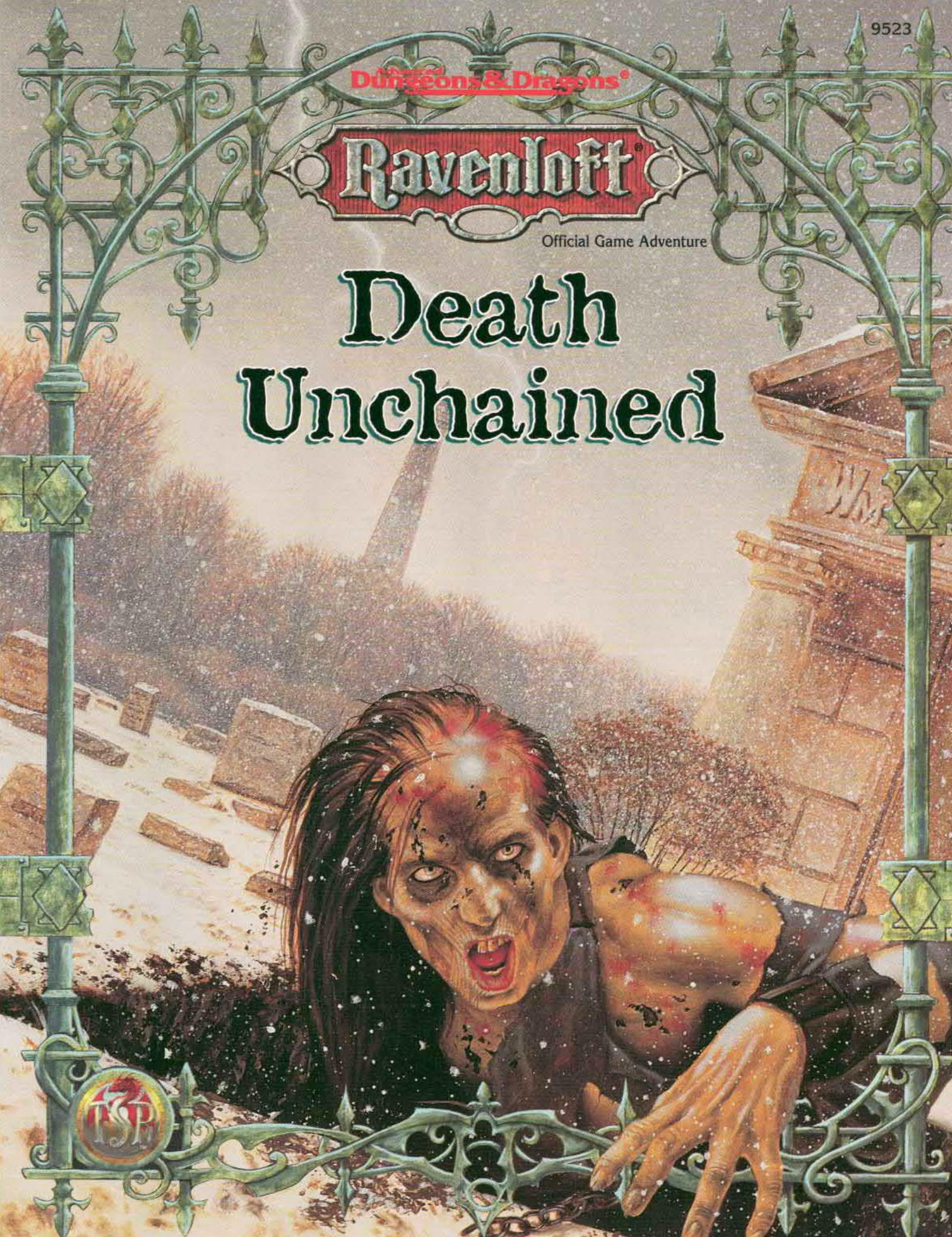


Dungeons & Dragons®

Ravenloft®

Official Game Adventure

Death Unchained



City of Lekar

scale: 1 square = 200 feet

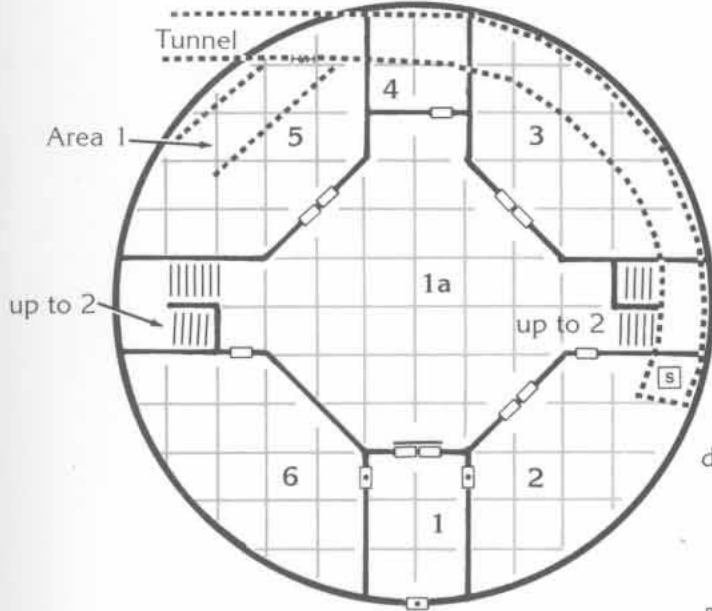


- X Heroes' Starting Place
- Main Road
- Laborers' Quarter
- Wall and Tower
- Impalements
- 3 = Radiant Tower
- 2 = Berglitzi Home
- 1 = Vlad Drakov's Castle
- B = Break in Wall

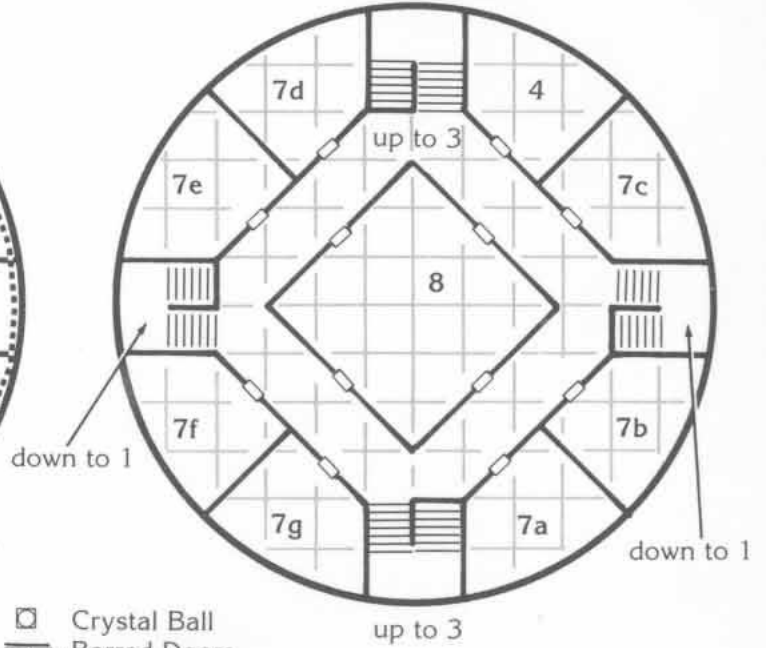
The Radiant Tower

scale: 1 square = 5 feet

Ground Floor

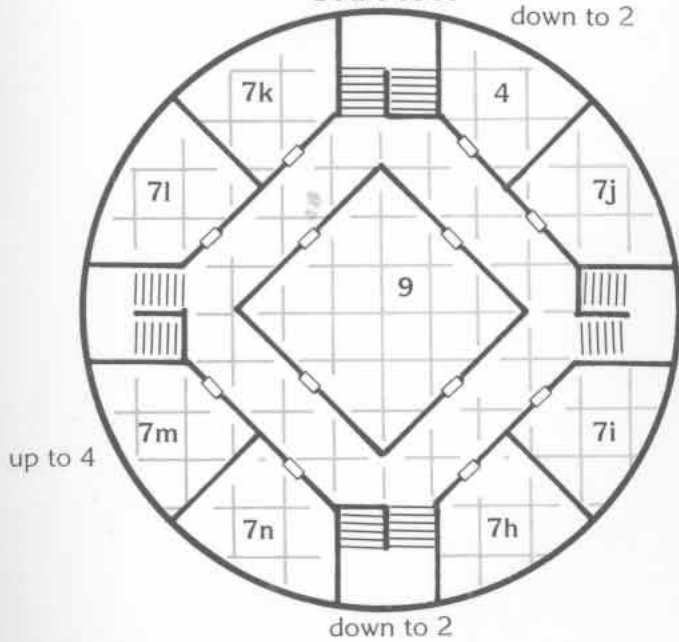


2nd Floor

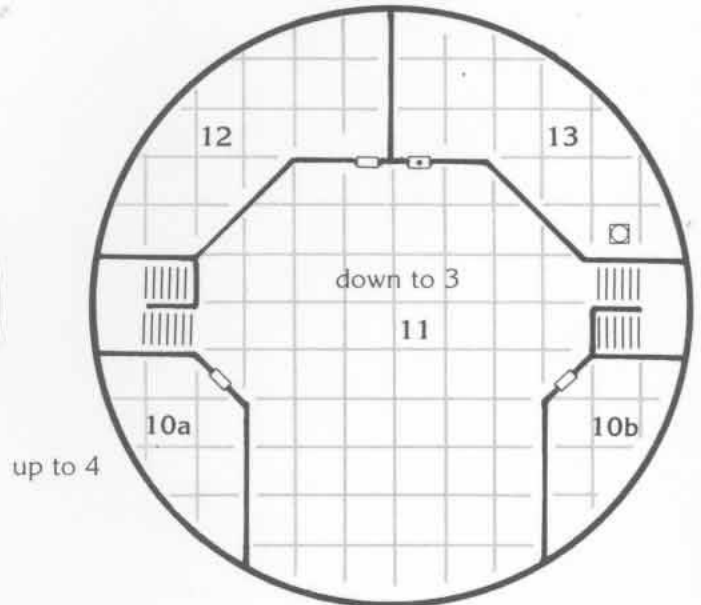


- Crystal Ball
- Barred Doors
- Door
- Double Door
- Locked Door
- Secret Door
- Secret Trap Door
- Stairs
- Tunnel

3rd Floor

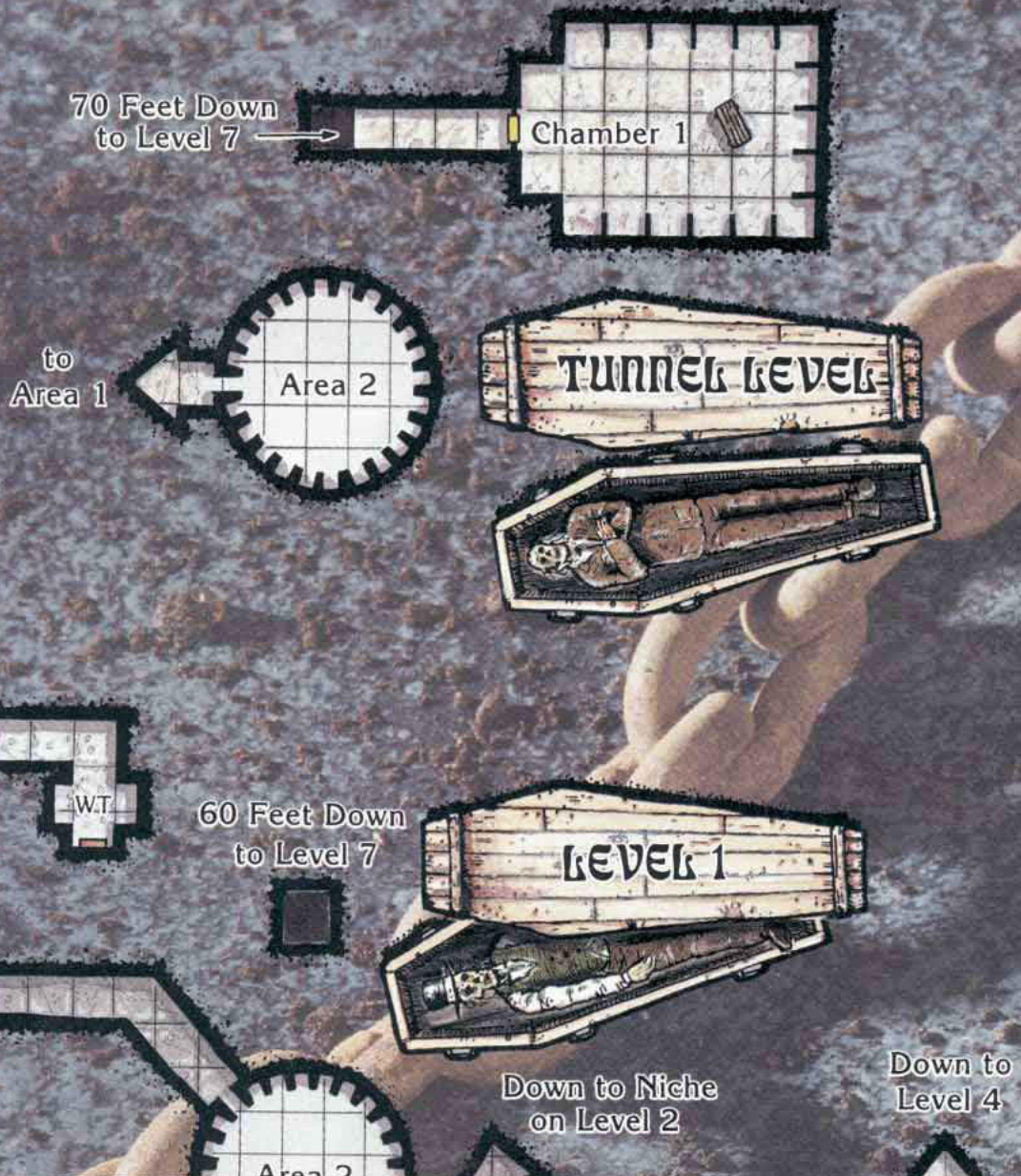


4th Floor



ST	Slide Trap	S	Secret Door		3-Foot Ceiling		Skeleton
LT	Ladder Trap		Held Portal		Ebon Fold Assassin		Chair
DT	Drop Trap		Portcullis		Sarcophagus		Table
E	Exploding Runes		Locked Door		Ladder		Coffin
WT	Water Trap		False Door		Altar		Fountain
	Door		8-Foot Ceiling		Rope Bridge		Statue

