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PLACES OF POWER: FORGOTTEN ATHENAEUM





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Centuries ago, the librarians of the Athenaeum of Tirinos saved thousands of precious tomes and scrolls from the book-burning legions of an invading army. Casting a powerful ritual, they whisked the entire library and its grounds away to safety on another plane of existence. Today, the Forgotten Athenaeum remains on the Astral Plane, collecting and preserving blasphemous texts, uncomfortable truths and dangerous lore. Using a hidden network of portals, visitors travel to the library from across the multiverse to browse its shelves and uncover its many secrets. This great wealth of knowledge attracts both innocent scholars and academics as well as unscrupulous spies and rogues.

The next time your PCs need to track down an obscure piece of information, why not send them to the Forgotten Athenaeum?

Designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

CREDITS

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Rick Hershey and William McAusland. Some artwork copyright William McAusland, used with permission. Rick Hershey Standard Stock Art: Issue (1) by Small Niche Games

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Ruler Erasmus Spyridon
Population 19 (15 humans, 1 dwarf, 2 half-elves, 1 halfling)
Alignments CG, NG, N
Languages Common & many others
Resources & Industry Books, knowledge

Several hundred years ago, the peaceful and enlightened kingdom of Tirinos came under threat from the expansionist Venovian Imperium and its fearsome ruler, the Emperor Kazakul. Fiercely intolerant of beliefs and faiths different to his own, Kazakul decreed that any nation coming under imperial control must convert to the worship of Surtyr, God of Fire and War. All other religions were proscribed.

As the heavily armoured legions of the Imperium marched into Tirinos, they tore down the statues of the Twelve, the deities of the Tirene pantheon, and set fire to their temples and monasteries. Libraries and other places of learning were raided, and any books they found, whether religious texts or not, were seized by the soldiers, piled up in the streets, and burned.

Erasmus Spyridon was the Bibliognost at the Athenaeum, the largest library in Akratas, the Tirene capital. Horrified at accounts from the cities the Venovians had already taken, he searched through the Athenaeum's books for a means to save the library. As Kazakul's legions marched into the city, Erasmus discovered a powerful ritual in an obscure tome hidden in the stacks. Enlisting his fellow librarians' help, he cast the ritual and shifted the entire Athenaeum, its inhabitants and its ornamental gardens to the safety of the Astral Plane.

Today, the Forgotten Athenaeum of Tirinos still exists on the Astral Plane, and is dedicated to collecting and preserving blasphemous texts, uncomfortable truths and dangerous knowledge from across the multiverse. Erasmus remains as Bibliognost—although he has been there for over 300 years, nothing ages while on the plane. The Athenaeum's location is known only to a select few librarians and sages who can access it through a network of portals connecting to other libraries, universities and places of learning.

Because the Athenaeum holds a vast amount of lost or forgotten information that many powerful, wealthy and often dangerous individuals covet (or would prefer never saw the light of day), the library can sometimes play host to visitors with nefarious motives as well as innocent scholars and academics.

LORE

A PC may know something about the Forgotten Athenaeum, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 20 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A

successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 20: The Forgotten Athenaeum is a secret repository of lost and forbidden knowledge hidden on the Astral Plane.

DC 25: Centuries ago, the learned librarian Erasmus Spyridon used a powerful spell to move the library to the Astral Plane to save its collection from book-burning invaders.

DC 30: Portals to the Athenaeum exist in several libraries throughout the multiverse and can be accessed by using a copy of Erasmus Spyridon's tedious memoir *Meditations of a Bibliognost* as a portal key.

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the inhabitants of the Athenaeum are unremarkable individuals.

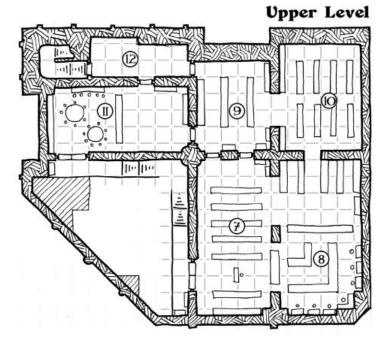
Appearance: The librarians come from several different cultures and worlds, and have a variety of skin and hair colours. Both sexes keep their hair cropped short, and the men are typically clean-shaven.

