminders, roleplaying hints, and other information.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

This adventure assumes you are using the Forgotten Realms setting, but is generic enough to be set in most fantasy settings. Here are a few ideas to get your players started:

Lost Researcher. The monks of Candlekeep have put out a call for adventurers to find Valathuriel. The grand library has offered both gold and brief access to their rare collections for any who return with information regarding Valathuriel. The notice states she was traveling to an abandoned observatory in the Cloud Peaks.

Servant of Evil. The local government (or perhaps even the characters!) ousted a warlock's plan to commune directly with the Elder Evils. The spellcaster's rambling notes contained information on the observatory as a site of interest.

Strange Signs. Caravans from Amn have reported seeing eerie lights in the foothills of the Cloud Peaks. Those that make camp close to the observatory are wracked with maddening nightmares for days.

Unnatural Game. A ranger serving the Emerald Enclave discovered tracks she had never seen before. Tracking them to their source, she discovered a pack of star spawn hunting. She has requested aid in learning more about the alien predators.



THE CALL OF ATROPUS

The earth beneath us is contained in a delicate crystalline sphere, shared by worlds beyond ours. Only those who seek madness look further. —Alaundo the Seer, *Heavenly Bodies*

The adventure begins as the characters approach the observatory. Read or paraphrase this to set the scene.

In the distance you see a squat observatory peering out toward the sky. As you approach, you feel a creeping presence crawling up your spine, almost as if a worm has found its way past your cloak. It is never really there, always just on the edge of your perception.

RESEARCHING THE OBSERVATORY

The characters can learn more about Erdanis and his observatory with an **Intelligence (History)** check. Access to a well-stocked library may provide **advantage** on this check, at the DM's discretion. The total result determines what the character learns. Each level is cumulative:

5-9: The observatory is 700 years old and was built by moon elves. It was abandoned 200 years ago.

10-14: The observatory was built by Erdanis Felahil, a renowned elven wizard and scholar. His seminal work on the movement of astral bodies formed the foundation for contemporary research on the subject. The observatory was not only a research station, but also a temple to Araleth Letheranil, a lesser elven deity of starlight and exploration. It was abandoned after a disaster.

15-19: Erdanis was in the midst of researching his greatest work when he died at the observatory. All of his research assistants died alongside the astronomer and none of his work has been recovered.

20 or more: Erdanis was researching the formation of Toril and other planetary bodies in Realmspace when he died. He claimed to have discovered a way to peer back into time before even the gods were created.

Terrain. The observatory is situated in the foothills of the Cloud Peaks. The ground outside of the observatory is gravel with sparse shrubs and small trees. Inside, the smooth stone floors are well preserved but littered with debris.

Sights, Sounds, and Smells. The exterior of the observatory has been ravaged by time. Countless birds have made their nests along its roof and in window sills. Inside, the tools of astronomers and researchers sit untouched.

The area immediately surrounding the observatory is eerily void of animal sounds. Inside, there is a constant low beating like a that of a heart. Disembodied whispers and moans can be heard just at the edge of the characters' perceptions.

Outside the air carries the alpine smells of crisp, clean air. Inside, mold and mildew prevail. There is a sharp metallic smell of blood coming from the star spawns' successful hunts.

Doors, Walls, and Windows. Unless otherwise stated, doors are made from reinforced hardwood. They have **AC 16** and **20 hit points**. They are immune to necrotic, poison, psychic, and radiant damage and resistant to piercing damage.

Unless otherwise stated, the walls are made from 1-foot thick polished marble and are 15 feet tall. They require a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics)** check to climb.

The large pane windows on the eastern, southern, and western walls of the observatory have **AC 13** and **20 hit points**.

Lighting. The creatures inside the observatory do not use light sources. During the day, the interior is cast in dim light, creating a **lightly obscured area**. At night, the observatory is entirely dark, creating a **heavily obscured area**.

Returning to the Observatory. If the characters retreat to rest or restock, **3 star spawn manglers** and **6 star spawn grues** spawn in 24 hours. These star spawn patron the ground and first floors, attacking intruders on sight. If the birthing pods in Area 13 (see below) are destroyed, this does not occur.

Touch of Madness. The eldritch horror of the Elder Evil Atropus permeates the observatory, twisting the minds of creatures inside. This does not carry a game effect but should be used as a storytelling method. The place plays tricks on even the most stalwart minds, sowing confusion and discord among allies.

A good way to use this in your storytelling is to create a list of things that may lure your player characters away or entice them to go down another hall. They should hear or see things that pull on their emotions and unsettle them. To dial up the horror aspect, you could write these on index cards and secretly pass it to the player or send them a private message in a virtual environment.

Here is a table with ideas on how to horrify each of the player backgrounds found in the *Player's Handbook*. Use these or create your own:

HORROR EFFECTS BY BACKGROUND

Background	Effect
Acolyte	You hear a prayer to your god.
Charlatan	You hear damning evidence against you.
Criminal	You feel someone watching you.
Entertainer	You see the corpse of a fan.
Folk Hero	A friend from your past calls for help.
Guild Artisan	You see a perfect example of your craft.
Hermit	Something promises even more knowledge, if you but call out to it.
Noble	You see a prized family heirloom.
Outlander	You feel like you are being hunted.
Sage	You see a perfectly preserved tome.
Sailor	You hear your favorite drinking song.
Soldier	You see the corpse of a comrade you could not save.
Urchin	You see a coin purse for the taking - enough to buy food for a month.



INTO THE MAW OF MADNESS



This section details locations on the approach to the observatory as well as the ground floor. Refer to the maps in Appendix C for more information.

AREA 1: THE COURTYARD

As the characters approach, read or paraphrase this.