scale: 1 square = 10 feet



De Unch



50 Feet Down
to Level 7



Death Trained



40 Feet Down
to Level 7



Slide to
Niche on



Chains

Straw

Chamber 5

Down to
Niche on
Level 5



Slide Down



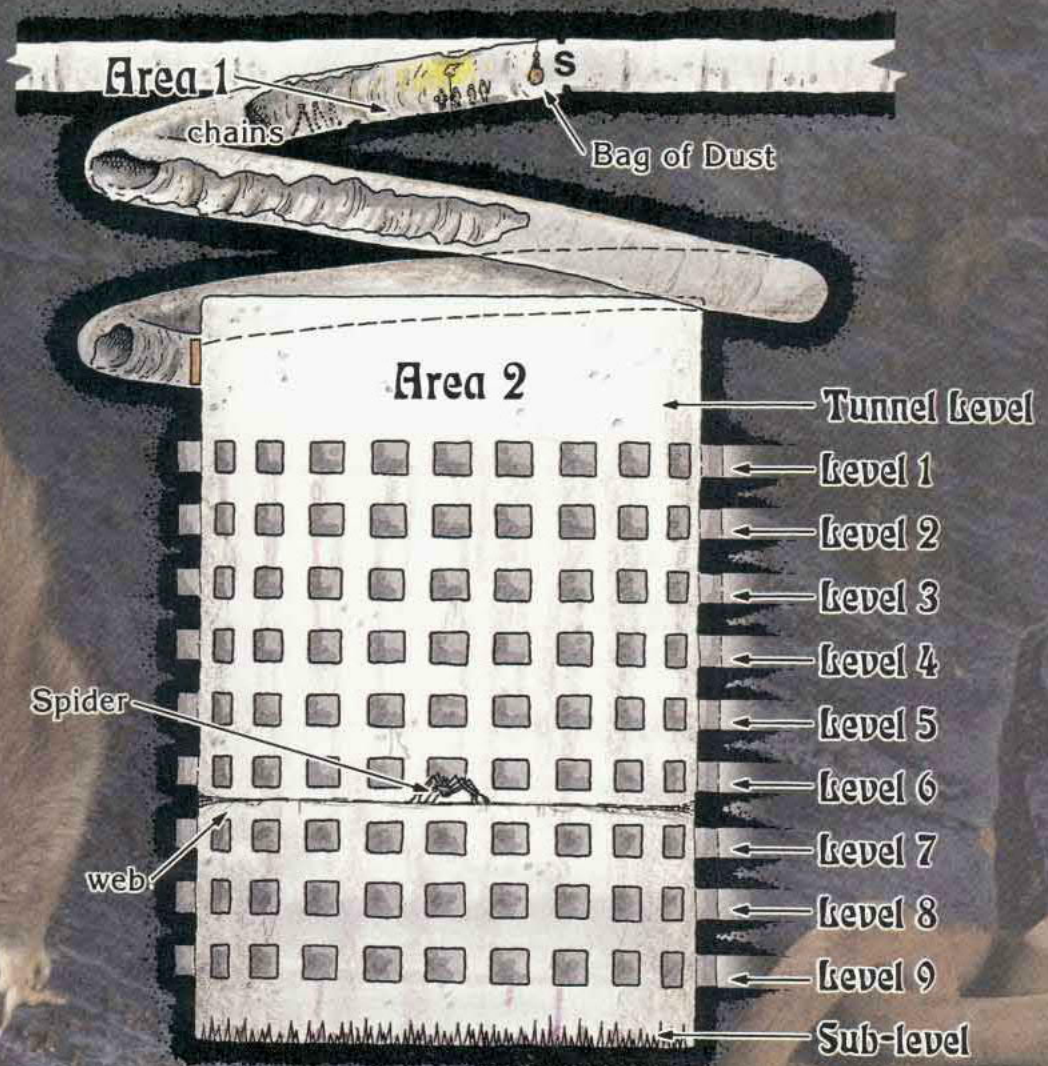
30 Feet Down
to Level 7



Up to
Slide
Trap

THE WELL OF BONES

(side view)



20 Feet Down
to Level 7

Up to
Level 4

Down to
Chamber 7

Down to
Levels
6 and 7

Up to
Slide
Trap

Up to
Level 3



LT

Area 2

up to surface
(collapsed)

Chamber 11
60 Feet Down
to Level 7

WT

E

Chamber 2

DT

Chamber 5



Down to
Chamber
8

Chamber 7

10 Feet
Down to
Level 7

Up to
Niche on
Level 5

Down to
Chamber 9

Down to
Level 9

Up to
Niche on
Level 6

Down to
Level 7
Up to
Level 5

Slide to
Niche on
Level 8

Down to
Level 7



Area 2

WT

Slide
Down to
Chamber
10

Chamber 11

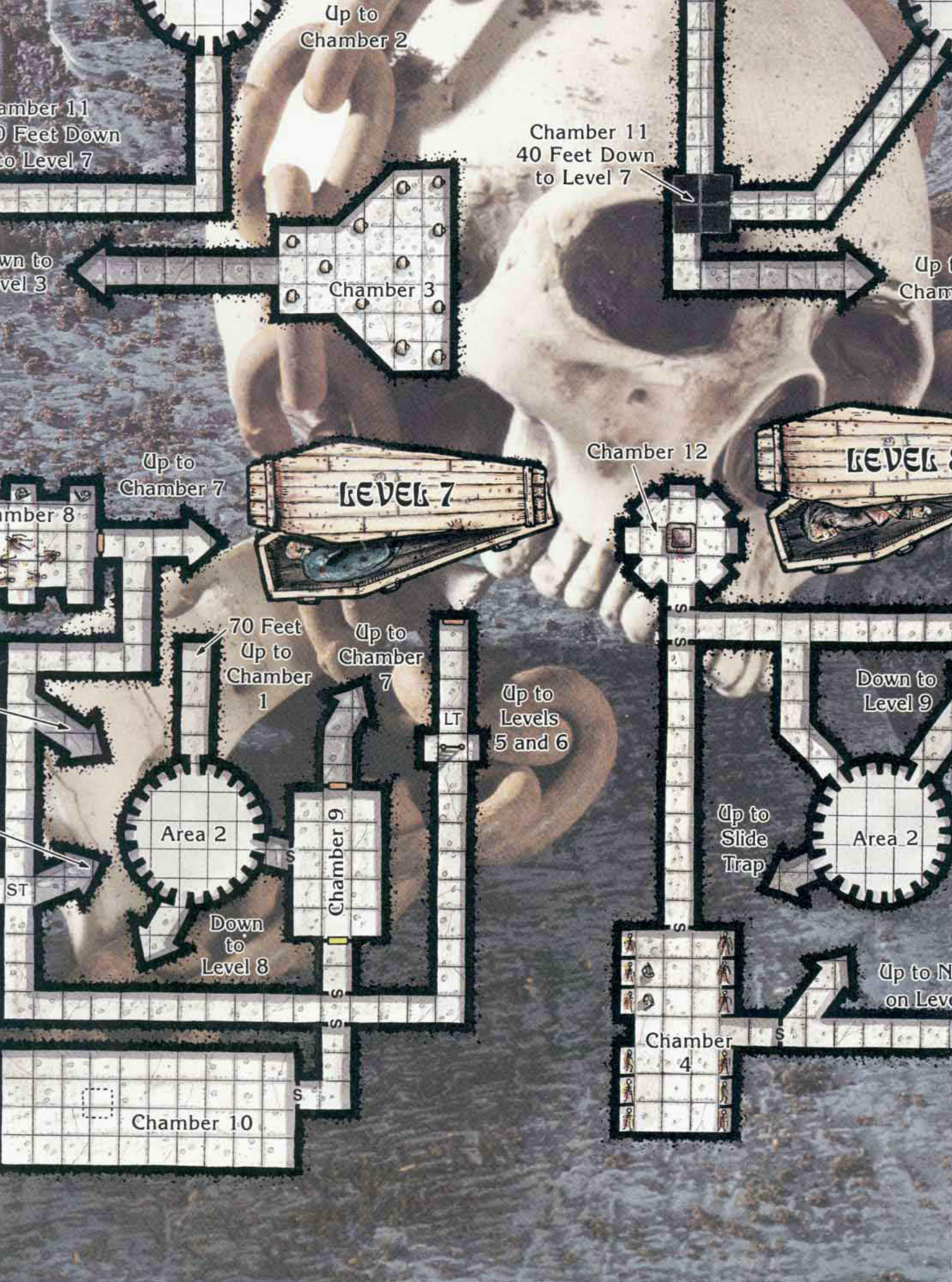
Chamber 11
10 Feet Down
to Level 7

10 Feet Down
to Chamber 10

DT

ST





Up to Chamber 2

Chamber 11
40 Feet Down
to Level 7

Chamber 11
40 Feet Down
to Level 7

Down to
Level 3

Chamber 3

Up to
Cham

Up to
Chamber 7

LEVEL 7

Chamber 12

LEVEL 7

Chamber 8

70 Feet
Up to
Chamber
1

Up to
Chamber
7

Up to
Levels
5 and 6

Down to
Level 9

Area 2

Chamber 9

LT

Up to
Slide
Trap

Area 2

ST

Down
to
Level 8

Up to N
on Level

Chamber 10

Chamber 4

Level 4

Down to Level 4

Up to Level 2

to Niche on Level 5

Down to Level 5

Chamber 11
30 Feet Down to Level 7

30 Feet Down to Chamber 10

o
ber 3

3



Up to Level 7

Chamber 4

WT

DT

LT

Up to Level 8

ST

Area 2

Down to Niche on Level 9

Chamber 13

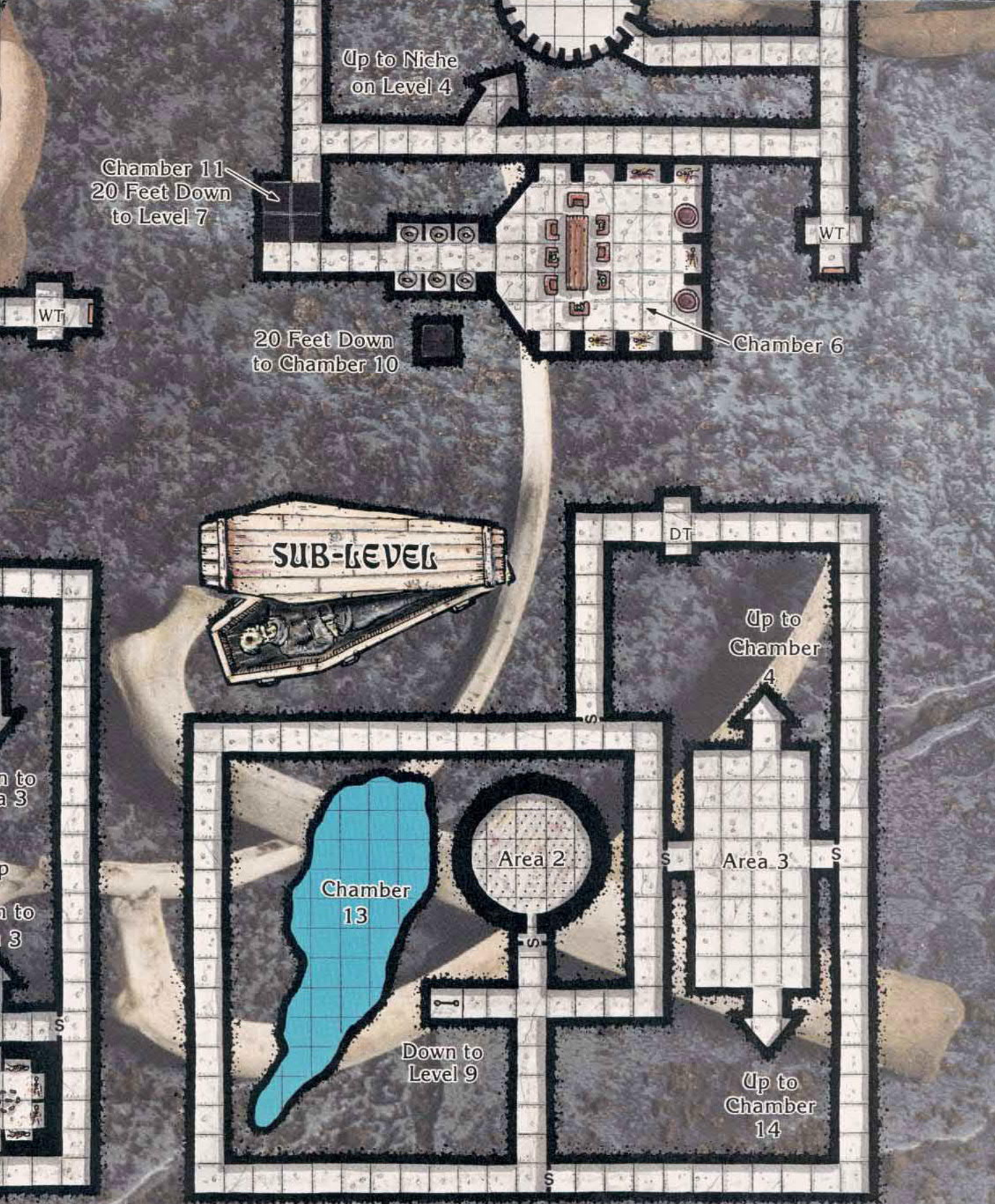
Down to Sub-Level

Chamber 14

iche
el 7

Jermlaine

Do
A
Up to
Slide T
Do
An



Up to Niche
on Level 4

Chamber 11
20 Feet Down
to Level 7

20 Feet Down
to Chamber 10

Chamber 6

SUB-LEVEL

Up to
Chamber
4

Chamber
13

Area 2

Area 3

Down to
Level 9

Up to
Chamber
14

Death Unchained

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Introduction



Can I forget the dismal
night that gave
My soul's best part
forever to the grave?

Thomas Tickell

Death comes in many forms. There is the death of the flesh, which can be reversed by those skilled in the healing or necromantic arts. There is the death of the spirit, which can be reversed with time, love, and compassion. And then there is the death of the soul, which is as irreversible as it is final.

To some, death is an endless torture. They lie not in eternal slumber, but are the selfless minions of those who can manipulate and command rotting flesh. To others—particularly to the persecuted masses of Falkovnia—it is life that is torture. Death is a blissful release from agony, an end to be welcomed, if not actively sought.