Dress: The librarians wear long tunics of dark blue wool and silver pendants depicting the Tree of Knowledge—a tree growing out of a book, the symbol of the goddess Minras.

Some of the more notable residents and visitors are:

- Erasmus Spyridon (location 6; CG old male human archmage)
 Erasmus is the learned Bibliognost of the Athenaeum and has dedicated his long life to preserving the knowledge held here.
- Althiel Veroth (location 11; CN male human veteran) Althiel and his companion Hallia Bloodthorn (N female human spy) are a pair of unscrupulous book thieves.
- Euneas Heliax (location 9; CG male human druid) Euneas is the Senior Librarian for the Hall of Nature.
- Jocasta Melina (location 8, CG female half-elf mage) A Tirene who has lived in the Athenaeum for centuries, Jocasta is Senior Librarian for the Hall of the Multiverse.
- Lileth Silvertongue (location 11; NE female human bandit captain) Posing as a bard in search of material for her songs, Lileth is here on secret orders from her king.
- Reneida Lagaris (location 10, N female human mage) Reneida is the Senior Librarian for the Hall of Arcana and joined the staff just three years ago.
- Senuthius (location 3; NG old male human mage) Senuthius is the doddery Tirene Senior Librarian who runs the Hall of History.
- Tadras Beldok (location 7; N male dwarf commoner) Tadras is the cynical, irascible Senior Librarian in charge of the Hall of the Gods.





Part of the Forgotten Athenaeum comprises locations of little interest to adventurers. Several locations, however, are notable:

- Entrance Hall: The original entrance to the Athenaeum is rarely used, and the two pairs of double doors are firmly barred from the inside.
- Atrium: Statues of gods and goddesses of knowledge from a variety of cultures and worlds decorate this impressive atrium. Marble stairs lead to the upper level.
- Hall of History: Rows of shelves rising to the ceiling contain the Athenaeum's collection of books and scrolls covering the history and cultures of hundreds of different cities, kingdoms and empires, both well-known and long-forgotten.
- Dormitory: The Athenaeum's librarians sleep in simple bunk beds in this large dormitory. Stairs lead down to a basement filled with crates of books that await cataloguing.
- Restricted Section: This locked area contains the Athenaeum's most dangerous volumes, including necromantic tomes, books that send the reader insane and wicked demonologies.
- Bibliognost's Office: Erasmus Spyridon, the Athenaeum's chief librarian, uses this chaotic, book-filled chamber as his office, private reading room and sleeping quarters. He says he knows where everything is.
- Hall of the Gods: This room is dedicated to blasphemous and heretical religious texts, as well as the holy scriptures of many obscure and largely forgotten gods.
- 8. Hall of the Multiverse: This section of the library holds hundreds of volumes describing the many different worlds and planes of the multiverse. Librarians and visitors use the reading desks here to study or make copies of the texts.
- 9. **Hall of Nature:** Filled with bestiaries, books of trees, plants and herbs and maps and charts of strange lands, this room focuses on the natural world.
- 10. Hall of Arcana: The rows of shelves in this chamber contain both treatises on magic and a small number of spellbooks and scrolls. The most dangerous arcane tomes are kept in the Restricted Section.
- 11. **Common Room:** Both librarians and visitors to the Athenaeum like to come to this room to unwind and socialise after a hard day's study in the library.
- Guest Quarters: Visitors to the library sleep in this simply furnished communal dormitory.

Because of its location on the Astral Plane, time does not really pass at the Athenaeum. Nothing ages or decays here: the librarians do not get older, and the oranges and olives growing in the gardens do not ripen and fall from the trees. But this doesn't mean time can be cheated. Since Erasmus, Jocasta and Senuthius have been at the Athenaeum for several centuries, if they were to ever leave, time would catch up with them as soon as they returned to the Material Plane and their bodies would crumble to dust.

Erasmus and his senior colleagues know they must remain at the library until they reach the point when they are tired of living. Since they still have a vast number of books left to read in the Athenaeum, and more volumes arrive all the time, this is unlikely. It has happened several times in the past, though—the original Senior Librarians of Arcana, Nature and the Gods all chose to end their lives by stepping through a portal after spending more than a century in the library. These days, Erasmus insists senior librarians serve a maximum term of ten years, and the rank and file librarians leave the Athenaeum after they have been here for five years.