The three story observatory stands before you, kudzu vines enveloping most of the exterior. Two large wooden doors engraved with delicate images of constellations guard the path inside. You hear a whistling breeze whip through a large broken window to west.

If the characters wait and watch the observatory from afar, succeeding on a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals hunched, twisted figures moving inside the building.

Main Entrance. The double doors along the southern wall were wedged shut with an iron bar by one of Erdanis' assistants. The door requires a successful **DC 17 Strength check** to force open, creating enough noise to alert every creature in the observatory. Alternatively, the iron bar can be quietly destroyed using a carefully applied vial of acid or similar spell or magic item.

Western Entrance. The large pane window along the western wall has been shattered. Broken glass covers the ground 10 feet from the broken window. Characters walking on the glass have **disadvantage** on Dexterity (Stealth) checks. If the character succeeds a **DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**, they do not have disadvantage.

Eastern Window. The eastern window is still intact. Breaking it alerts all creatures on the ground floor.

Scaling the Walls. The observatory is 60 feet tall. The large pane windows are located at ground level, 20 feet, and 40 feet. The characters can scale the exterior walls with a successful **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check**, using the vines to ease the climb.

CREATURES

2 **star spawn manglers** (MToF, p. 236) are hidden (+7 to Stealth) in the bushes and debris. They are actively watching for intruders and make Wisdom (Perception) checks each round. These eldritch abominations stand 4-feet tall and have smooth, glistening slug-like bodies. Two bulbous, misshapen eyes appear where a mouth should be. They pull themselves along the ground and walls on six clawed arms, some of which are bent at odd angles.

TACTICS

If the manglers are unseen, they wait for the characters to split up. If they stay together, the manglers ambush the characters when they attempt to enter the observatory by any means.

The manglers use hit-and-run tactics, preferring to Hide while they wait for their Flurry of Claws to recharge. Remember that if the encounter takes place at night, the manglers can Hide as a bonus action using their *shadow stealth* trait. The manglers prefer to target unarmored or lightly armored characters or characters who have separated themselves.

The manglers fight until only one remains. The last mangler Disengages and retreats up the observatory walls, Dashing if there are no archers or spellcasters, otherwise it Dodges as it flees. It enters through the roof and warns its allies on the second floor.

The manglers will pursue the characters up to 100 feet from the observatory's courtyard, where they break off and return to their guard duty.

If the manglers are alerted to the character's presence, they move to the location using Stealth and ambush the party.

TREASURE

The corpses of the dwarven brother-and-sister duo, Hammer and Anvil, lie near the broken window. The male wears a suit of half-plate *armor of cold resistance* (DMG, p. 152). His sister wields a *warhammer +1* (DMG, p. 213). The pair also carry 2 *potions of healing* (DMG, p. 187). They each carry coin purses with a total of **29 gp** and **37 sp**.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters alert the pack of star spawn grues in Area 5 by forcing the door open or breaking the window, they come to reinforce the manglers. Likewise, if there is more than 5 rounds of combat in the courtyard, the grues are alerted and rush to join the fight. See Area 5 for tactics concerning grues.

THIS IS DEADLY!

This encounter can be quite deadly, especially if the grues join. If you fear a total party kill, don't be afraid to drop hints to your players that retreat is an option. Without good preparation, this encounter should feel very challenging. Remember, a challenging encounter is a memorable encounter!

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

Make the following adjustments if the characters are lower or higher level:

- If the party is level 5, decrease the manglers' hit points to 55
- If the party is level 7, increase the manglers' hit points to 85.

AREA 2: MAIN HALL

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

A large chandelier adorned with crystalline spheres hangs from the center of this hall, its light long gone. Flanking the entrance are two elven statues: one holds an astrolabe while the other grasps a tome in one hand and a candle in the other. To the north, a large statue depicts a beautiful female in a gossamer robe embracing a slender elf. Each have a halo of starlight overhead.

This long hall was once used by Erdanis and his assistance to entertain guests, listen to lectures, and display their works.

Sacred Statues. The two small statues in the southern part of the hall depict the personified ideas of exploration and discovery. Characters who succeed on a **DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check** can identify the statue to the north depicts Selûne, the Moonmaiden and Araleth Letheranil, an elven god of starlight and exploration. Some sages believe the two divinities are actually the same being, whereas others say the two had a love affair.

SECRET DOOR

The secret door to Area 7 is opened by placing an amulet Erdanis wore in life into the base of the large statue. See Area 12 for more information on the amulet.

The secret door is discovered with a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** and opened with a successful **DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**. It can also be forced open with a successful **DC 18 Strength check**, causing enough noise to alert the creatures in Area 5. See Area 7 for more information.

TREASURE

If the characters devise a plan to reach the 20-foot diameter chandelier hanging from the center of the hall, they can easily remove **125 gp** worth of fine crystal orbs.



The Call of Atropus

REOCCURRING ENCOUNTER: THE MAD GHOST

If the characters take actions that alert creatures on the second floor, Erdanis' spirit, in the form of an **allip** (MToF, p. 116) begins to harass them, hoping to either kill or drive off the intruders. Many sections in this adventure will detail which creatures are alerted, but use your own judgment as well. For example, if the characters check for traps by hitting a wall with an axe, it might alert Erdanis. Spells with loud, destructive effects like *fireball* would also alert the allip. The allip should appear at least once every 10 minutes while the characters explore the observatory.

TACTICS

The allip uses hit-and-run tactics at all times, relying on its *incorporeal movement* trait to appear out of walls to attack before retreating again. It prefers to use its Whispers of Madness action unless the characters are engaged in combat, then it will attempt to stun them with Howling Babble.