Death may come suddenly or may proceed with agonizing slowness. Just as the torturer plays with his victims, so too does the necromancer strip the life force away, piece by tiny piece.

What lies beyond the veil of the grim reaper? Only the foolhardy venture to ask.

For the Dungeon Master

Death *Unchained* is designed for a group of three to six characters of levels 5 to 7. Ideally the player characters (PCs) should have some means of dealing with poison, which appears frequently in this adventure.

The adventure is set in Falkovnia, one of the core domains of the RAVENLOFT® world. It pits PCs against the Ebon Fold, a secret society of assassins who are using magical daggers to steal life

force from their victims and channel it into a crystal skull at the center of their lair. The assassins do not know what purpose this will ultimately serve, only that it has been ordered by the necromancer who is their leader.

Although it is not required for this adventure, the Dungeon Master (DM) may like to read *The Complete Necromancer's Handbook* rules supplement. It can provide valuable tips on running a nonplayer character (NPC) necromancer. It also includes various poisons, magical items, and arcane texts that can be added to the lair of the Ebon Fold.

Adventure Summary

Death Unchained opens with the PC heroes being transported by the Mists to Lekar, the capital city of the domain of Falkovnia. Here, they meet a fellow adventurer whose party is being hunted by the Ebon Fold. She proposes that the heroes join forces with her, instructing them to meet her group at a ruined chapel outside of town. When the heroes arrive at the chapel, the group is already dead and the Ebon Fold are lying in wait. The heroes now become targeted for death and must find out why.

They can find part of the answer at the Radiant Tower, a school for wizards. Here they can learn that the magical daggers used by the Ebon Fold drain life energy.

Eventually, the characters discover that the subterranean lair of the Ebon Fold lies beneath the Radiant Tower. They must enter this lair to find the crystal skull in which the life energies are being stored. Ultimately, they must defeat the leader of the Ebon Fold, a powerful necromancer, and release the stolen energies from the skull.

Introduction

Fear and Horror Checks

At several points during this adventure, the DM is instructed to have the heroes make fear and horror checks. This game mechanic is intended to foster appropriate reactions, on the part of the players, to a horrific or terrifying situation.

At the DM's discretion, fear and horror checks may be omitted if the players are already doing an adequate job of role-playing these emotions.

Running This Adventure

Portions of this adventure are written to allow greater flexibility in running an encounter; they give the DM the opportunity to alter the course of events, tailoring encounters to the actions of the characters. These sections are indicated by the heading **Options**. Other optional sections are titled **Ladislav's Opportunity**. They outline possible attacks that the main villain (the necromancer Ladislav Sintesti) might make.

When running *Death Unchained*, the DM should strive to produce an atmosphere in which the heroes feel hunted, constantly on the verge of being captured. From the moment they arrive in Falkovnia they become subject to the unceasing brutality of the domain's militia, who are used to terrorizing the population and arbitrarily arresting and executing anyone they please.

The heroes are almost certain to run afoul of Falkovnia's militia—especially if they are carrying weapons or wearing armor. The Talons will immediately act to enforce the law prohibiting the wearing of arms and will unrelentingly pursue any who resist arrest or escape their custody.

Demihuman characters will have the worst time of it. They are automatically assumed to be escaped slaves and will be hunted down like dogs. To survive in Falkovnia they will either need to find some way to disguise themselves as humans—or will have to pass themselves off as the slaves of the human characters.

Terrified by the brutal oppression of their lord, the general populace will refuse aid to the heroes, lest they be arrested too. The one saving grace is that the inhabitants of Falkovnia do not wish to draw attention to themselves,

and thus will not go out of their way to inform the militia of the heroes' actions.

In addition to the militia, the Ebon Fold (a secret society) will be constantly on the characters' trail. The DM should keep the heroes in a continual state of flight, allowing them only a moment's breathing time between chases and attacks. This way, the offer of aid from fellow travelers (the NPCs led by Hathril Hasselin) and the eventual offer of lodging in the Radiant Tower will seem like welcome respite.

Falkovnia is also a land of unremitting horror. Everywhere the heroes turn, they are faced with gruesome encounters with death, dismemberment, and disease. It should seem that there is no relief from the mutilated "walking wounded" or the nightly round of impalements. Should any of the characters succumb to disease (as they almost certainly will if they spend any time in the city) no one will help them, lest they too become infected. Even though the disease will be temporary and probably nonfatal, the DM should give the impression that the hero is in dire danger, with no source of succor.

Before beginning play, the DM should photocopy and read the **Player Handouts** that appear on page 64 of this adventure. The DM will be instructed when to hand these out to the players.

The Continuing Adventure

Death Unchained is the first in a trilogy of adventures. The events in it lead up to *Death Ascendant*, another 64-page module, and ultimately to *Requiem*, a boxed set. Despite the fact that it is part of a trilogy, *Death Unchained* can be played as a stand-alone adventure.

Indeed, the DM should present it as such. When they have completed *Death Unchained*, the heroes should feel that they have accomplished their goal by putting an end to the Ebon Fold and destroying the crystal skull. It should come as a complete surprise that this is merely a prologue to an upcoming battle with the darklord of a neighboring domain.

Knocking at Death's Door

D

rink today, and
drown all sorrow;
You shall perhaps
not do it tomorrow;
Best while you have it,
use your breath;
There is no drinking after death.

John Fletcher

Death Unchained begins, appropriately enough, with a funeral. It doesn't matter whether the characters are already within Ravenloft, or whether they are starting the adventure from a world outside the Demiplane of Dread; in either case, they will soon be transported by the Mists to the domain of Falkovnia and the city of Lekar.

Ideally, the funeral should be of someone that the heroes know and like. Perhaps a trusted retainer has died and is being laid to rest. In this case, they may already be part of the procession; the DM should modify the description below accordingly, perhaps shifting the appearance of the Mists to the burial site. The adventure can then unfold as a natural development of events that are already in progress.

Alternatively, perhaps a famous person has died, and the heroes (like everyone else of import) are attending the funeral. If the procession is taking place on a specific world, the DM might also like to modify the description to include the customs and burial practices of that world. Once again, this will help to blend this adventure in with a campaign already in progress.

Read the players the following:

You hear the sound of horns playing a slow, melancholy tune. Overlaying this minor key are the bright voices of laughing children and the tinkle of metal on stone.

In another moment, a procession of folk dressed in dark, somber

clothing rounds the corner. Six of them carry a black coffin on their shoulders. Others play horns or cast copper coins onto the street. Children run behind the procession, plucking up coins.

As the procession passes you, one of the pall bearers stumbles and loses his footing, jostling the fellow beside him. The coffin crashes to the ground and the lid flies open. Rocks tumble out. In another moment, there are shouts of surprise and confusion. The mournful dirge falters to a halt.

"It's gone!" one of the mourners cries. "The body is gone!"

Seconds later, a thick white mist begins to pour out of the open coffin. Tendrils of it spiral toward you, as if seeking you out.

No matter how hard the characters run or what refuge they seek, the Mist surrounds them. Closing the lid of the coffin does not help; the Mist instead begins to rise out of the ground. Even magic cannot halt its progress.

The DM should allow them a moment or two to blunder around in the fog before reading the following to the players:

As the mist begins to dissipate, you see that you are standing in what seems to be a large public square—the outlines of the buildings that enclose it can just be made out. All around you, dozens of posts have been set into the ground. From each hangs a limp shape that is pierced by the post.

Suddenly one of the shapes moves slightly and groans. You realize that each of the forms is a person, impaled on a smooth wooden stake. Amazingly, one of these wretches is still alive!

Knocking at Death's Door

The 36 people impaled on the stakes are ordinary citizens of Falkovnia—men and women alike. Some are freshly killed; others have hung here for weeks. They are pathetic-looking creatures, dressed in simple peasant clothing.

As the Mist finally clears, revealing the agonized expressions on the faces of the dead and the slippery, blood-soaked cobblestones underfoot, have the heroes make a fear check.

If they investigate the groans, read the following to the players:

The weak groans come from a woman—an ordinary peasant, by the look of her. She turns her head slowly to the side and groans again with the pain of even this slight movement. Her body slides an inch lower on the stake, driving it through her stomach and producing a fresh gout of blood.

"My daughter," she whispers faintly, her eyes beseeching you. "Is she alive?"

Good-aligned characters should want to help this woman, who is obviously in great pain.

Unfortunately, removing her from the stake will tear open her wound and kill her; she currently has only 1 hit point. While the stake is piercing her, any healing spells will be of limited use, since the wound will not close.

The woman begs the heroes to look for her teenage daughter Smaranda, who can be recognized by the faded blue ribbon in her hair. Unfortunately, Smaranda is just a few feet away, impaled by a stake and quite dead. A shawl lies on the ground below her, wet with blood.

If the heroes show the woman the ribbon or the shawl or tell her that her daughter is dead, she cries out in anguish. "A curse upon the Talons!" she cries. "May they drown in the blood they so freely shed!"

Unless they find a way to save her, the woman will eventually die. She does, however, manage to whisper a warning to the characters: "Get inside! It's past the midnight curfew! The militia will kill you if they find you on the streets."

The woman's name is Ilona Beglitz. If the heroes have shown her any kindness, she tells them to take her wedding ring—a simple band



Knocking at Death's Door

of copper—to her husband Matthias, who will give them shelter for the night. In gasps wracked with pain she tells them how to find her house in the Laborers' Quarters. "Tell him that his wife was innocent of any crime," she whispers fiercely. She then dies, either from blood loss or grief.

If the heroes save Ilona's life, she faces a new dilemma. Seeing her body gone, the militia will assume that her husband "stole" it for burial. Since the body of a "criminal" is the property of the state, this is a capital offense. At dawn, the Talons will seek out and kill Matthias and the couple's two remaining children.

Thus, Ilona and Matthias will have to go into hiding. Use the statistics below for the family (and for any other residents of Lekar that the characters encounter).

Adult Resident of Lekar, hm/hf, 0-Level:

AC 10; MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 4; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (punch); SW afraid of the Talons; SZ M (5'8"); ML unsteady (6); Int avg (9); AL N.

Child Resident of Lekar, hm/hf, 0-Level:

AC 10; MV 6 (unencumbered); hp 2; THACO nil; #AT nil; Dmg nil; SW afraid of the Talons; SZ S (3'-4' tall); ML unsteady (5); Int avg (8); AL N.

A Brush With Death

The characters are now free to start exploring the city of Lekar. It is well past midnight and the streets are deserted and dark. Every door they try is securely barred; every window is shuttered. The only people out on the streets are the Talons, who patrol in groups of two to eight.

If the Talons find anyone on the streets after curfew, they arrest him immediately. The punishment is swift and brutal—the victim is "warned" by having one or both feet lopped off. Those who fight back against this barbaric punishment in any way (or who anger the Talons by talking back) are dragged off to one of the many public squares that are set with upright wooden poles. There they are impaled and left to die.

The heroes may be simply wandering the streets or they may be trying to find the Laborers' Quarter and the home of Matthias

Beglitz. In either case, they are spotted by a patrol of four Talons. Read the players the following:

Four men step out of a side street, blocking your path. Each wears a quilted doublet of blood-red velvet, dark breeches, a black iron bracer about each wrist, and a swirling black cape trimmed with red. One of the men has eyes that glow in the dark like a cat's. He seems to be their leader.

"Halt!" he cries, reaching for his sword. "You have broken the curfew and committed a criminal act. Bare your ankles and prepare to pay the penalty."

If any of the heroes is wearing metal armor or carrying weapons that are not concealed, add the following:

One of the men behind him bares needle-sharp teeth in an evil smile. "Look! They are dressed in armor and carrying weapons! Enforce the lord's law. Kill them!"

The purpose of this encounter is to give the heroes a face-to-face introduction to the brutality of the Talons and to let them cross swords with these bullies. The DM should stage the encounter so that it encourages at least one of the PCs to flee.

The Talons, hm/hf, F3/4/5 (2d4):

AC 5 (scale mail, shield); MV 11 (lightly encumbered); hp 20/27/35; THACO 18/17/16 (17-16/16-15/15-14 with Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 or 2d4 (spear/pike or broad sword; +1-+3 Str bonus); SA magical items; SD magical items; MR 5%; SZ M (5'8"-6'6"); ML elite (14); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 270/420/650.

If the heroes defeat this first patrol (and they probably will) they are faced, within seconds of their victory, by a possible confrontation with a very large group of Talons—a unit of 50 militia members (or 100 if the heroes don't scare easily) who are practicing maneuvers by night. This unit stumbles across the scene, sees the dead bodies of their comrades, and

Knocking at Death's Door

immediately gives chase. This time, the characters should run.

The DM should make it a tense chase, but in the end the PCs should be able to escape. The idea is to get at least one of the characters to hide. The DM should keep up the chase, always with the Talons hot on the characters' heels. The character should be the one to come up with the idea to hide, but the DM can encourage this course of action by offering tempting possibilities—an open door or a convenient cubbyhole between two buildings. No matter which hiding place is chosen, the hero winds up discovering a dead body. Read the player the following:

As the heavy footsteps of your pursuers fade off into the night, you get the chance to catch your breath. Only now do you realize that you are standing (or sitting) on something soft. It squishes underfoot, emitting a sickly sweet odor of rot.

If the character inspects the corpse, add the following:

It seems your hiding place has been used once before—as a place to dispose of a corpse. The body is that of a human male whose throat has been slit from ear to ear. His blood-crusted corpse is infested with maggots; clearly he has been dead for at least half a day.

Robbery was apparently not the motive for this murder. A few gold coins have spilled out of one pocket and lie partially beneath the corpse. A bloodstained piece of paper pokes from a shirt pocket,

The dead man was a member of the Ebon Fold. Opening his shirt will reveal a large

puncture where this fellow was impaled. (He was subsequently brought back to life by the necromancer Ladislas; for details, see the section The Ebon Fold, page 60.) He was killed by Hathril Hasselin (whom the heroes will meet later).

The note in his pocket is bloodstained but legible. The DM should pass **Player Handout 1: Bloodstained Note** to the player at this time.

The note is from Ladislas Sintesti. It instructs this Ebon Fold assassin to use a *death shard* (one of the magical daggers that channels energy to the crystal skull) against Hathril, whose forehead bears a *wizard mark*. This dagger is nowhere to be found (Hathril took it).

Three gold coins lie on the ground. Another six are in the pocket of the dead man. Each is embossed with a hawk—the symbol of Vlad Drakov—and is the currency of this domain.