The way time works also means no one needs to eat while they are at the library, but this doesn't stop the librarians from enjoying the taste of fine food and good wine. It is traditional for visitors to bring tasty treats as gifts for the staff when they come to the Athenaeum to study.

IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

The PCs can seek out the Forgotten Athenaeum whenever they need to research a piece of obscure lore, especially dangerous information that has been suppressed by those in power. Perhaps they need to track down the last remaining copy of a book revealing the true heir to the throne so the evil king can be deposed. Or maybe they must steal this book and destroy it to keep their monarch in power. They may be sent here to discover which of the Seven Paths to Enlightenment is the true path, and which are heretical. Alternatively, they must research the true name of the powerful demon they need to summon to save their comrade's soul.

You can decide how easy or how hard it is for your PCs to get here. They might need to travel to a distant city to find a sage who knows where a portal to the Athenaeum can be found, or perhaps tracking down a copy of Erasmus' *Meditations of a Bibliognost* becomes a quest in itself.

You can also choose to locate the Athenaeum in a remote place in your campaign world rather than on the Astral Plane. If you decide to take this approach, you can designate some of the unnumbered rooms on the map as kitchens and other essential amenities.

VISITING THE ATHENAEUM

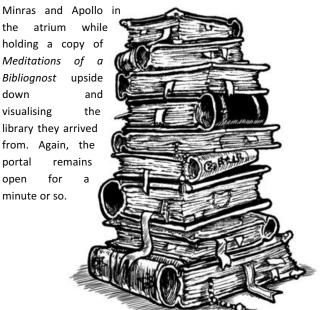
Portals to the Forgotten Athenaeum are hidden deep in the stacks or behind little-used doors in many of the world's great—and some of its less well-known—libraries and universities. To open a portal, a character must step through it while holding a copy of Erasmus Spyridon's *Meditations of a Bibliognost* in front of him with both hands. Once the shimmering portal appears, it remains open for a minute or so, allowing a few would-be researchers to pass through.

New visitors arrive in the atrium (location 2) and their appearance is greeted by the sound of a tolling bell, the result of a permanent *alarm* spell cast in the area. The duty librarian, and usually one or two others, will appear soon afterwards to greet the guests and relieve them of any comestibles, alcohol and other luxury items they have brought as gifts for the staff. Visitors are also expected to bring at least one book with them as a donation to the Athenaeum's collection.

Visitors are given a brief tour of the Athenaeum's halls, gardens, common room and guest quarters, and are warned against trespassing into other areas, particularly the Restricted Section. They are then free are spend up to a week studying the books in the library. After this time, they must leave and cannot return until at least a month has elapsed. Many of the current librarians were previously frequent visitors to the Athenaeum who joined the staff to gain unlimited access to its collections.

Intelligence checks involving research made at the library gain advantage after a full day's research. Such checks gain to +2 if they involve research into heretical, banned or dangerous lore.

To return home, a visitor must step between the statues of



EVENTS

While the PCs are here, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT

- An ignorant visitor eats one of the oranges growing in the gardens. He is summoned before a furious Erasmus and banned from the Athenaeum for life.
- A dangerous book breaks its chains and escapes from the Restricted Collection. The librarians enlist the help of the PCs and other visitors in tracking it down.
- A brown-robed priest arrives in the atrium, bleeding heavily from a mortal wound, and clutching a satchel holding a single large book.
- The *magic mouth* on the door to the restricted 4 section cries out—Hallia Bloodthorn has just attempted to break in.
- A pair of crazy-eyed religious fanatics appear through 5 a portal with the intention of burning any heretical works they find.
- One of the librarians is found unconscious in the stacks. She has been struck on the back of the head with a heavy tome.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in the Forgotten Athenaeum, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6 RUMOUR

- There is something funny about that Lileth Silvertongue. Surely a bard should know how to tune a lute?
- The Ebon Grimoire of Damnation is one of the most evil
 and dangerous books in the restricted section. It holds
 the true names of seven demon princes.
- Erasmus' heart was broken when his wife, Hesper, the first Senior Librarian of Arcana, decided to end her life by stepping through a portal to the Material Plane.
- The *Pelagic Apocrypha*, a slim folio found in the Hall of Nature, reveals the location of the Lost Islands of the Blessed.
- The basement of the Athenaeum contains crates filled with hundreds of books that are still to be catalogued.
- The oranges growing in the gardens have magical properties.