The allip should never stay visible for more than 1 round unless it is affected by a condition that prevents it from moving (luckily it is immune to most of those). If the characters have positioned in such a way that it is impossible for the allip to retreat after attacking, it does not attack and waits for a better opportunity. Assume that the allip is always just on the other side of the nearest wall or ceiling and watches the characters by phasing partially through the wall.

If brought to 25 or fewer hit points, the allip Disengages and retreats to the second floor, where it lies in wait with Valathuriel.

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

Make the following adjustments if the characters are lower or higher level:

- If the characters are level 5, reduce the allip's Whispers of Madness and Howling Babble DCs to 13.
- If the characters are level 7, increase the allip's hit points to 60.

AREA 3: STAIRS UP

As the characters approach, read or paraphrase this.

These stone stairs lead up to the second floor. The thin silver-plated handrails are chipped from years of disrepair, marring the astral scenes painted on them.

These stairs are in good repair and pose no threat to the characters.

AREA 4: BASEMENT STAIRS

As the characters approach, read or paraphrase this.

These stone stairs quickly end in a pile of rubble, the result of a centuries-old collapse.

These stairs led to a basement level the researchers used for storage. Due to seismic activity in the Cloud Peaks, they have since crumbled, creating a blocked passageway. Attempting to clear the passageway using nonmagical means creates enough noise to alert every creature in the observatory.

AREA 5: ASSISTANT QUARTERS

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

A metallic, coppery smell permeates this room. A host of spined, vaguely humanoid creatures crawl over a recently slain elk, ravenously tearing at its stomach and haunches.

This area served as housing for Erdanis' junior assistants. Students from large universities as far away as Silverymoon would study under Erdanis for a time before continuing their career elsewhere. Permanent housing for these assistants was not feasible within the small observatory. The door from Area 2 is easily opened.

Ceiling Access. The ceiling in the southwestern section of this room has collapsed, allowing access to Area 11 (see below).

CREATURES

A pack of 8 **star spawn grues** (MToF, p. 234) have dragged an elk from a recent hunt into this room. These aberrations look vaguely humanoid but have a lipless mouth that reveals a maw of needlelike teeth. Jagged spines protrude from their body in irregular patches.

Six are ravenously feasting on the elk while the other two remain vigilant. The six who are feeding have **disadvantage** on Wisdom (Perception) checks. The grues attack the characters on sight.

TACTICS

The grues fight in pairs, swarming lightly armored characters. They position themselves in such a way to make movement without drawing opportunity attacks difficult.

The grues fight to the death and will pursue the characters if they flee.

If the grues have been alerted to the characters' presence, they swarm the area, letting out maddening yips and shrieks.

TREASURE

If the characters succeed a **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** or spend 10 minutes searching the room, they find the humanoid remains of an old kill. The corpse still wears a silver wedding band set with a small sapphire worth **100 gp**.

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

Make the following adjustments if the characters are lower or higher level:

- If the party is level 5, remove 2 grues.
- If the party is level 7, add 2 grues.

AREA 6: RESEARCH CENTER

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

You feel an intruding sense of doom and despair upon entering this room. Nine humanoid skeletons lie about the room, all of which met a violent end. Some have had their skulls destroyed with heavy research implements while others were dashed into the heavy stone walls. Scattered about the room are well-preserved alchemical, cartographic, and other scientific tools.

This was once the main research center for the observatory. Here, Erdanis and his assistants would experiment on pieces of comets, attempt arcane divinations onto other planets, and develop new telescopes and other astronomical tools.

When Erdanis succumbed to his madness, many of his assistants fled into this area and barricaded the door, hoping to weather his monstrous rampage. The door and walls did little, however, as the allip turned their minds to madness. The assistants killed one another, trapped in a prison of their own making.

Barricaded Door. The door has been heavily barricaded and requires a successful **DC 20 Strength check** to open from Area 2. The barricades can be removed with 10 minutes of work, if the characters have entered from the eastern window.

Ceiling Access. The ceiling in the southeastern section of this room has collapsed, allowing access to Area 12 (see below).

TREASURE

If the characters succeed a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** or spend 10 minutes searching the room, they uncover rare astronomical tools worth **300 gp**.


AREA 7: ERDANIS' STUDY

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

As the statue's forms leave each other's arms, a private study is revealed. A small oaken desk rests against the western wall, littered with torn and hastily written notes. What was once a well-organized collection of books has been left in tatters, tomes thrown haphazardly about the room. To the north, an iron staircase spirals upward.

These small chambers were used by Erdanis to seclude himself and escape into his own mind, a practice that proved deadly.

Spiral Staircase. This staircase provided Erdanis with a means to easily traverse the observatory. The stairs lead to Area 14.



A Luminary Gone Mad The tomes in this area are largely penned by Erdanis. They contain all manner of astronomical knowledge as well as treatises on the movement of the planes, construction of spacefaring vessels, and other rare research. This module will not explore these topics in detail, but they could be used as a launching point for future adventures!

The most recent works clearly show Erdanis slipping into madness. He becomes obsessed with something he called the "First Sphere." His ramblings mention the folly of Ao in believing he could create perfect beings and attempts to describe Atropus, the stillborn god he believes was sent as a curse to Ao. The margins of these works are littered with half-finished spells and sketches of aberrations.

TREASURE

If the characters succeed a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** or search the room using *detect magic*, they find a small collection of **spell scrolls** (DMG, p. 200). The scrolls contain: *chromatic orb*, *unseen servant*, *darkness*, and *clairvoyance*.

The tomes might prove useful to the right buyer, but have no intrinsic value themselves.