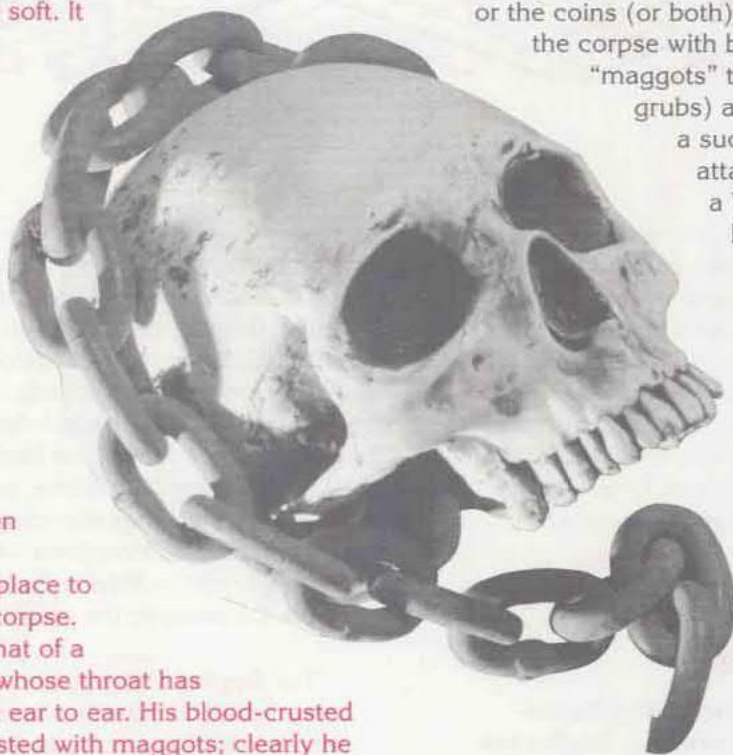
The DM should give the hero a chance to inspect the body and to recover either the note or the coins (or both). If the character touches the corpse with bare hands, the

"maggots" that infest it (actually rot grubs) are deemed to have made a successful burrowing attack. Have the hero make a Wisdom check to see if he notices this infestation.

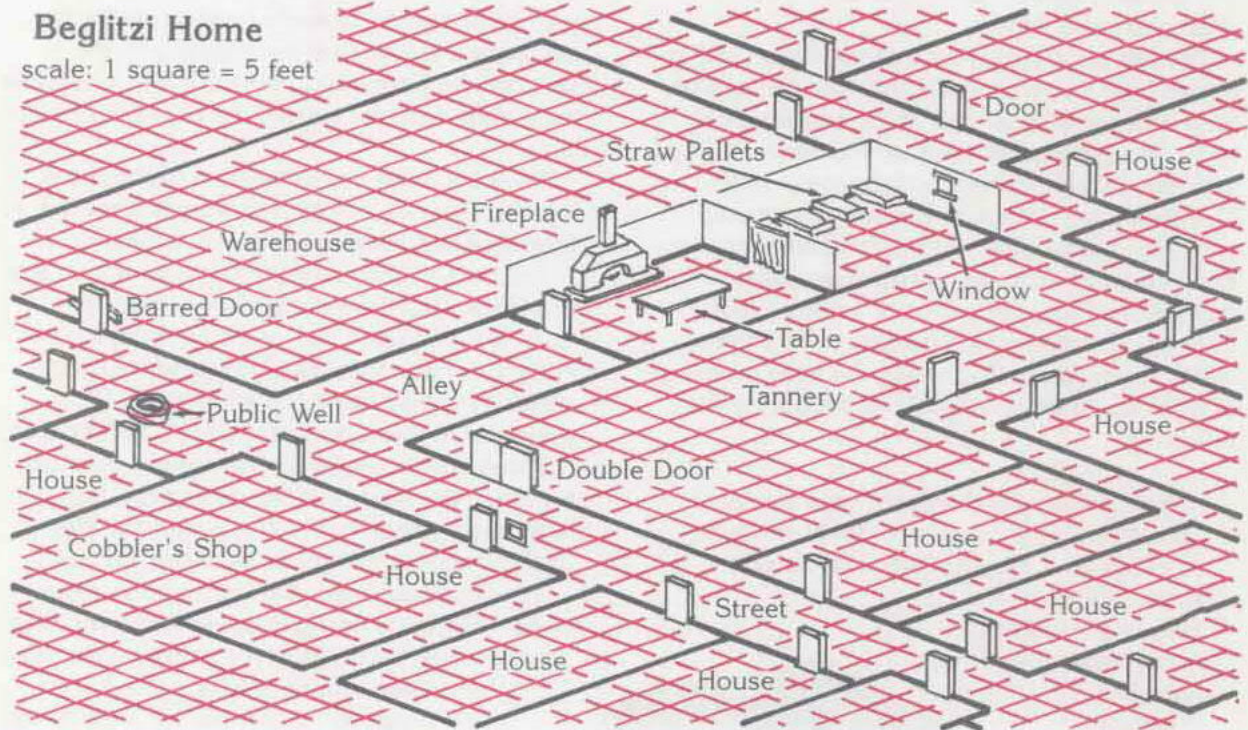
The rot grubs are an important part of this encounter; they may later be used as a tool to defeat Ladislas Sintesti, leader of the Ebon Fold. If the hero doesn't touch the corpse, the DM should instead have him "happen to notice" that the maggots are of an unusual size and shape (having two antennae) and leave the character to

draw his own conclusions about what they really are.

Rot Grubs (5d6): AC 9; MV 1; hp 1; THAC0 nil; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA burrowing; SZ T (1" long); ML unsteady (5); Int non- (0); AL nil; XP 15 each.



Knocking at Death's Door



Burrowing: Rot grubs automatically succeed in burrowing into any bare skin that touches them. Due to the anaesthetic secreted by the rot grub, victims must make a successful Wisdom check on 1d20 to realize that something is wrong. If flame is applied to the wound within 1d6 rounds, 2d10 rot grubs can be killed per application. A *cure disease* spell wipes out the entire infestation. Otherwise, the rot grubs reach the heart and cause death in 1d3 turns.

Darkness and Danger

There are no set encounters for the remainder of the evening. The heroes may seek out other members of the Talons to challenge, but otherwise it is assumed that they will keep a low profile, avoiding those patrols that they encounter. There are, after all, some 3,500 militia members in the city of Lekar—far more than the heroes can deal with.

If they spend the night on the streets, the DM should include several close calls with the Talons; the heroes should be made to feel

hunted by the militia members (particularly if any of the Talons got a good look at them).

If they instead decide to go to the home of Matthias Beglitzi, they find that Ilona's directions are not easy to follow. The Laborers' Quarters are a maze of poorly lit, winding alleys. The heroes will easily become lost and have to spend a lot of time back-tracking. Once they find the Beglitzi's home, they can shelter there overnight if they can convince Matthias to open the door (or have Ilona with them). The DM should refer to **Map 2: Beglitzi Home** and read the following to the players:

The Beglitzi home is a squalid, two-room hovel, sandwiched between a foul-smelling tannery and a boarded-up warehouse. It is clear that the family has very little in the way of material wealth; the beds are rough pallets of straw and the sole piece of furniture is a rickety table in the main room. A blackened pot hangs over a cramped fireplace, and the earthen floor is littered with refuse.

Matthias is a haggard man in patched clothing, but the determined tilt to his chin

Knocking at Death's Door

makes it clear that he is a survivor. His two children—a young boy and an infant girl—sleep on the straw. The boy occasionally stirs, coughing softly.

If the heroes found a way to save Ilona's life, Matthias is eternally grateful to them. He realizes, however, that this places his family in danger. He immediately awakens his family (seven-year-old Petrus and the infant Voica) and attempts to flee the city. He refuses any offer by the heroes to accompany him, saying the family has a better chance if they are not traveling with obvious foreigners. They are welcome to stay in his home, however. He then gathers up his meager possessions and flees. Whether or not he is successful in escaping is up to the DM; if he fails, the heroes may later see the bodies of the Beglitz family impaled on the city walls.

If the body of Ilona or Smaranda is missing from the stake where it was impaled, the Talons discover this "theft" at dawn. One hour after sunrise, a patrol of eight Talons comes to the Beglitz home. They kick open the front door (the only exit, other than a small window in the back) and hack anyone they find inside to pieces.

Otherwise, the Beglitz home can be a secure hiding place for the heroes—as long as they aren't foolish enough to venture outside in their armor, carrying obvious weapons. Matthias can warn them of the laws against carrying weapons and can explain about the curfew, which lasts from midnight until dawn. He also cautions demihumans not to go out of doors.

Matthias is grateful to the heroes for any comfort and assistance that was offered his wife and child, but he makes it clear that their presence puts his and his two children's lives in grave danger.

Terror in the Streets

The characters may have spent the night wandering the streets and may still be there when dawn breaks. Alternatively, if they have found a place of refuge, they will eventually have to venture out of doors.

As the sun rises, filling the city with light, the streets gradually come to life. Doors are unbolted, windows unshuttered, and residents venture out of their homes and proceed to their

stores and workshops. The heroes get their first good look at the city. Read the following to the players:

By the light of day, the city appears even more dismal. The buildings are roughly constructed and poorly maintained, and the streets are full of potholes and spotted with horse dung and refuse. The smell is enough to make your eyes water.

The citizens of this forlorn place seem to be uniformly poor and unkempt. They dress in plain, ill-fitting clothes of drab brown. Many have runny noses or pox-blistered skin, and all appear malnourished and in ill health. They shuffle past, their eyes downcast, unwilling to meet the gaze of strangers. Their demeanor is that of frightened animals marked for slaughter.

Even more remarkable is the number of folk who show signs of mutilation. Here a man wheezes through the ghastly remains of a heavily scarred face from which the nose has been sliced. There a woman hobbles along on crutches, one leg missing. Others in the crowd have arms, hands, or backs that are marked with the gruesome scars of past tortures. Others—particularly those in their teens and younger—bear the ugly brand of a hawk on their foreheads.

The most horrifying feature of this city, however, is its public squares. Each of these is a forest of tall posts, many bearing impaled corpses. They are clearly the remains of ordinary citizens of Lekar, some of them partially skeletal and falling from the stakes. Their crimes may never be known, but the agony of their tortuous final hours is etched on every one of their unliving faces. The smell of rot in these open areas is overwhelming; people hurry past them with cloths pressed to their noses, unwilling to look at the ghastly corpses that are displayed there.

The heroes may explore the city as they like, but the majority of its citizens will respond to them only with frightened silence. Demihuman characters will be stared at; the residents of Lekar assume they are escaped slaves and marvel at the foolishness these "runaways" display by walking openly in the streets.

If the group makes an effort to blend in with the crowd and to appear human, they can move

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about the city freely. They can purchase any equipment they like (except weapons or armor) at the prices listed in the *PLAYER'S HANDBOOK*, but all will be of poor quality.

For each hour that the characters spend on the streets, there is a 25% chance (cumulative) that they will encounter a patrol of 2d4 Talons. If they are wearing armor, carrying weapons, are obviously demihuman, or do anything to attract the militia members' attention (like looking them in the eye instead of shuffling past like the frightened citizens), a fight may ensue. As before, the heroes should be allowed to escape; this encounter should frighten but not seriously damage them. Eventually (if this happens enough times) the Talons will be on the lookout for the heroes and will attack them on sight.

Any characters unfortunate enough to be captured by the Talons (or foolish enough to surrender to them) will be briefly questioned. The soldiers ask what land they hail from and why they are in Lekar. Then, assuming them to be spies, the Talons pronounce a sentence of death and impale them on stakes in a public square.

As the Talons are dragging the victim away, the DM should give the character a chance to escape. This attempt is made using an open doors check; on a successful roll, the hero can struggle out of the Talons' grip and flee. Otherwise, he is lifted into the air, positioned above the upright stake, and pulled down upon it until the sharpened end emerges from his torso. This results in 2d6 points of damage to the victim, who (if not killed outright) is left to die. Any movement on the part of the victim (including attempts to get free, most of which will be futile) results in a further 1d4 points of damage.

If the captured character is a demihuman, the Talons might instead consign the captive to a slave detail; he is then put to work on the walls. (The DM can work the character into the scene that follows, allowing for a rescue by the other heroes.)

If the heroes head for the walls of the city, looking for a way to leave it, read the following:

The city is surrounded by massive stone walls that are nearly 20 feet high and have a tower every 200 feet. The top of the walls are patrolled by soldiers who keep a watchful eye both on the land outside the walls and on the city as well.

The walls serve to both intimidate the city's population and to stave off any invasion. The inner face of the wall is studded with rusted iron spikes, on which hang the corpses of ordinary citizens.

One section of the wall has a large gap which is being repaired by three emaciated figures—an elf and two dwarves. They are shackled together and are lifting a heavy stone block. As it is set in place, the elf collapses and the dwarves stop to help him up. The six soldiers guarding them immediately begin to curse and kick the prisoners. The beating is as savage as it is brief—after a second or two, all three lie still. "We need a fresh work crew," one of the guards tells the others. "Bring out another brace of slaves."

The encounter is designed to inform the heroes (if they don't realize it yet) that demihumans are slaves in Falkovnia. It also shows them a possible exit from the city—through the gap in the wall. There's little chance of escaping through it now, unless they can make themselves invisible. At night, however, characters who can move quietly (a simple Dexterity check on 1d20) and keep to the shadows can easily slip through the breach.

An Offer of Alliance

The timing of this encounter is up to the DM, although the heroes should already have had a few encounters with the Talons and should be on the run. Ideally, it should take place during daylight. The location is also up to the DM. Begin by reading the following to the players:

Your eye is caught by a woman who signals covertly to you. She is dressed in drab brown clothing but, unlike the rest of the population of this wretched city, looks to be in excellent health. Bright green eyes meet your gaze confidently and a lock of bright red hair peeks out from under a shapeless hat.

Edging closer, the woman begins to whisper: "I can tell by your appearance and the way you carry yourselves that you are strangers to these parts, and that

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means you are in mortal danger. I think that we should”

Her voice trails off as she notices a pair of soldiers a short distance away.

“Come,” she whispers. “Let’s find a quieter place to talk.”

The woman is Hathril Hasselin, a 6th-level half-elf bard. She is protected by a magical +2 *belt of protection* that functions like a +2 *cloak of protection*. It has a brass buckle shaped like a shield and is made of leather that has been tooled with protective runes.