^{*}False rumour



1: ENTRANCE HALL

This chamber was the original entrance hall to the Athenaeum in the city of Akratas; its white marble floor is inlaid with the tree symbol of Minras in gold and emerald green stone. Since the library moved to the Astral Plane centuries ago, its two pairs of sturdy wooden double doors have been kept firmly barred from the inside in the unlikely event the library comes under attack. Those librarians and guests who wish to wander the ornamental gardens must use the side doors to the outside from the Hall of History (location 3) or the Dormitory (location 4).

The last attack on the Athenaeum happened around 30 years ago, when a band of astral pirates landed outside and attempted to break in. They were beaten back by the magical might of Erasmus and the then Senior Librarian of Arcana, a powerful wizard named Venroth Cloudweaver.

2: ATRIUM

The Athenaeum's impressive atrium is the arrival point for visitors who come to the library through a portal. The domed ceiling here is two storeys high, reaching up 50 feet to where glass skylights in the roof fill the room with the glistening silver light of the Astral Plane. The floor is of polished grey marble streaked with porphyry; a wide stone staircase leads to the upper level.

But it's the statues that decorate the atrium that first draw the eye of new arrivals. Over a dozen marble, bronze and wooden sculptures representing gods and goddesses of knowledge from several different cultures and worlds stand here, including Minras, the Forgotten Athenaeum's patron goddess, handsome Apollo and his lyre, armoured Athena and her owl, bearded Oghma, one-eyed Odin, ibis-headed Thoth and the relevant god(s) from the GM's own campaign world.

When a portal opens from another library, the visitors materialize between the statues of Minras and Apollo in the centre of the chamber. This triggers an audible *alarm* spell—a ringing bell—which brings the duty librarian to welcome the guests. Charis (NG male human **commoner**) often fulfils this role. Good-natured and rather portly, he likes to be the first to sample any edible gifts brought by the visitors, and is particularly fond of cheese—the smellier, the better.

3: HALL OF HISTORY

Rows of bookshelves rising from floor to ceiling fill this huge chamber. These hold the Athenaeum's vast collection of books and scrolls on the history, culture and rulers of hundreds of cities, kingdoms and empires, both well-known and long-forgotten. It is said history is written by the victors, but among these volumes are the true (or at least alternative) accounts of

defeated nations, lost dynasties and sacked cities, ranging from a papyrus describing the corruption of the Boy Pharoah Nermerkhet by the Whisperer in Darkness, to a large boulder inscribed with strange petroglyphs by the ancient inhabitants of the Forest of the Gray Spires.

At first glance, the books appear to be in no logical order whatsoever, but Senuthius (NG old male human mage), the doddery Senior Librarian who looks after the Hall of History, has his own eccentric shelving system, based on when a book was added to the library. Senuthius has been at the Athenaeum as long as Erasmus, and took part in the ritual that saved its many books on the history and culture of Tirinos from the barbarous Venovians—these beloved volumes are at the heart of the collection here. Fortunately, Senuthius has an elephantine memory which allows him to track down a given volume in a matter of moments. He's not as nimble as he used to be, however, and delegates the retrieval of anything from shelves above chest height to younger folk who are willing to climb up one of the very tall and rickety library ladders.

Lileth Silvertongue (NE female human **bandit captain**; see location 11) spends a lot of time in this Hall, researching dusty genealogies of the kingdom of Kjarran.

4: DORMITORY

The Athenaeum's ten librarians and five senior librarians sleep in simple bunk beds in this large dormitory. Three bunks are empty. The Athenaeum is not currently fully staffed, so Erasmus or one of the senior librarians might discuss a potential job opening with a scholarly PC.

Chests by the side of the beds contain spare clothing and other belongings. Bookshelves line the walls, filled with the librarians' personal reading material. Each has one or more labelled shelves for their own collection, demonstrating a wide variety of interests and specialisms: Urmas' shelf is filled with books on unicorns and pegasi, while Rhea collects beautifully illustrated manuals of herbology, with a particular focus on cacti and other desert plant life.