DEVELOPMENTS

Erdanis' private journal rests on the writing desk. He stopped detailing his days as his madness took over, but the most recent entries detail what he was working on. The journal tells how to operate the locked chest in Area 12 (see below).

FROM THE VOID



This section details locations on the first floor of the observatory, which has been tainted by the star spawns' incursion.

ELDRITCH HORROR

This area gives you, the Dungeon Master, a fantastic opportunity to play into Lovecraftian horror tropes. Take a moment to describe the horrible noises coming from Area 13 and the unnerving, erratic movements of the orrery in Area 9. If you can, close the curtains in your gaming space and speak in a low, slow cadence as you paint a picture of the area. The players should feel very out of place in this section.

AREA 8: STAIRS UP

As the characters approach, read or paraphrase this.

The stairs to the second floor are lost under a glistening, undulating black substance that seems to be slowly moving toward you. The ooze stretches along the stairs and into a room to the west.

Creeping Doom. The oily black mass growing on the stairs extends into Area 14. The ooze-like substance is not a creature but responds to living matter similar to a dangerous mold or slime.

Any creature who touches the substance or ends its turn in the area must make a **DC 13 Wisdom saving throw**. A creature takes 6 (1d10) psychic damage and is frightened on a failed save, or half as much damage and is not frightened on a successful one. The character remains frightened until they leave the observatory or are cured by magic, such as a *lesser restoration* spell. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the character also gains a long-term madness effect (see DMG, p. 258 for more information on madness effects).

The substance can be burned away with natural or magical flame. Doing so causes the ooze to let out a terrible shriek, alerting all creatures in the observatory.

AREA 9: HALL OF STARS

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

The sound of metal rapidly scraping against itself fills this large room. Along the southern wall you see a massive orrery spinning erratically. The spheres and gears of the machine catch light and throw it across the room in chaotic patterns, playing tricks on your senses.

Realspace Orrery. The large orrery on the southern wall stands 10 feet tall and depicts the astral bodies of Realspace. It was once enchanted to magically track the position of the planets, moons, comets, and other objects but has begun to malfunction, spinning erratically, due to disrepair. A character who succeeds on a **DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check** can repair the orrery with 10 minutes of work. Once repaired, the orrery can be set to stop spinning, revealing the current alignment of the solar system.

TREASURE

If the orrery is repaired, a character who succeeds on a **DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**, can remove a diamond worth **300 gp** and a large black opal worth **200 gp**.

The orrery itself is too large to move without a team of laborers and draft animals.

AREA 10: COLLAPSED LABORATORY

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

The floor of this room has almost entirely collapsed. Shattered glass and crumbling parchment covers what floor remains.

This area was once an alchemical lab. Erdanis' research into the nature of Realspace required him to experiment with rare and often dangerous substances, such as phlogiston, a flammable substance that existed between the Prime Material Plane's crystal spheres.

Collapsed Floor. Crossing what remains of the floor requires a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check**.

If a character falls through the collapsed floor, they take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and land in Area 5 (see above). If the character is wearing metal armor, the fall creates enough noise to alert every creature in the observatory.

TREASURE

An unadorned leather pouch rests on a thin piece of flooring along the eastern wall. If the characters search the area using *detect magic*, they sense magic emanating from the bag. Inside is a single **bead of force** (DMG, p. 154), used by Erdanis' assistants to contain alchemical reactions.

AREA 11: APPRENTICE'S QUARTERS

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

The floor of this room has partially collapsed along the eastern wall. You see the remnants of a bedroom - a shattered bed, torn sheets and personal effects thrown about the room. A humanoid skeleton sits pressed into the southern corner, its knees brought to its chest in a feeble attempt to protect itself. The skull is trapped in an eternal scream.

Erdanis had taken on a single true apprentice, hoping to create a legacy for himself even after his long elven lifespan. The unsuspecting apprentice was the allip's first victim.

Collapsed Floor. If a character falls through the collapsed floor they take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and land in Area 6 (see above). If the character is wearing metal armor, the fall creates enough noise to alert every creature in the observatory.

AREA 12: ERDANIS' QUARTERS

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

This room is well preserved, with a large four-post bed against the northern wall and finely crafted ebony furniture. A chest rests in the eastern corner of the room, adorned with silver filigree depicting the night sky. Inlaid into the chest's lid is an intricate model of the Torilian solar system.

This room was Erdanis' personal living area. The researcher rarely spent much time here, preferring the company of his arcane and academic pursuits. The door is stuck and requires a **DC 12 Strength check** to open.

TRAP

Erdanis used the chest to store valuable personal belongings. Instead of a conventional lock, the chest is enchanted to open when the model of Realmspace is manipulated to match the current alignment of the solar system. If a character knows how to operate the chest due to reading Erdanis' journal in Area 7 or through an *identify* spell, they must succeed on a **DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check** to know the current planetary alignment. This check is not required if the orrery in Area 9 is repaired.

Alternatively, a character who succeeds on a **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check** while studying the locking mechanism understands how it functions and can disable it with a successful **DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**.

If the Dexterity check using thieves' tools fails by 5 or more, or the characters damage the chest in an attempt to smash it open, ether gas fills a 5-foot cube surrounding the chest. Any creature in the area must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or become poisoned for 8 hours. The poisoned creature is also unconscious. The creature wakes up if it takes damage or if another creature uses an action to shake it awake. This does not, however, remove the poisoned condition.

TREASURE

Inside the chest is a purse containing **40 pp** and **55 gp**. Wrapped in a black silk is a forked iron rod worth **250 gp**. The iron ore was harvested from a fallen meteor and is supernaturally durable. The rod, which is attuned to the Astral Plane, was used as a material component for the *plane shift* spell.