Her single visible piece of jewelry is a ring that she wears on her right thumb (it’s too big for any of her fingers). It is made of gold, and its design is a stylized representation of an eye; the iris is a small green circle of emeralds. This magical ring is the *Eye of the Unseen* and is described fully under the section *Eyes of Baltor* (page 15).

Hathril carries with her at all times a small accordion (about the size of a loaf of bread). It has the same properties as a *horn of goodness* and when played casts a *protection from evil 10’ radius* spell over Hathril and any companions of good alignment. The accordion can be used in this manner three times per day.

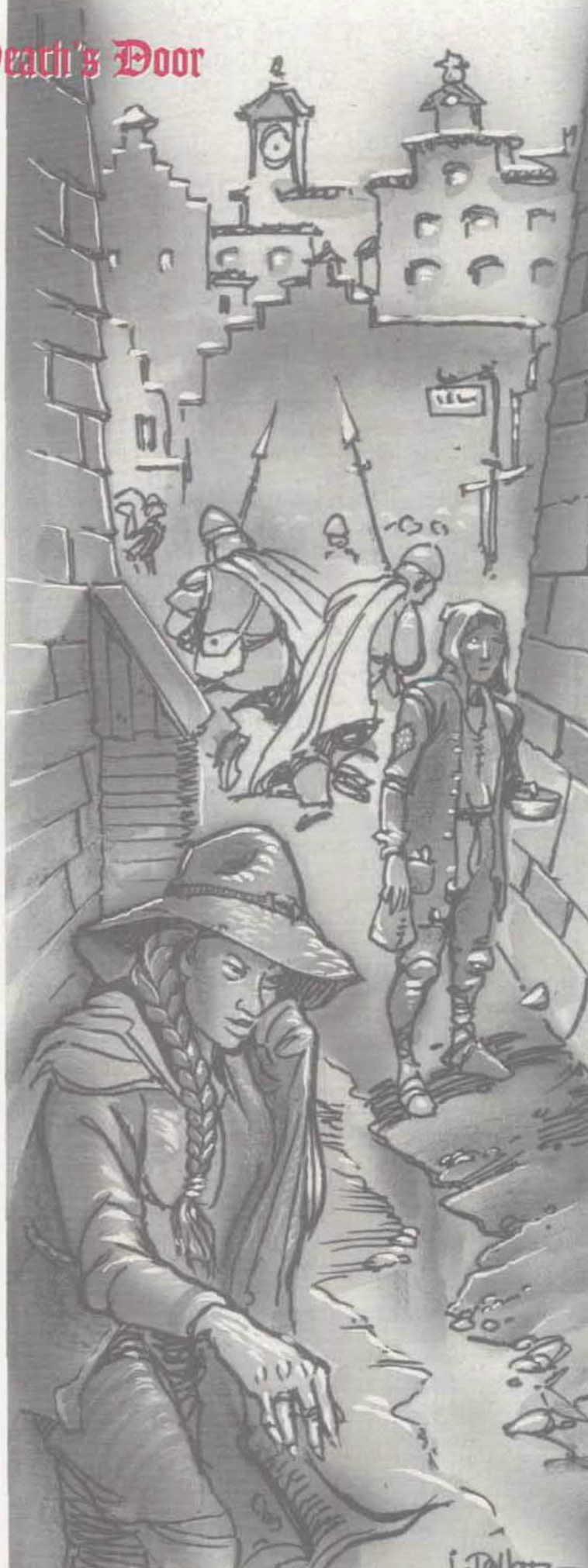
When in combat, Hathril fights either with her sling or with a pair of silver daggers that she conceals in sheaths fastened to her forearms, under her sleeves. She crosses her arms and draws the daggers from their sheaths with a flourish.

The DM should give the heroes a moment to decide whether or not to trust Hathril. If they hesitate, she lifts her hat slightly to reveal her pointed ears. “You can trust me,” she says. “I’m not from this place.”

If they still hesitate, Hathril tells the heroes where she is from. It turns out that she came from the same world as they did—she speaks its native languages fluently, and knows quite a bit about the world (the DM will have to fill in the details, based on the PCs’ former campaign world).

If the characters are too stubborn or untrusting, Hathril eventually becomes frustrated. She slips away before the Talons patrol passes, using the *Eye of the Unseen* to turn invisible.

Hathril continues to follow the heroes around, repeatedly asking to speak with them. When they eventually agree, read the following:



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The woman speaks quickly, always keeping a wary eye on her surroundings.

"My name is Hathril," she says. "Three days ago, my five companions and I were exploring a tomb on our home world when a mist rose around us. When it cleared, we found ourselves in this vile place.

"My companions are all elves, and thus must remain in hiding. I can pass for human, so they sent me out to scout around. I'm delighted to have found someone from my home world. Tell me, do you know how to get home again?"

The DM should give the characters a chance to respond. If they question Hathril about the tomb she was exploring, she says it was the tomb of Baltor, a famous wizard. She does not tell them about what she found there (six magical rings), but if any of the heroes have the ancient history proficiency, on a successful proficiency check they know that the wizard was buried with six magical items of some sort, collectively known as the *Eyes of Baltor*.

Hathril's companions are all demihuman, and thus they immediately became the targets of the domain's militia. The Talons hunted them relentlessly, trying to enslave them. Only Hathril (who can pass for human and who has no obvious weapons or armor) is able to move about freely.

After allowing the heroes to compare notes with Hathril on their entry into Ravenloft, the DM should add the following:

Hathril readjusts her hat, pulling it down firmly over her pointed ears. As she does so, you catch a glimpse of a brightly patterned sleeve, hidden under the ugly brown garment she wears. You also notice the ring on her thumb—a gold band decorated with sparkling green stones.

"Tell me," she says. "Have you noticed anyone following you? Have you seen any evil-looking men armed with daggers whose blades are made of glass?"

Once again, the DM should pause for the characters' response. If any of them specifically observes Hathril's ring, the DM can describe its stylized eye pattern. Otherwise, continue with the following:

"One of the men with the glass-bladed daggers was following me. No matter what I did, I couldn't shake him. No matter what disguise I adopted, he kept picking me out of the crowd. Eventually, I was forced to put an end to his game of cat and mouse."

Slowly and dramatically, she draws a finger across her throat.

"I think our two groups should join forces," she adds. "It's the only way we'll survive."

From a pocket she pulls a piece of paper with a crude map drawn on it.

"My companions have hidden themselves in a ruined chapel a few miles outside of town. If you agree to an alliance, join us there tonight. It's easiest to escape the city after dark, through one of the spots where they're rebuilding the wall. We'll be watching for you. Please come."

The DM should give the heroes a copy of **Player Handout 2: Hathril's Map** at this time.

If the character who found the body of the Ebon Fold member realizes that this murder must have been Hathril's handiwork, he might think to question her about the "glass-bladed dagger" that this fellow was purportedly carrying. Hathril will explain that she took the dagger and hid it in the chapel. She believes it is magical but has no idea as to its function.

If the heroes recovered the note from the body, they might want to examine Hathril's forehead for signs of a mark. Only by using a *detect magic* spell can the *wizard mark* be revealed. Hathril's only explanation as to how it got there is that she was touched by a "fortuneteller" who read the bumps on her head. (This was actually Ladislas, who used a *magic jar* spell to take over a Vistana's body.)

Hathril bids farewell to the group, saying that she wants to do some more scouting and that she will meet them later that evening. She disappears dramatically, using the *Eye of the Unseen* to become invisible.

If the PCs refuse to take the bait and do not head for the ruined chapel, the DM may need to push them in that direction. A sizeable patrol of Talons and an extended chase through a countryside that is heavily patrolled by well-armed militia (with the chapel as the only possible refuge) should do the trick.

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W

here pass, with
melancholy state,
By all the solemn
heaps of fate,

And think, as softly-
sad you tread

Above the venerable dead,
Time was, like thee they life possest,
And time shall be, that thou shalt
rest.

Thomas Parnell

Using the map that Hathril has drawn for them, the heroes can make their way to the ruined chapel where she and her companions are hiding. The DM should refer to **Map 3: Ruined Chapel**.

To find the chapel, they must travel along the road to Silbervas and pass a large lake. When they reach the so-called "four-mile stone" (all roads in Falkovnia are measured and marked) they are to turn left and climb into the hills.

As they crest the first of the hills, the heroes find themselves looking down into a valley. Read the following aloud:

The moon washes the valley below with a pale, ghostly light. By its faint gleam, you can see that the floor of the valley is covered with hundreds of upright wooden stakes. At the foot of each is a bleached pile of bones—presumably the mortal remains of the wretches who were impaled here, years ago. Wisps of mist drift between the bodies, veiling them like a tattered shroud.

At the center of this forest of death is a small stone building. By its bell tower and arched windows, you guess it to be a chapel. Part of its roof has fallen in and its front doors gape open. It is impossible, from this distance, to tell if anything is moving inside the chapel, but through its broken windows you can see the faint red glow of what you presume to be a campfire.

The characters may be leery about entering the valley, especially given the skeletal remains that carpet it. The DM should play upon these fears, encouraging them to believe that they might—at any moment—be attacked by a host of undead.

These fears are unfounded. The real danger lies within the chapel; the DM should read the following as the heroes approach the door of the chapel.

As you reach the chapel itself, a wave of weariness passes over you. It is all but impossible to keep from yawning and rubbing your eyes. Then the feeling passes, as suddenly as it came.

A Grim Harvest

Once the heroes enter the chapel, the DM should read the following aloud:

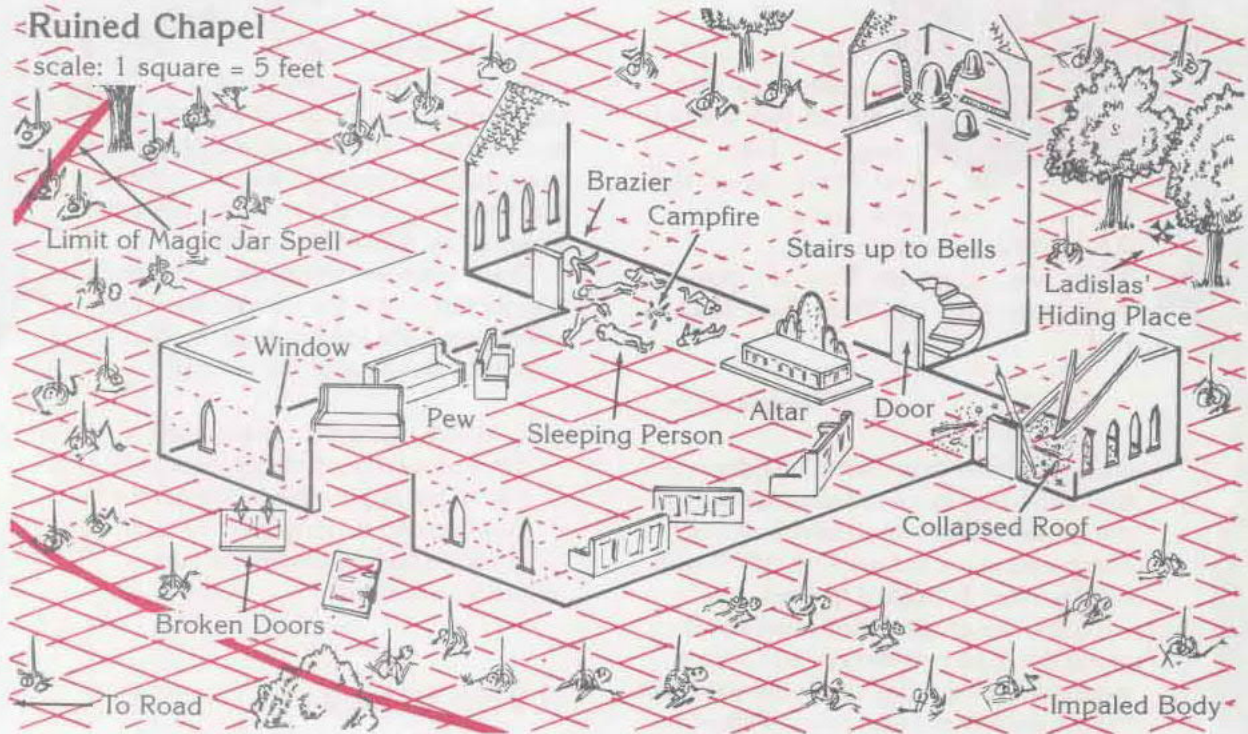
The inside of the chapel is in a state of disarray. The pews are broken and shoved to the side, and fragments of stained glass litter the floor. The ornately carved wooden altar has been defaced beyond recognition; it is impossible to tell what god or gods were once worshipped here.

In one corner of the room is a campfire. The fire has burned down until little is left but embers. Occasionally a flame flickers, illuminating the room and driving the chill from the air.

Around the fire are six sleeping forms, their heads pillowed on their arms. You recognize one as Hathril. The other five are elves.

Beside the group is an iron brazier; it has been knocked over, spilling the coals it once held. Partially roasted meat lies on the floor beside it. A rat is gnawing on the meat. Seeing you, it scuttles away.

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Hathril and her companions are dead. They were killed by members of the Ebon Fold, who used the crystal-bladed *death shards* to steal their life force (see the Ebon Fold section on page 60 for details). The wounds made by these daggers are visible only as tiny punctures; unless the heroes look carefully, the bodies will appear to be uninjured.

If any of the bodies is touched, read the following to the players:

As soon as you touch the corpse, the skin undergoes a hideous transformation. Starting with the spot that you touched, it turns into a dull gray powder and begins to slide away like unclean sand. Soon, the inner muscles and organs are revealed—and then they too turn to dust.

More and more of the body is dissolving, turning to powder that is stirred by the faint breeze that whispers through the chapel. The dust dances above the corpse, forming a mocking whirlwind that suddenly collapses upon itself. In the stillness that follows, all that is left is a grinning skull and some bones, wrapped

in empty clothing and sitting in a pile of dust.

Witnessing this hideous transformation requires a character to make a horror check.

The brazier that lies beside the bodies looks like an ordinary cooking brazier. In fact, it is a *brazier of sleep smoke*. If a fire is kindled inside it, smoke pours from the brazier. Everyone within five feet of it must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or fall into a magical slumber that can only be alleviated by means of a *dispel magic* or a *remove curse* spell. This brazier does not have the power to summon fire elementals.

The brazier (which the Ebon Fold members deliberately placed outside the chapel for Hathril to find) made the work of assassinating her companions much easier. The assassins left it here in the hope that other adventurers will stumble across it and use it.