Stairs lead down to a basement filled with crates of books that have recently arrived in the Athenaeum and await cataloguing. Going through these books is a long, tedious task, punctured with moments of excitement at a valuable find (if you're a librarian). A cruel GM might decide that the information the PCs are seeking is held in these uncatalogued volumes and have Erasmus assign them the job of helping catalogue the books as they search through them.

5: RESTRICTED SECTION

The iron-bound door leading to the Athenaeum's Restricted Section is safeguarded with both a decent mundane lock and an arcane lock (DC 30 Dexterity check opens). It is further warded with a magic mouth that booms out "No admittance, by order of the Bibliognost!" when anyone other than a senior librarian touches it. Only Erasmus and his senior colleagues are trusted with keys to the restricted section.

Beyond lies a set of chambers containing the library's darkest and most dangerous volumes. These include books of demonology and necromancy, blasphemous tomes of cosmic secrets capable of driving the reader insane and other written works filled with twisted and evil magic. At the far end of the area is the strangest items in the Athenaeum's collection: a chained and muzzled ghoul whose entire body is covered with eldritch runes that have been burned into its grey skin. This "book" reveals the horrors that dwell in the deepest dark beyond the Screaming Gate in Gloamhold's benighted depths.

Many of the books in the restricted section are chained to their shelves so they can be read at the study tables here, but not removed from these chambers. The chains are fixed to one corner of each tome's cover, and the books are shelved with

OUTSIDE THE ATHENAEUM

The Forgotten Athenaeum stands within five acres of ornamental gardens, transported to the Astral Plane along with the building when Erasmus performed his ritual. Beyond lies the endless silver void of the Astral Plane. An astral traveller approaching the Athenaeum would see a tiny island with a two-storey marble building surrounded by lawns, trees and shrubs, floating in the mists.

The Athenaeum's gardens are planted with a variety of attractive shrubs and flowers, as well as orange and olive trees. Small paths wander throughout the gardens, with stone benches at regular intervals for reading or quiet contemplation, and there are several pretty fountains. Two softly-spoken librarians, Edwulf and Rhea (NG male and female human **commoner**), make sure the garden is well-looked after. They keep the fountains topped up with a decanter of endless water.

Because time does not pass here in the same way as it does on the Material Plane, the trees and plants do not grow, the flowers do not wilt, and the fruit does not ripen. This also means any flowers that are cut or fruits that are picked are not replenished, so anyone caught stealing fruit or otherwise damaging the garden will face an enraged bibliognost. One small section of the garden was badly burned when Erasmus was forced to use a *fireball* to deal with the last of the astral pirates, and will never grow back. He has yet to forgive himself.

their spines facing away from the viewer, so that only the page edges are visible. This makes it hard for those who are unfamiliar with the restricted section to find the books they are looking for without assistance. To make things even trickier, some of the chained volumes are aggressive. Treat these books as **small animated objects**.

6: BIBLIOGNOST'S OFFICE

Two arcane locked doors (DC 30 Dexterity check opens) lead into this book-filled chamber which serves as the office, private reading room and sleeping quarters of Erasmus Spyridon (CG old male human archmage), the Athenaeum's chief librarian. The office appears chaotic at first glance. Piles of books and scrolls and stacks of papers cover every available surface, including the bed and the chairs, but Erasmus is adamant he knows where everything is. A painting on the wall depicts a sad and beautiful grey-haired woman—this is Hesper, Erasmus' dead wife.

Although Erasmus is white-haired, balding and stooped, he doesn't look as ancient as he truly is—the Bibliognost is over 400 years old. Centuries after saving the Athenaeum, he is still as dedicated as ever to the preservation of knowledge, however uncomfortable it might be to those in power, and a steely glint comes into his eye whenever he hears about books being burned. If the PCs seem trustworthy, Erasmus may ask them to travel through a portal to a library or other place of learning under threat and rescue its important volumes from destruction.

7: HALL OF THE GODS

This chamber is filled with ceiling-height bookcases filled with religious texts. Many of these volumes were deemed to be blasphemous or heretical by rulers or powerful religious leaders and were brought here to the Athenaeum before they could be burned. There are also several bookcases dedicated to the holy scriptures, rituals and practices of many obscure and largely forgotten gods whose worship has been outlawed or superseded.