Additionally, there is an amulet set with a large sun opal. This necklace functions as a *gem of seeing* (DMG, p. 172). This amulet can be used to open the secret door in Area 2 (see above).

ADJUSTING TREASURE

There are a number of Rare magic items presented in this adventure, all of which have thematic ties to the location. If you feel the treasure rewards are too much, consider reducing the *gem of seeing* to only being usable once per day, restrict the range to 60 feet, or both.

AREA 13: INFESTED EXHIBITION HALL

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

The ooze-like substance covers this chamber, hanging in thick drapes from the walls and ceiling. Large, bulbous tumors are growing here. Inside their translucent membranes you see something crawling, something breathing. To the west of the door is a broken display case housing a pitted black rock.

This room was used to display the observatory's discoveries. The hall housed star maps, drawings of nebulae, specimens of astral minerals, and advanced telescopes invented by Erdanis. The door is ajar and easily opened or closed.

Answering the Call Before his death Erdanis purchased a rare piece of meteorite at a Waterdavian auction. He hoped to discover new minerals within the sample, but was unable to find anything of use. He ordered for the specimen to be placed in the exhibition hall as a visitor attraction.

In reality, the astral rock was a small piece of Atropus, cast off from the dead god millennia ago. The meteorite contained the magical material needed to birth star spawn. As the Phoenix passes overhead, the nascent star spawn in the meteorite have awoken, polluting the immediate area with alien magic. Only a hollow husk of the meteorite remains in a display case.

Creeping Doom. The entire chamber is covered in an ooze-like substance. See Area 8 above for more information.

Star Spawn Birthing Pods. The bulbous growths on the ceiling and walls are filled with ooze that is forming into star spawn. They can be easily destroyed with weapons or fire.

AREA 14: SECRET PASSAGE

See Area 7 above for more information on this area.

SECRET DOOR

Characters who succeed on a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** notice there is a secret door along the wall. However, the door can only open from inside the passage.

A SHATTERED MIND

After she was captured, Valathuriel was brought here and psychically tortured by the allip. Erdanis' mad spirit destroyed her mind with visions of the unknowable reaches of the Far Realms and terrible scenes of Atropus, the stillborn god. She has toiled for days, barely eating or sleeping, trying to understand what the allip has shown her.

She has been kept alive, teetering on the edge of true insanity, by Atropus, whom she now unwillingly serves. Truly a tragic end to a brilliant young mind - if the heroes can't save her!

AREA 15: STAIRS UP

These stairs lead up to the observatory's roof, where Erdanis would peer through his powerful telescope. They are in good repair and pose no threat to the characters.

AREA 16: ASTRAL LIBRARY

As the characters alert Valathuriel, read or paraphrase this.

This large, open chamber is littered with toppled bookshelves and reading tables. Well preserved star maps and beautiful paintings of nebulae hang from the walls. To the west, you see a hunched humanoid form frantically scratching at a bundle of parchment, mumbling to itself. It notices you and shoots up, revealing the sharp features of a young half-elven woman. Her head tilts to the side unnaturally as she calls out, "No! This cannot be stopped! Not today! Centuries have we waited!" Her hand traces an arcane sigil in the air - you feel the Weave well up around you!

CREATURES

Valathuriel Selevarun*, 4 **star spawn grues** (MToF, p. 234), and Erdanis' spirit, an **allip** (MToF, p. 116), are found in this area, unless Erdanis has been alerted (see the sidebar **Reoccurring Encounter: The Mad Ghost**, above).

Valathuriel sits at the table to the west, scribbling away on a scroll while muttering to herself. The allip roams the room erratically while the grues stay near Valathuriel at all times.

Valathuriel has already cast *mage armor* (PHB, p. 256) on herself. If she has been alerted, she casts *true seeing* (PHB, p. 284) and *armor of Agathys* (PHB, p. 215) on herself.

Valathuriel and the creatures attack the characters on sight. It is possible to reason with Valathuriel during combat. See the *Developments* section below for more details.

ELDER EVIL BLESSING: ATROPUS

Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes offers some brilliant ideas for special blessings bestowed on loyal Elder Evil cultists. Atropus' blessing is presented on page 237. If you want to give Valathuriel an additional power, consider adding this blessing, but be warned that this encounter is already quite deadly!

TACTICS

Valathuriel begins combat by casting *slow* (PHB, p. 277) on as many characters as possible. Remember that this spell does not use one of her 3 5th-level slots and is cast as a 3rd level spell. After disabling the characters, she stays at range and attacks using *eldritch blast* (PHB, p. 237), targeting different characters with each of her three rays. She always attempts to take half cover (+2 AC and Dexterity saving throws) behind debris and furniture or three-quarters cover (+5 AC and Dexterity saving throws) behind the bookshelves.

If a single melee combatant closes on her, Valathuriel casts *dissonant whispers* (PHB, p. 234), forcing them to retreat. If she is surrounded by two or more enemies, she casts *arms of Hadar* (PHB, p. 215) and escapes. If her *slow* spell is dispelled or she loses concentration on it, she casts *Evard's black tentacles* (PHB, p. 238) on as many enemies as possible. Valathuriel prefers to always attack with *eldritch blast* from long range.

Valathuriel will reserve one spell slot for *counterspell* (PHB, p. 228), which she uses to counter any spell that would prevent her from moving or casting her own spells, including an enemy's own *counterspell*.

If she is brought below 30 hit points, Valathuriel casts *levitate* on herself, ending any other concentration spells, and retreats to the first floor through one of the two holes in the floor. She attempts to Hide and ambush the characters.