The fact that the heroes felt the lingering effects of this smoke as they were approaching the chapel should warn them that the attack took place quite recently.

The dead have little monetary treasure on

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them; they hadn't yet plundered much of Baltor's tomb when the Mists claimed them and thus are carrying just 1d20 gp each. The characters may be able to use their weapons (including Hathril's two silver daggers) or armor (three suits of elven chain mail, one suit of scale mail, and two suits of leather armor). The DM can also add whatever nonmagical adventuring gear might logically be carried by this party if the players ask for details of the elves' equipment.

They might also like to claim Hathril's magical belt or accordion (assuming they recognize either item as magical). To use the latter, a character must have the musical instrument proficiency; simply creating a noise by pumping the accordion isn't good enough to trigger its magical abilities.

Finally, if the heroes carefully search the skeletal remains they can find a ring on a finger of each corpse. These are the fabled *Eyes of Baltor*. The heroes can discover that they are magical simply by slipping them on and observing the changes their vision undergoes. Learning the correct command word to trigger a ring's secondary magical effects is another matter, however. They will either need to use an *identify* spell or find a wizard who knows more about magical rings than they do.

The Eyes of Baltor

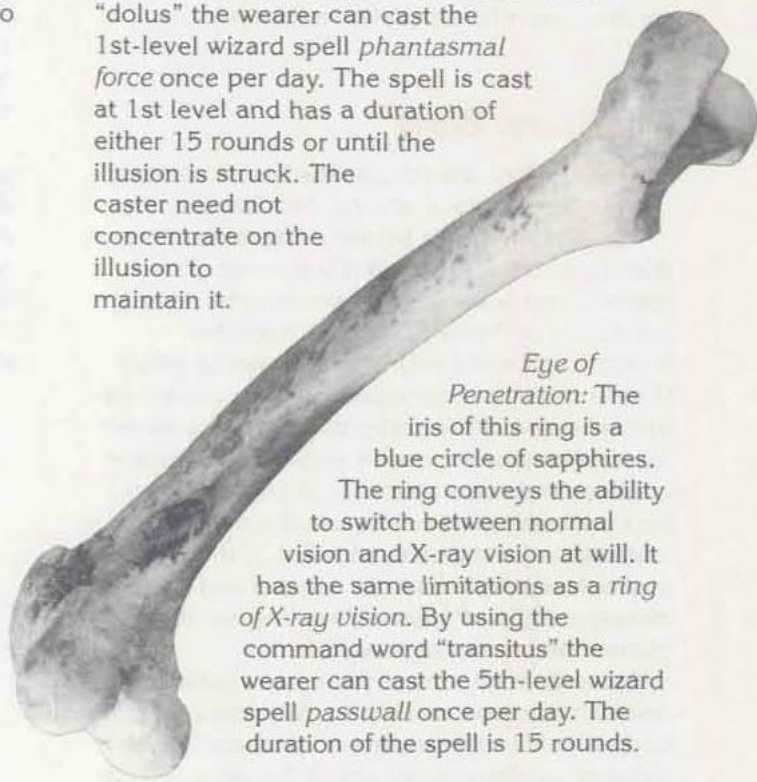
These six magical rings were created by the wizard Baltor, who still wore them when he was at last laid to rest. Each conveys a different form of magical sight to its wearer (either active at all times, or activated at will), and each (with the proper command word) can grant its wearer one additional magical ability. Both of these magical effects end as soon as the ring is removed.

Wearing two of these rings at once causes the wearer to go permanently blind in one eye, with a resulting Dexterity penalty of -1. Wearing three or more rings blinds both eyes. (Only Baltor knew the secret to safely wearing all of the rings at once.)

Each gold ring is decorated with a stylized representation of an eye. The iris is formed by a circle of small gem stones; the colors help to differentiate the rings from one another.

Eye of the Unseen: The iris of this ring is a green circle of emeralds. The ring conveys the ability to see any creature or object that is hidden by an *invisibility* spell. (It does not convey the ability to see things that are merely hidden.) By using the command word "celator" the wearer can become invisible once per day. This invisibility lasts for 15 rounds unless it is negated with a *dispel magic* spell or the ring is removed.

Eye of Inner Truth: The iris of this ring is a red circle of rubies. The ring conveys the ability to see things as they actually are—the wearer is completely immune to all illusions and phantasms. By using the command word "dolus" the wearer can cast the 1st-level wizard spell *phantasmal force* once per day. The spell is cast at 1st level and has a duration of either 15 rounds or until the illusion is struck. The caster need not concentrate on the illusion to maintain it.



Eye of Penetration: The iris of this ring is a blue circle of sapphires. The ring conveys the ability to switch between normal vision and X-ray vision at will. It has the same limitations as a *ring of X-ray vision*. By using the command word "transitus" the wearer can cast the 5th-level wizard spell *passwall* once per day. The duration of the spell is 15 rounds.

Eye of Auras: The iris of this ring is a pink circle of rose quartz crystals. The ring conveys the ability to see the aura that surrounds any magical object or wizard in clear view. (Hidden or invisible objects are not revealed by their auras, nor is the type of magic revealed.) By using the command word "genera" the wearer can cast the 1st-level wizard spell *identify* once per day. In order for the spell to succeed, the wearer of the ring must have had the magical item in his possession for at least eight hours.

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Eye of the Sun: The iris of this ring is a brown circle of garnets. The ring conveys the ability to alternate between normal vision and infravision at will. By using the command word “tutus” the wearer is able to cast the 3rd-level priest spell *protection from fire* once per day. This protection lasts for 15 rounds.

Eye of the Certain Path: The iris of this ring is a black circle of jet. The ring conveys the ability to see simple (nonmagical) traps that lie ahead, in the same manner as the 1st-level priest spell *detect snares and pits*. By using the command word “pendeo” the wearer can cast the 1st-level wizard spell *feather fall* three times per day. The duration of the spell is equal to the time it takes for the wearer to complete his descent.

The Broken Blade

The DM should give the heroes adequate time to look around the chapel and examine the bodies of Hathril and her friends. Looting the dead is a form of grave robbery and is cause for a powers check (see the *Realm of Terror* rules book from the RAVENLOFT boxed set). The DM should adjust the percentage chance according to the actions of the heroes. If they offer the corpses a decent burial and treat them with respect, the chance of failing a powers check is 1% (or even zero, for characters who vow to use the rings to exact vengeance for the elves' deaths). If the characters simply loot the corpses and speak disrespectfully of them while doing so, the chance may be as high as 5%.

At some point, one of the heroes (whichever one rolls the lowest under his Wisdom on 1d20) notices something hidden in the chapel, in a niche or perhaps under one of the pews. It is an object wrapped in a folded piece of paper.

The DM has to count on the players' curiosity; this is an important clue. The object in the paper is a dagger with a clear crystal blade—a *death shard* (see the description on page 61). Its blade has been broken.

The paper it is wrapped in is a note from Hathril, addressed to the heroes. The DM should give **Player Handout 3: Dagger Note** to the players at this time.

Immediately after reading the note, the characters are attacked, as detailed below. If they do not bother to read the note, the attack

occurs as they leave the chapel.

The attack is made by assassins of the Ebon Fold, led by the necromancer Ladislav Sintesti. A description of the Ebon Fold can be found on page 60; a description of Ladislav can be found on page 57.

The Life Stealers

The Ebon Fold attacks in force; there will be a minimum of one assassin per hero, and a maximum of two assassins per hero. The DM can tailor the attack to the relative strength of the party, using a higher number of attackers if it looks as though the heroes will have too easy a time of it. Remember, however, that Ladislav will be using his spells and the Ebon Fold will be stealing experience levels from them.

The Ebon Fold members time their attack to gain maximum surprise. They might, for example, wait until the heroes kindle a fire inside the *brazier of sleep smoke* and succumb to its magical effects, or they might wait until the characters are bickering over the magical “spoils” they have just found. When the attack begins, read the players the following:

You hear a low creaking, as if a foot were resting on a squeaky board. It is your only warning. In another instant, dark figures are leaping in through the broken windows and down through the hole in the roof. Two more dark figures block the door. From a dark corner, a member of the Talons issues curt orders, directing the attack.

As the shadowy figures circle you they laugh with maniacal glee, daggers in their fists. Moonlight slanting in through the ruined ceiling reflects off the weapons, whose blades seem to be made of clear glass or crystal. The attackers close in, their strange daggers raised for the kill.

Ladislav's Tactics

The assassins are led by Ladislav Sintesti, the highly intelligent necromancer who runs the Ebon Fold. Ladislav has used a *magic jar* spell to take over the body of a member of the Talons. His own body is sitting outside, 40 feet away from the ruined chapel. For details on

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Ladislav's combat tactics using the *magic jar* spell, see page 58.

Ladislav Sintesti (in Talon host body) hm, W12: AC 4 (*bracers of defense*); MV 11 (lightly encumbered); hp 35; THACO 17 (16 with Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger; +1 Str bonus); SA wizard spells; SD magic bracers, wizard spells; MR 10%; SZ M (6'2"); ML elite (14); Int genius (17); AL NE; XP 1,400.

Ladislav has the following spells memorized during this encounter: 1st—*chill touch*, *shield*, *spider climb*, *wall of fog*, *wizard mark*; 2nd—*darkness 15' radius*, *irritation*, *magic mouth*, *spectral hand*, *stinking cloud*; 3rd—*feign death*, *hold undead*, *protection from good 10' radius*, *slow*, *vampiric touch*; 4th—*contagion*, *curse* (reversed *remove curse*), *enervation*, *minor globe of invulnerability*, *wizard eye*; 5th—*animate dead*, *avoidance*, *magic jar*, *passwall*, *teleport*; 6th—*disintegrate*, *life spell* (reversed *death spell*, see description on page 61).

Ladislav sends the Ebon Fold members in first. They work in pairs, one trying to maneuver a hero into a position where another Ebon Fold member can use a backstab attack. Each is armed with a *death shard*.

Death Shards

The assassins are using magical +2 daggers known as *death shards*. The hilts of these daggers are made of normal metal, but the blades are made of clear crystal. Although the blade appears to be made of a breakable material, it is impervious to normal damage. Because it is magical, it cannot be broken by a *shatter* spell.

A *death shard* does 1 point of normal damage each time it strikes, but each successful hit also drains 1 life force from its victim, resulting in the loss of 1 experience level—and a permanent loss of hit points.

Each time a *death shard* drains a level of life force, its crystal blade fills with swirling, blood-red smoke. This smoke gradually fades over the next ten rounds as the energy within the blade is channelled somewhere else (for full details, see page 61).

Ladislav leaves the fighting to his minions, preferring to cast spells from a shadowy corner. He positions his host body in a doorway, window,

or behind the ruined altar for protection. Although there is a sword at his hip, he does not draw it; because he is a wizard, he is unable to use it.

Ladislav does not want to kill the heroes, since this would snuff out the life force that the Ebon Fold is trying to steal. Instead he uses the spells *contagion*, *irritation*, and *slow* to make the them easier targets for the Ebon Fold.

At some point, Ladislav will mark one of the characters with a *wizard mark*. He does this from a distance, using the *spectral hand* spell. The mark is invisible to everyone but Ladislav and members of the Ebon Fold, who will immediately target this individual for attack in future meetings.

This mark can be revealed via a *detect invisibility* or *true seeing* spell or can be viewed with a *gem of seeing*, a *robe of eyes*, the *Eye of the Unseen*, or the *Eye of Auras*. It cannot be dispelled, but it can be removed with an *erase* spell. It wears off naturally in 1d4+2 days.

Eventually, the tide of battle should turn in favor of the heroes. While the Ebon Fold are fearless, they are normal humans of a lower level than the heroes. When Ladislav realizes that they are being defeated he abandons them (and the host body). First, however, he makes a boastful speech. Read the following to the players:

The soldier leading the assassins pauses, then points an accusing finger at your group. "You may have won this battle," he shouts, "but eventually you will fall like wheat before a scythe. The grim harvest shall be completed, no matter what you do!"

Then the soldier staggers, as if suddenly losing control of his limbs. When he looks up again, his eyes hold confusion and fear.

"What has happened?" he asks. "Where am I?"

Hunyadi Danesti

Once Ladislav leaves the host body, the Talon's own life force returns to it. The victim—a 5th-level warrior named Hunyadi Danesti, will be confused and unable to act for one round, but after that he is capable of defending himself.

Assuming he is not immediately cut down by the heroes during the attack, Hunyadi can tell them that the assassins with the crystal-bladed daggers are not associated in any way with the

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Talons. They probably won't believe him, but he is telling the truth.

If asked to explain why he seemed to be leading the attack, he says that his body was "stolen" and that the last thing he remembers before finding himself in the chapel was being imprisoned in a tiny room "of odd proportions" with gray glass walls.

Hunyadi may be an innocent victim of Ladislav's *magic jar* spell, but he is not a friend to the heroes. If allowed to return to Lekar, he will betray them at the first opportunity.

Hunyadi Danesti, hm, F5: AC 4 (*bracers of defense*); MV 11 (lightly encumbered); hp 35; THAC0 16 (15 with Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (broad sword; +1 Str bonus); SA magical items; MR 5%; SZ M (6'4"); ML elite (14); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 650.

Mopping Up

In the aftermath of the attack, the characters can investigate the bodies of any Ebon Fold members who were slain. Each will be carrying a *death shard*. If they examine these daggers within ten rounds of the battle's end, some of them may still hold life energy. This appears inside the clear blades as a swirling red smoke. (See the description of the *death shards* on page 61 for details.)

Each of the assassins has a seemingly unhealed puncture wound (the result of impalement) in his stomach or chest. The wound is grievous enough to have easily killed the individual.

The next logical move for the heroes is to find out how the daggers work—especially if any of them has lost part of his life force to a *death shard*. Hathril's note holds the clue—a trip to the Radiant Tower in Lekas may offer some answers.

The DM should allow the heroes time to lick their wounds and begin an investigation. If they are smart enough to disguise themselves as locals and do not enter into any direct confrontations, they will have a temporary respite from pursuit by the Talons.

Ladislav, meanwhile, realizes that the heroes must have captured one or more of his *death shards*. He wants them back but bides his time for the moment, plotting his next move against

the group. The frontal assault at the chapel didn't work. His second attempt to steal their life energies will involve something more subtle.

Ladislav uses his *locate object* and *wizard eye* spells to keep track of the crystal-bladed daggers. He uses *sending* spells to whisper disturbing messages to any character who is in possession of a *death shard*. The DM should say that he hears a "strange, whispering voice" and should read one of the following to the player only:

"Set me free from the dagger. Set me free and I will shower you with riches. And then I shall consume your spirit! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Return me to my master and he will spare your life. Defy him, and he shall burn your mind and wither your body!"