Tadras Beldok (N male dwarf **commoner**) is the senior librarian who looks after this hall. An expert on hundreds of deities and religions, Tadras is cynical, crabby and does not suffer fools gladly. He is contemptuous of gods in general and organised religion in particular, and is the only librarian who refuses to have Minras' symbol around his neck. Instead he just wears a plain silver chain.



8: HALL OF THE MULTIVERSE

This section holds hundreds of volumes filled with obscure knowledge and dangerous secrets from the many different worlds and planes of the multiverse. These include floor plans of the arch devil Baalzephon's infernal fortress, a map showing the safest route to the summit of Mount Olympus, and brass plates engraved with the correct method of addressing the Grand Sultan of the Efreeti, complete with diagrams of the necessary genuflections. Well-worn, ink-stained wooden reading desks line the walls in the far corner of the chamber—librarians and visitors use these when studying or making copies of the texts.

Jocasta Melina (CG female half-elf mage) is the Senior Librarian for this hall. A kindly, grey-haired Tirene who has lived in the Athenaeum since it moved to the Astral Plane, Jocasta still misses her dear friend Hesper but is happy to stay here for at least another century or two. "What could be better than having as much time as one needs to unravel all the secrets of the cosmos?" she says.

9: HALL OF NATURE

The smallest of the Athenaeum's halls, this chamber is focused on the natural world and is filled with bestiaries, beautifully illustrated books of trees, plants and herbs and maps and charts of strange lands. These volumes are shelved on wooden bookcases decorated with delightful depictions of animals and foliage, carved by past librarians. Mounted on the wall is the hall's most unusual "book"—a huge slice of tree trunk, 15 feet in diameter, on which is painted a world map marked with many long-forgotten and mythical places.

Euneas Heliax (CG male human **druid**) became the Senior Librarian for Nature eight years ago, and brought his horned owl animal companion, Skritch, with him. Skritch likes to perch on top of the tree trunk map and hoot at newcomers. Euneas is an authority on strange beasts as well as a talented artist and spends much of his time writing and illustrating his own definitive "Monster Manual", humming tunelessly to himself as he does so.

10: HALL OF ARCANA

The rows of ceiling-high shelves in this chamber are crammed with books and scrolls rescued from places where oppressive rulers have outlawed or restricted the practice of arcane magic. The Hall of Arcana's collection includes both scholarly treatises on magic and a small number of spellbooks and scrolls. Many of the most dangerous volumes that arrive here have been moved to the restricted section.

Reneida Lagaris (N female human **mage**) is the Senior Librarian for the Hall of Arcana and joined the staff three years ago. She fled to the Athenaeum to hide from the Hooded Coterie, a group of corrupt arcanists she once belonged to until she realised the true extent of their depravity. It is only a matter of time before these evil wizards track Reneida down—they will not rest until they recover the valuable tomes she stole from them when she fled.

11: COMMON ROOM

This room is used by both visitors to the Athenaeum and the librarians themselves to unwind and socialise after a hard day's study in the library, and perhaps enjoy some of the edible goodies brought by new arrivals. Many of the librarians like to play chess and enjoy taking on fresh opponents.

Burly Althiel Veroth (CN male human **veteran**) and his lissom adventuring companion (and ex-lover) Hallia Bloodthorn (N female human **spy**) are a pair of unprincipled thieves, newly-arrived at the Athenaeum. Both are affable enough, happy to swap tales of their adventures with the PCs. They claim to have come to the library to uncover "lost lore" but are cagey about exactly what this is. They keep the fact they have been hired by a shadowy middleman to steal the *Ebon Grimoire of Damnation* from the Restricted Section to themselves.

Lileth Silvertongue (NE female human **bandit captain**) is another visitor. Posing as a bard in search of material for her songs, she is actually a member of the Grey Rooks, a ruthless group of spies in the service of the king of Kjarran. Her mission is to remove and destroy any books in the Hall of History which prove that the king's cousin is the rightful heir to the throne. Lileth is a poor lute-player and has no original songs so her cover story is vulnerable to a curious PC's questioning.

12: GUEST QUARTERS

Visitors to the library—including the PCs—sleep in bunk beds in this simply furnished communal dormitory. A lockable chest stands next to each bed to store valuable items.



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