The grues relentlessly attack the characters. They spread out as much as possible, making good use of their *aura of madness* trait. The grues fight to the death and will pursue the characters if they flee.

The allip makes use of its *incorporeal movement* trait to dart in and out of combat, using the floor and walls as needed. It uses its Howling Babble action whenever it is available, otherwise it attacks using Whispers of Madness. When encountered here, the allip fights until it is brought below 15 hit points, then Disengages and retreats through the roof to Area 19.

While on the rooftop, the allip uses Whispers of Madness, replacing the forced melee weapon attack with a Shove attack, hoping to cause the characters to push one another off the rooftop. If a character falls off the roof, they fall 60 feet to the ground below, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall.

The allip fights to the death in this location and will pursue characters if they flee, but it cannot leave the observatory's walls.

TREASURE

Valathuriel carries a coin purse filled with **200 gp**. This was meant to be the second half of Hammer and Anvil's payment. She also carries a work-in-progress manuscript detailing Erdanis' life and contributions to astronomical research. These notes can be used as proof the characters encountered Valathuriel. Tucked into her robe is a *sending stone* (DMG, p. 199). The linked stone is held by her mentor in Candlekeep.

If the characters succeed on a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, search the room using *detect magic*, or spend 20 minutes searching through the debris in this room, they find a *driftglobe* (DMG, p. 166).

DEVELOPMENTS

Throughout the combat Valathuriel should be portrayed as a conflicted enemy. This does not have any mechanical effects, but it should be clear she is struggling against an unseen force. If the characters succeed on a **DC 22 Charisma (Persuasion) check** she relents from attacking for 3 rounds, after which Atropus is able to exert his control once again. If she is attacked during these 3 rounds, she resumes fighting the characters. Subsequent checks to reason with Valathuriel are made with **disadvantage**. If the allip is slain, the DC is reduced to 16.

If the characters save Valathuriel, either by knocking her unconscious or restraining her, and remove her from the observatory, she will return to normal after 24 hours.

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

Make the following adjustments if the characters are lower or higher level:

- If the party is level 5, remove 2 grues and reduce Valathuriel's hit points to 60.
- If the party is level 7, add 3 grues.

ROLEPLAYING VALATHURIEL

If the characters do not kill Valathuriel, she might become a powerful ally or contact for the party. Use these details to help bring her to life.

Traits. I have read every known work on astronomy. I assume everyone I meet knows as much as I do.

Ideal. Aspiration. I will write a work that is remembered for ages.

Bond. My colleagues are my family. I will never abandon or harm them.

Flaw. Once I pick a goal, I become obsessed with it to the detriment of everything else in my life.

Statistics. Once cured, Valathuriel loses her *innate spellcasting*, *spellcasting*, and *whispering aura* traits and her attacks no longer deal additional psychic damage. She also loses all damage resistances, condition immunities, telepathy, and the ability to speak Deep Speech. Her alignment changes to lawful neutral and her Wisdom score becomes 10 (+0).

AREA 17: KITCHEN

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

The wet scent of mildew and mold permeates this room. Along the eastern wall are crates full of rotten food - the remains of a kitchen quickly abandoned.

This area was used by Erdanis' assistants to prepare meals for the researchers. The door is stuck and requires a **DC 12 Strength check** to open.

AREA 18: RUINED WASHROOM

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

Thick black mold covers the floor here, growing from stagnant pools of standing water. Broken porcelain glints under the fetid waters.

This area was a privy for Erdanis and his assistants. The door is stuck and requires a **DC 12 Strength check** to open.

AREA 19: ROOFTOP OBSERVATORY

As the characters enter, read or paraphrase this.

The roof of the observatory has fallen into decay, exposing much of the rooftop. A large telescope, its massive lenses still intact, peers out into the southern sky. The rails and gears once used to move the telescope along the edge of the rooftop have been lost to decay.

Peering into the Abyss. The telescope is well preserved and still fully functional. Moving it would require a team of laborers and draft animals or powerful magic.

If a character uses the telescope to look at the Phoenix comet specifically, they must succeed a **DC 20 Wisdom saving throw** or be frightened until they finish a long rest, as the character is wracked with terrible visions of Atropus.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Depending on the needs of your campaign, you can take the conclusion of *The Call of Atropus* in several directions. Here are some ideas to get you started:

SPARING VALATHURIEL

If Valathuriel survived the encounter, she will recover from her madness overtime. However, she will forever be changed by this event. Perhaps she takes up the call to adventure, leaving behind the safety of Candlekeep for a life dedicated to ridding the Realms of evil.

Valathuriel can make a handy contact for the characters, providing expertise in lore as well as access to private libraries, such as Candlekeep.

AGAINST ATROPUS

Defeating an entity like Atropus would be impossible for characters this level (or perhaps of any level!), but after experiencing the horrors they faced in the observatory, they may be moved to learn more about the Elder Evil. This location is not the only place touched by Atropus' pervasive evil. You could create a number of interesting encounters and adventures dealing with Atropus' minions, which include both eldritch horrors and the undead.

After the Phoenix leaves Toril's skies (how long this takes is up to you), Atropus' influence will also fade. But who knows what has awoken, lurking in dark corners of the Realms.

FOLLOWING THE STEPS OF A GENIUS

The research recovered from the observatory can launch all sorts of adventures. If you are looking to introduce Realmspace and *Spelljammer* style adventures into your campaign, you might consider allowing the characters to discover how to build a spelljammer ship from Erdanis' research. Gathering the components, funds, and expert knowledge needed for this could be a whole campaign itself!

If the characters have less grandiose aims, they might reclaim the observatory, handing it over to prominent scholars from Candlekeep. No doubt this would ingratiate the characters to the scholarly world, increasing their fame and reputation.