"Break my crystal body and all of the evils of the world shall be unleashed. All the fiends of the underworld shall pour forth."

"Go ahead, mortal. Attempt to possess me. I shall enjoy watching you squirm, once I dominate your mind and crush your spirit."

"Return the dagger, and I will help you leave this land. Leave it on any street corner at midnight. My minions will recover it."

A Dogged Attack

This encounter is designed to reveal one of Ladislav's weaknesses—his overwhelming fear of dogs. It should be played out when the heroes at last decide to seek out the Radiant Tower and are on their way there.

The encounter begins with a magical attack by Ladislav, who has concealed himself in a nearby building. He casts a *magic jar* spell and attempts to take over the body of one of the PCs. This attack is blocked by any spells or magical items that convey a *protection from evil*. It can also be resisted by the victim if he makes a successful saving throw vs. spell. This roll includes a modifier based upon the hero's

Gazing into the Grave

combined Intelligence and Wisdom as compared to Ladislav's combined Intelligence and Wisdom; see the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ladislav intends to use the body of one of the heroes (or perhaps one of their retainers) to attack another member of the group. This distraction will allow four Ebon Fold assassins to make a backstabbing attack with their *death shards*.

The DM should begin by asking all of the characters to make their saving throws vs. spell at the same time, then he should choose one of those whose roll failed to be invaded by Ladislav. (Until this victim's body is released, the DM controls the character.) When the victim's body has been taken over, the DM should read the following to the players—or should pass the player a secret note, instructing that PC to act out the scene that follows:

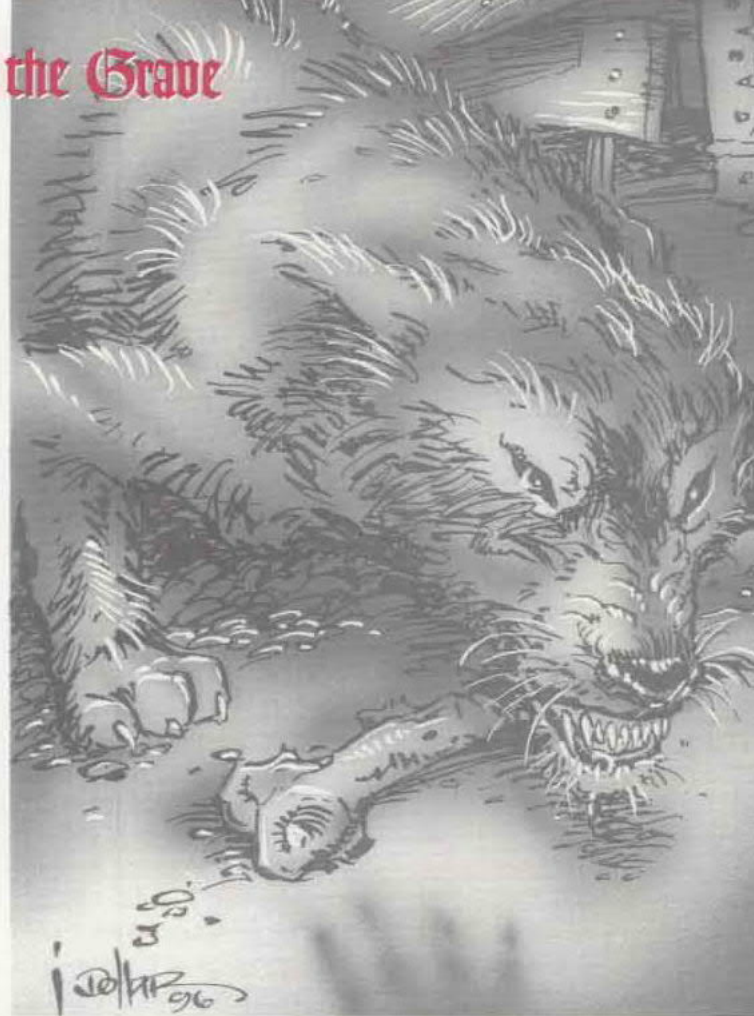
Your friend (PC's name) pauses for a moment, as if something had suddenly occurred to him. Pulling out a weapon, (PC's name) stares at it intently. "Look at this," he says. "I don't believe it. This has never happened before!"

As soon as the character has the other characters' attention, he attacks one of them. At the same time, the Ebon Fold members spring out of hiding to make their backstab attacks. Have all the characters check for surprise. Read the following to any hero who is not surprised:

As you dodge the blows of your friend, you see a figure closing in behind you. He holds a dagger with a clear crystal blade, ready to plunge it into your back. His look is one of utter confidence. Clearly this is a man who is not afraid of death.

While the other heroes are fighting, the character who is controlled by Ladislav stands still, arms outstretched, allowing the assassins to stab him at will with their daggers. It is up to the DM to decide exactly how many strikes are made, but Ladislav is smart enough to pull out of the body before it dies.

Unfortunately for the necromancer, as soon as the battle begins, a dog appears on the scene, triggering his phobia. Sensing Ladislav's fear, the dog leaps at him, causing him to



abandon his hold on the possessed PC. Read the players the following:

Flushed from its hiding place by the noise of the fight, a dog bolts across the street. One of your attackers trips over it, knocking it to the ground. The animal growls and snaps at him viciously.

Still snarling, the dog climbs to its feet. Its eyes fix upon (PC whom Ladislav is controlling) and it lunges toward him.

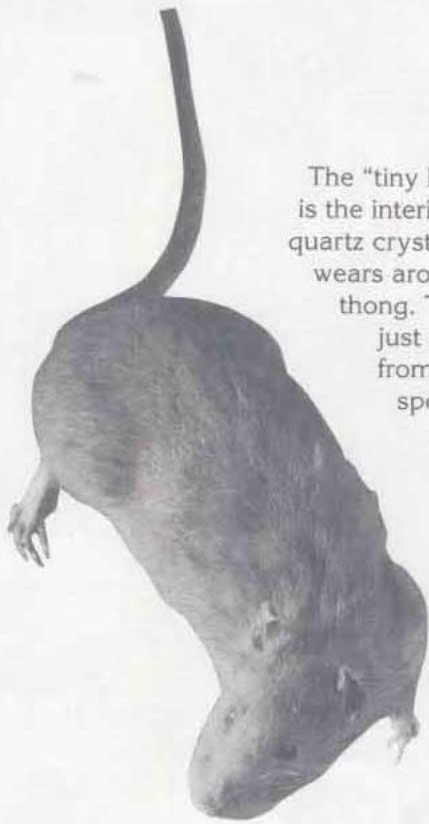
"Help!" (PC's name) screams in a panicked voice. "Don't let it get me!"

As soon as the dog lunges, the DM should read the following to the player whose character was possessed by Ladislav:

A moment ago, you were trapped inside a tiny hexagonal room with smoky gray walls. Peering in at you, through the ceiling, was the gigantic face of a young man with a thick black moustache.

Now, however, you have returned to your own body. Your heart is pounding in fear and your skin is damp with sweat. And a dog is lunging at your throat!

Gazing into the Grave



The “tiny hexagonal room” is the interior of the gray quartz crystal that Ladislav wears around his neck on a thong. The character has just been released from the *magic jar* spell and has returned to his own body.

The dog is actually just running away—although the character still feels Ladislav's irrational fear of it and

may believe, for a round or two, that it is attacking.

Whether or not that character acts, a member of the Ebon Fold springs forward at his master's command, attempting to sink a dagger into the animal. Unless the heroes prevent him from doing so, he instantly kills it.

If the heroes save the dog's life, it won't show them any affection. This mongrel is far from domesticated; it has lived its entire life in alleys, feeding on rats. It is used to receiving only vicious kicks and blows from humans. It growls at anyone who approaches it and bites anyone who tries to pat it. The dog may grudgingly follow someone who offers it food—but only at a distance, and always warily.

Those characters with the animal handling proficiency may attempt to soothe the dog somewhat, but any checks are made at a -5 penalty.

If the dog is killed, the heroes may later want to find another dog—especially if they figure out that Ladislav is afraid of them! Unless magic is used, the chance of finding a dog is just 5% per hour of searching (noncumulative).

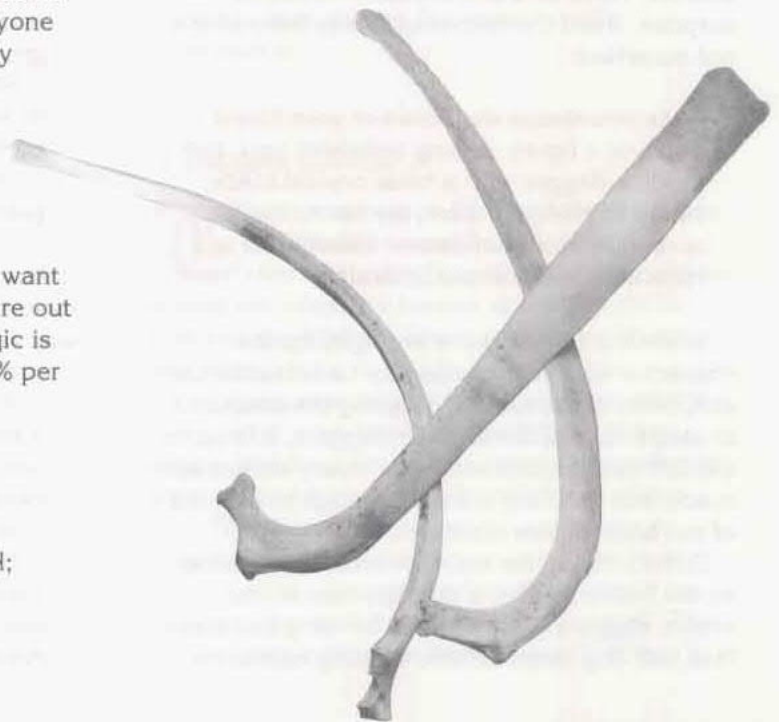
Domestic Dog (Mammal, Minimal:
Wild Dog): AC 9; MV 10; HD 1/4; hp 2;
THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (bite); SZ S
(3' long); ML avg (8); Int semi (3); AL N;
XP 7.

After one or two more attempts to backstab the heroes, the other Ebon Fold members break off their attack and scatter in all directions. The heroes may pursue them, but it is likely that the assassins will escape. The Ebon Fold knows the city far better than the heroes do and will make full use of its winding streets. In addition, they look like ordinary citizens of Lekar and can blend in with the populace.

If the heroes do manage to capture one of the Ebon Fold, the assassin's last act is to kill himself. He is utterly convinced that Ladislav can revive him from the dead, even if the dagger drains his life force. (He is wrong.) Thus he sees his death as merely a convenient form of escape, rather than as something permanent. Read the players the following:

As you close in on the fellow who attacked you, he turns toward you with a wildly gleeful look on his face. “You shall not have me!” he cries, raising his crystal-bladed dagger in one fist. “I can only be claimed by death. And even he cannot hold me for long. My master will raise me up again!”

This said, he plunges the dagger into his chest. He collapses, lifeless, onto the ground. Within minutes his skin and tissue crumble to ash, leaving behind only a skull that mocks you with its grin.



Hope Resurrected

A

simple child,
That lightly draws its
breath,
And feels its life in
every limb,
What should it know
of death?

William Wordsworth

The next part of this adventure takes place in Lekar's one and only school of magic—the Radiant Tower. (There are other wizards in the city, but they tend to keep a much lower profile and certainly don't set up organized schools.) The DM should refer to **Map 4: The Radiant Tower**.

The Radiant Tower is actually quite inappropriately named. It is a circular, four-story building with only a single doorway on the ground floor (the main entrance) and a number of windows on its upper floors. Its walls are filthy with soot and dirt; it appears to be centuries old and in a poor state of repair. Stones sometimes fall from its crumbling masonry, occasionally striking and injuring passersby in the street below.

The tower stands on a damaged foundation and thus has developed a perceptible tilt. The general populace of Lekar believe that the only thing holding it up is magic. In fact, no magic is involved; it is only pure luck that the tower has not already collapsed.

If the heroes take the time to investigate, they can learn a number of "facts" about the Radiant Tower, most of them wildly inaccurate. The DM can pick and choose from the following rumors, which are spread by the townsfolk of Lekar:

"The school is run by a Vistana named Mircea. They say the tower appeared magically, at

midnight, on the spot where he parked his wagon. It's leaning because Mircea longs to be wandering again. One day it will turn back into a wagon and roll away."

"The wizard Mircea has never worked a day in his life, and yet he's a wealthy man. You know what I think? That there's a horde of gold buried underneath that tower. My friend Radu thought the gold must have been hidden under a false floor. He snuck into the tower one night to steal it and was never seen again. I think Mircea killed him."

"Mircea, the headmaster of the school, may not be much good at seeing the future, but he's great at uncovering the secrets of the past. Why, he told me things about myself that no one else knew. It's like he read my mind."

"The Radiant Tower? That's an evil place. The magicians that live in it throw stones out of the windows if they see anyone walking below, and they've put dangerous wards on the tower itself. Just touching the walls is enough to suck the life from you. Why, they found a body at the base of it only yesterday. When they touched the corpse, the skin turned to dust. I tried to get the Talons to investigate, but they refused. I think Mircea has somehow charmed them."

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Once the characters gain access to the Radiant Tower, they can learn (through conversations with its inhabitants) that these rumors are false. Most of the explanations can be found in the description of Mircea Giurgiu in the **Cast of Characters** appendix (page 62). One thing Mircea won't be able to explain is the body found outside the tower. The dead man (whose body crumbled to dust, just as Hathril's did) was a recent victim of the Ebon Fold—a newcomer to Ravenloft who, like the heroes, stumbled into this domain. The assassin who killed him was sloppy and left the corpse near the lair. So far, however, no one has made the connection.

Getting Inside the Tower

Mircea Giurgiu is a cautious man who does not readily admit visitors to the Radiant Tower. He rarely appears at its front door himself, instead sending one of his students to greet any callers. Only if someone really piques his interest (a fellow wizard of the divination school, or a Vistana, for example) does he admit that individual into the magic school—and then only after he has successfully cast an *ESP* spell to ensure that the visitor does not mean him harm.

Hathril succeeded in earning Mircea's trust by telling him about the *Eyes of Baltor* and promising Mircea that he could examine these magical rings. In return, he agreed to analyze one of the crystal-bladed daggers for her and identify its magical properties.