THE RISE OF ATROPUS

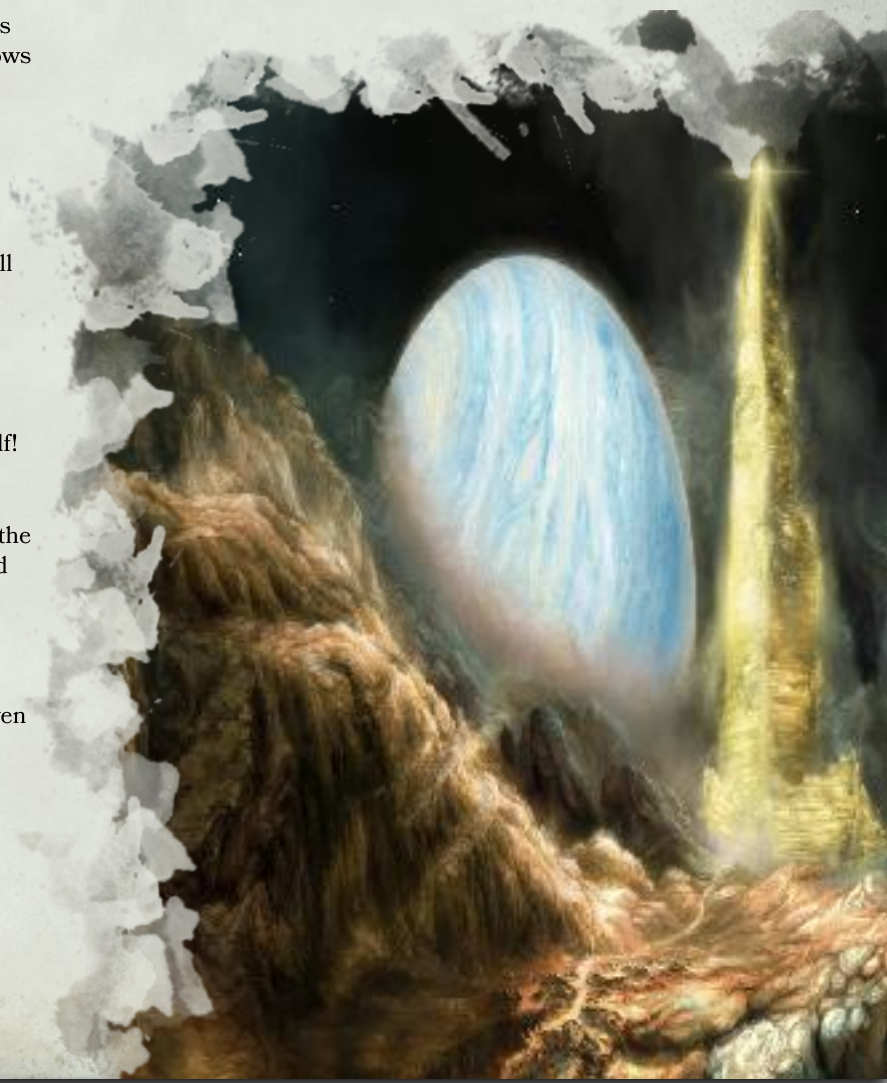
Failure is, of course, always an option and often leads to even more exciting adventures. If the characters are unable to defeat Erdanis' spirit, end Valathuriel's service to Atropus, and cleanse the infested observatory, Atropus will grow stronger.

Valathuriel will succumb complete the ritual needed to contact Atropus in another tending. The Elder Evil will fully invade her mind, body, and spirit transforming her into a grotesque **star spawn seer** (MToF, p. 236). What plans she and her new master have are up to you, but a star spawn seer backed other star spawn and mad cultists would make for a perfect Tier 2 antagonist!

ANSWERING THE CALL

Not every adventuring party is made up solely of righteous knights and good-natured rogues. Your characters may want to finish the ritual to contact Atropus. This could involve a quest for a rare component held by an opposing faction or lost in a dangerous tomb.

Once the characters have contacted the Elder Evil, they could make a warlock's pact with it, gaining a fraction of its power in exchange for a lifetime of servitude.



APPENDIX A: CREATURES AND NPCs



This appendix contains a list of all creatures and NPCs used in the adventure as well as stat blocks for custom NPCs.

CREATURE LIST

All of the creatures used in adventure, with source and page reference:

- Allip (MToF, p. 116)
- Star spawn grue (MToF, p. 234)
- Star spawn mangler (MToF, p. 236)
- Star spawn seer (MToF, p. 236)

NPC STAT BLOCKS

VALATHURIEL SELEVARUN

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic evil (currently)

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 77 (14d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +1, Cha +7

Skills Arcana +9, History +6, Investigation +6, Nature +6

Damage Resistances psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages telepathy 30 ft., Common, Deep Speech, Draconic, Elvish, Giant

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The warlock's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic*, *jump*, *levitate* (self only), *mage armor*

1/day each: *arcane gate*, *slow*, *true seeing*

Spellcasting. The warlock is a 14th level spellcaster (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It regains its expended spell slots on a short or long rest. It knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips: *chill touch*, *eldritch blast*, *guidance*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *shocking grasp*

1st - 5th level (3 5th-level spell slots): *armor of Agathys*, *arms of Hadar*, *crown of madness*, *clairvoyance*, *counterspell*, *dimension door*, *dissonant whispers*, *dream*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *telekinesis*, *vampiric touch*

Whispering Aura. At the start of each of the warlock's turns, each creature of its choice within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 10 (3d6) psychic damage, provided that the warlock isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 4 (1d6) psychic damage.



APPENDIX B: MAGIC ITEMS



This appendix contains a list of all magic items found in the adventure, as well as their Dungeon Master's Guide page reference.

MAGIC ITEM LIST

All of the magic items used in this adventure, as well as source and page reference:

- Armor of cold resistance (DMG, p. 152)
- Bead of force (DMG, p. 154)
- Driftglobe (DMG, p. 166)
- Gem of seeing (DMG, p. 172)
- Potion of healing (DMG, p. 187)
- Sending stones (DMG, p. 199)
- Spell scroll (DMG, p. 200)
- Weapon +1 (DMG, p. 213)

APPENDIX C: MAPS

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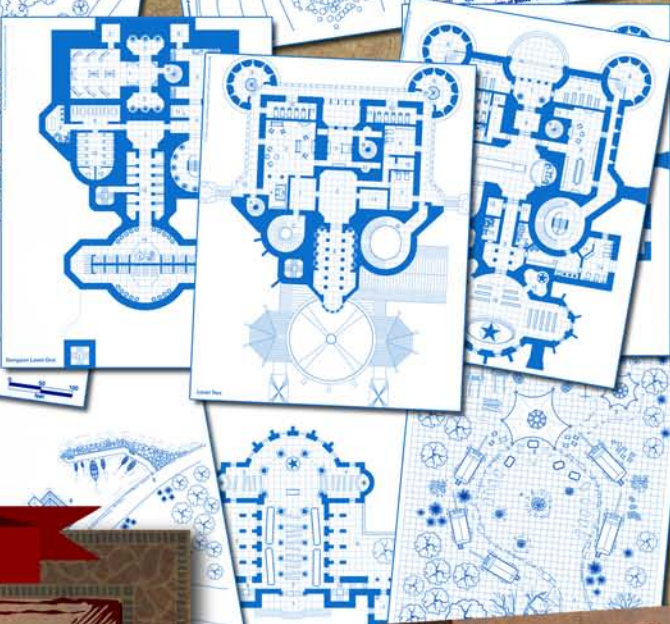
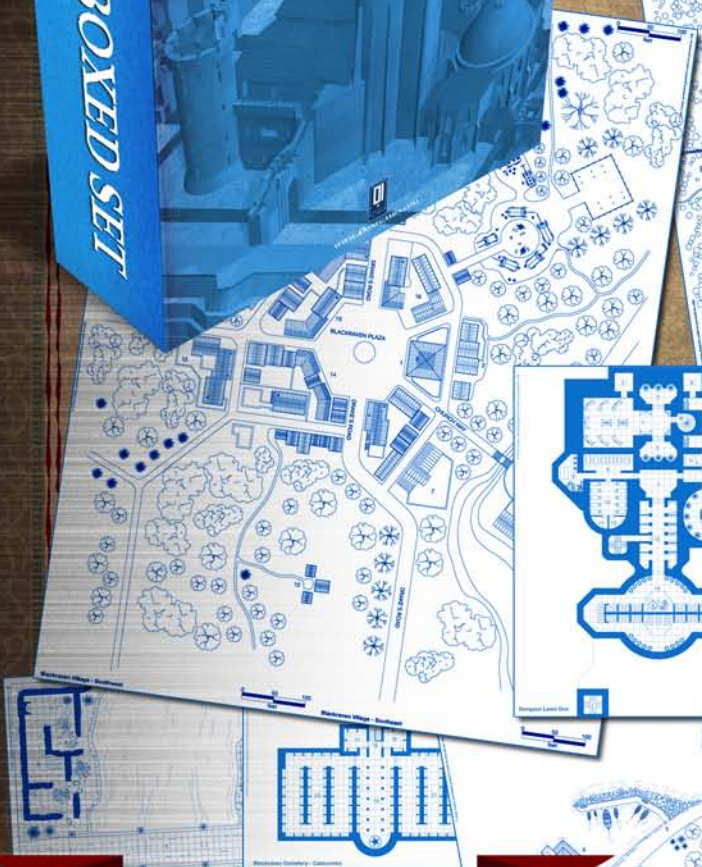
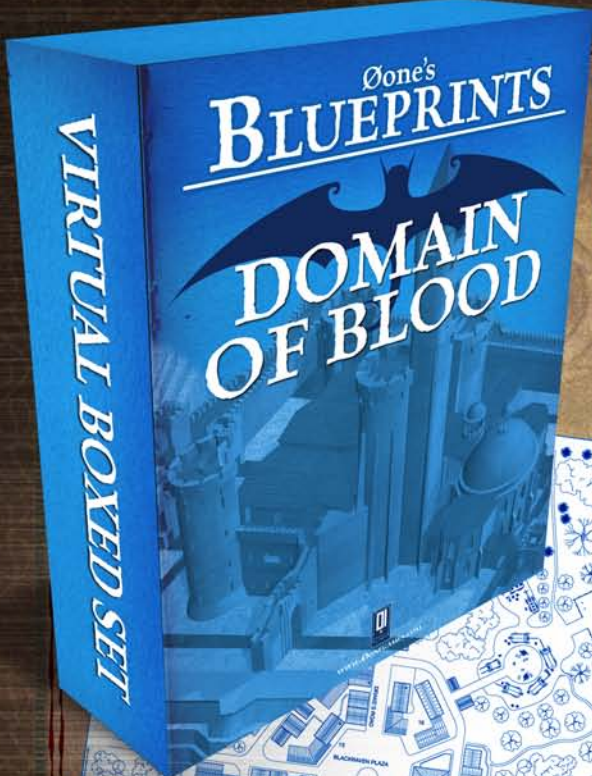








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BOX CONTENT

- THE DOMAIN
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