If the heroes try to use Hathril's name to gain entrance to the Radiant Tower, they will be asked to let Mircea examine the rings that Hathril and her companions wore (and that, presumably, the heroes now wear).

Mircea makes this proposition with only one ulterior motive. He hopes that one of the rings might allow him to "see" into the future. If he found such an item, he would offer the outrageous sum of 10,000 gold pieces for it (paid in money transmuted by his *fool's gold* spell, of course). If this offer were refused, he would attempt to steal the item.

Alternatively, the characters could claim to have some knowledge of divinatory spells or to be Vistani. Mircea, however, can use his *ESP* spell to uncover any lies.

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When they first arrive at the Radiant Tower the DM should read the following to the players:

The Radiant Tower appears to have been misnamed. While it is one of the tallest structures in Lekar, at four stories high, it hardly qualifies as a tower. The circular building appears to be in poor repair; the masonry is dirty and crumbling. Windows ring the three upper stories.

There is only one entrance on the ground floor—a heavy wooden door with a large brass knocker engraved with a design that is so worn as to be nearly illegible. Beside the knocker is a small sliding panel, set into the door at about chest level.

If the characters look closely at the knocker, they can see that the design it bears is that of an eye. It symbolized the prophesied awakening of the corpses in the catacombs below (see the *Descent Into Darkness* chapter). The image has been worn away by the hands that have grasped this knocker over the years. Mircea believes the eye to be symbolic of the Vistani ability to see into the future.

The design on the door has no connection to the *Eyes of Baltor*. The similarity is merely a coincidence—albeit one that Mircea finds highly prophetic. He does not know the tower's full history, although he is aware of its sudden and magical appearance (see page 29 for details on the tower's history).

Assuming the heroes knock on the door, add the following:

The panel in the door slides back, revealing the face of a man in his late teens who has the familiar hawk brand on his forehead. He peers out at you, scratching idly at the stubble on his chin. "Hello," he says. "Are you here to see Father?"

Before you can reply, something crashes onto the street a few feet away. It looks like a chunk of masonry. Looking up, you see that one of the windows up above is closing.

The fellow behind the door glances at the fallen stone, then says, "Don't worry. That happens all the time."

The young man behind the door is Alexandru, one of Mircea's twelve students. Unless the characters use one of the strategies discussed earlier and are able to convince Mircea (using Alexandru as an intermediary) to come to the door himself, Alexandru turns them away, sliding the door panel shut. If this happens enough times, the heroes may be frustrated enough to try to break into the Radiant Tower. This should prove difficult.

Mircea knows that, one day, his luck with the *fool's gold* spell will run out and the Talons will come for him. Thus he has fortified the Radiant Tower with both mundane traps and magical wards (some of them provided by grateful wizards who, in the past, found the magic school a place of refuge from the horrors of Falkovnia). These won't hold up forever, but Mircea doesn't care. All they have to do is keep the Talons at bay long enough for him and his students to escape through the secret tunnel that lies underneath the tower.

All of the windows in the tower, for example, are protected by permanent *alarm* spells. Unless the proper password is spoken ("Mircea commands your silence") a loud alarm sounds when they are opened. The students are taught the password—but the younger ones sometimes forget or mispronounce it, causing a false alarm.

Reaching the windows is a challenge in itself. The outside walls of the tower are coated with a permanent *grease* spell. Anyone trying to climb them must first make a successful saving throw vs. spell.

The front door is protected by a *wizard lock*; only Mircea and his students can open it freely.

Even if this defense is negated, the person opening the door must know the secret method—which involves rotating the doorknob one full counter-clockwise turn before the door is opened. If this is not done, a puff of dust is blown out of tiny holes in the door. Anyone within ten feet of the door must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or succumb to the effects of a *hold person* spell.

Assuming the door has not been heavily damaged, it then swings shut and the *wizard lock* is reactivated.



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Mircea and His Students

Once the heroes have been admitted into the Radiant Tower, they are invited to stay there as long as they like. There is a “suggested donation” of 2 gp per day per person “to help feed the orphans” but this is not rigidly enforced—especially if Mircea finds the visitors intriguing.

The school currently is home to 12 students—eight boys and four girls, ranging in age from seven to twenty. All have the hawk brand on their foreheads. The boys are Alexandru, Varna, Magest, Brusa, Bran, Ludo, Lenk, and Dobru. The girls are Aldea, Tamerla, Irina, and Musana.

Radiant Tower Student, hm/hf, Div1:

AC 8–10 (varies with Dex bonus); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 3; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1–2 (punch); SW afraid of the Talons; SZ M (5'4"–6'); ML avg (10); Int high (14); AL N.

Personality: childlike.

Spells: Each of the students is specializing in the study of divinatory magic, and thus knows two 1st-level spells. The DM may choose any two spells from Mircea Giurgiu’s spell book (see page 62).

If the characters ask Mircea to examine their rings, he can use his *identify* spell to tell them more about these magical items. He will need to be alone with all six rings for eight hours “to remove any trace magics from them.” If they agree to this, he disappears with the rings into his private study and locks the door. At the conclusion of this eight-hour period, Mircea has a 60% chance (rolled separately for each ring) of determining a ring’s secondary function and the command word that triggers it. He then insists upon eight hours of rest.

Mircea can also use his *identify* spell to determine the function of the crystal-bladed daggers. The heroes may already know that the *death shards* drain life force (especially if they have suffered this effect themselves). If not, Mircea can inform them of this fact and adds that the daggers seem to be designed to channel this life force elsewhere. If they have described the red “smoke” that forms inside a dagger after it scores a hit, Mircea speculates that the repository to which the life force is channelled will also be filled with swirling red smoke. He suggests using a *dispel magic* spell to release

any life force still trapped within a dagger. (The blade must still be broken open; see the description of the *death shards* on page 61.)

The Radiant Tower

The heroes’ stay at the Radiant Tower should come as a welcome respite from the horrors of the world outside. They are given the run of the place but are asked to respect the students’ privacy and to not open any windows.

The only other prohibition is that they not enter Mircea’s private study, located on the fourth floor of the tower. They are welcome, however, to use his laboratory.

1) Entryway. Every door leading from this entryway is either locked or barred. Together with its low ceiling, this gives this area a slightly claustrophobic feel.

A multitude of cloaks and hats hang on pegs along either wall. Some are in good repair, while others are heavily patched.

The door leading to the street is *wizard locked*. The other doors are either locked or barred. A *hat of disguise* hangs on a peg; it is used by the students who are sent out to pay for supplies and equipment using false gold coins created by the *fool’s gold* spell.

Room 1a is the actual entrance to the school. Most visitors to the building will simply be taken directly into room 2 and will see no more of the school. But anyone who is accepted as a guest will be brought into this foyer and shown upstairs to the heart of the Radiant Tower.

2) Lounge. This room is furnished with lots of cushions and carpets. The walls are painted with lively renditions of dancing bears and fiddlers.

The lounge is intended to look like a Vistani encampment. A secret trap door in the floor, hidden by a carpet, leads to an underground tunnel (see the chapter **Descent Into Darkness**, page 29). Only Mircea knows of its existence.

3) Dining Hall. This room is furnished simply, with a long wooden table and stools. It is clearly a dining hall, where the students take their meals.

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4) Washroom. This room contains a wash basin and chamber pot, which is emptied into the street regularly.

5) Kitchen. Two large stoves are the main features of this room. There is also a water pump, three tables for food preparation, and a number of pots and pans.

6) Pantry. This storage room holds crates of fruits and vegetables, smoked meats, sacks of grain, and bottles of cheap wine.

7) Bedroom. This simple bedroom is furnished with a bed, chair, carpet, and mirror.

Rooms b–i and k–l are occupied by the students; if the heroes stay overnight they will have to squeeze into rooms a and j. Opening a window will trigger an *alarm* spell.

8) Study. This classroom is filled with desks and chairs. Strange symbols have been carved into a number of the desk tops.

The symbols are mere graffiti, symbols of divinatory magic that have been carved by idle students. Any character who practices divinatory magic can identify them.

9) Library. This room is lined with shelves that are filled with books and scrolls.

The texts here are primarily concerned with Vistani lore and the art of fortunetelling. Most of them are wildly inaccurate depictions of the Vistani, penned by *giorgios* who knew little about them. There are also a number of books on disease diagnosis and herbal medicines.

10) Storage. This room contains a number of the basics necessary to keep the school running. Clean linen, tools, writing supplies, and a spare cot can be found here.

Tossed carelessly onto a shelf in room 10a is a leather sack containing 100gp—in actuality, copper coins that have been transformed into gold with a *fool's gold* spell. Those finding it

must make a successful saving throw vs. spell at a –6 penalty to see it for what it really is. The coins will revert to copper in five hours.

Room 10b holds a number of potions, secured in a locked cabinet. These include a *potion of animal control*, a *potion of extra healing*, and an *elixir of health*.

11) Laboratory. This laboratory is equipped with all of the usual tools of the wizard's trade: mortar and pestle, crucible, measuring scales, an alembic for distilling liquids, braziers, beakers, a sand bath, filters, funnels, retorts, and vials.

The laboratory contains a number of material spell components; the characters have a 5%–20% chance of finding whatever components they need (adjust the chance according to the rarity of the item).

12) Mircea's Bedroom. A bunk bed is built into one wall of this room, and the windows beside it have been done up with brightly colored curtains. A fiddle hangs on one wall, and a rather moth-eaten stuffed bear stands in a corner.

Stuck to the walls are several charts. One traces the major lines in the human palm, while another shows the bumps on a typical human head.

A table holds a number of strange items: crystals, a deck of playing cards, teacups that have not been washed and that still have tea leaves stuck inside them, and forked sticks.

This room is furnished in an attempt to duplicate the interior of a Vistani *vardo*. The items on the table are the tools of the fortune-teller's trade, which Mircea collects—including half of the cards from a *tarokka* deck. Mircea would dearly love to know how to use them.

13) Mircea's Private Study. This room contains a desk and chair, above which are several shelves that are laden with books. A pedestal stands in one corner of the room; whatever stands atop it is covered by a cloth of purple velvet.

The door to this room is both locked and *wizard locked*. Unlike the entryway door, only Mircea can pass through this *wizard lock*.

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Among the books on the shelf are Mircea's spell books. The item on the pedestal is a glass sphere; Mircea believes it to be a *crystal ball*.

A Whisper of Madness

A little over a year ago, the cult leader Ladislas became aware of a source of great necromantic power existing beneath the city. Through his magics he determined the location to be directly below the Radiant Tower magic school and swore to make it his own. As he plotted, however, one of his assassins told him about an alleyway which held a hidden entrance to a tunnel that ran below the tower. Upon inspecting the site, Ladislas found himself drawn to a nondescript section of the tunnel which, when touched in the proper places, fell away. The secret entrance led down to a pit dug into the bowels of Falkovnia; a pit which hid a series of catacombs. The necromancer had found a new lair for his cult.

When the Ebon Fold established its headquarters in the catacombs, Ladislas saw a way to make Mircea Giurgiu his unwitting tool. Knowing that Mircea was fascinated with

divination, Ladislas hired a Vistana to deliver a "crystal ball" to the school. The man was instructed to say that this magical item was a present from Mircea's father's tribe, who would one day return to Lekar to acknowledge Mircea as a member.

The glass sphere was in fact a *crystal hypnosis ball*. So enthralled was Mircea with this gift that he failed to use his *identify* spell to recognize its evil, ulterior purpose.

The *crystal hypnosis ball* is linked directly to the master whom Ladislas serves. Through it, this powerful practitioner of magic can plant false images of whatever the person using the ball is looking for. While this victim is hypnotized and gazing into the ball, a suggestion is planted in his mind.

The suggestion planted in Mircea's mind is that he should keep a "visitor book," recording any important or peculiar people who come to the Radiant Tower. In this book, he should record their names, any magical abilities or special skills he has observed them use, and the address they will be staying at in Lekar. He is to keep this record book in a most unusual place—in the escape tunnel under the school.

Mircea was further commanded to keep the existence of the visitor book a secret.

Unbeknownst to Mircea, Ladislas reads the visitor book. It tells him not only where to find potential victims, but also what tactics those victims might use to oppose his assassins.

If questioned about his "crystal ball," Ladislas shows irritation. The heroes were not supposed to enter his private study. If they apologize for this transgression (or think up a good excuse for going in there), he may tell them the story of how he obtained this magical item.

If any of the PCs attempts to use the *crystal hypnosis ball*, a suggestion is planted in that person's mind. Six possible suggestions are listed below; all are lies. Roll 1d6 to determine which one the character receives. At some point a little later in the adventure (so that the connection with the *crystal hypnosis ball* is not obvious) the DM should pass a note to the player whose character was affected, outlining the appropriate suggestion below:

1) The crystal-bladed daggers have the ability to inject life force when wielded by someone with a pure heart. If you stab one of your friends with the blade, they will gain extra life force.

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2) The assassins with the crystal-bladed daggers are undead. They can only be killed by impaling them on a stake, like vampires. The stake must pierce the heart.

3) The wizard who confronted you at the ruined chapel has taken over the body of one of your companions. You must watch closely to figure out which one is the traitor.

4) Anyone who breaks a crystal-bladed dagger will be cursed with bad luck. This will manifest itself as an extreme vulnerability during times of battle. It's up to you to prevent this from happening by not letting your friends break the daggers.

5) Everyone except you has been marked with a magic-resistant symbol that resists all efforts to discover or erase it. The only way you're going to survive is by striking out on your own, before the assassins come for them.

6) The wizard whom you "met" at the ruined chapel knows a way out of this land. Your only hope of escape lies in making sure that he is not killed, so that he can be questioned about this escape route.

Evil Underfoot

After giving the heroes some time to interact with Mircea and his students (anywhere from a few hours to a few days) the DM needs to steer them toward the catacombs that lie beneath the Radiant Tower. There are three possible ways to do this; the DM may choose which of the following encounters is to be used, either playing through all of them in the order presented—or using just one or two.

Option 1

During a game of hide and seek, the boy Lenk goes missing. He does not show up for the next meal, and even a thorough search of the tower doesn't turn him up.

Several hours later, one of the heroes stumbles across the boy. The encounter can

take place anywhere in the tower—but should preferably be in a spot well away from room 2. Read that player the following:

You hear the loud sobbing of a child. It is Lenk! The boy sits hunched in a corner, his arms wrapped tightly around his skinny legs. His clothes are covered in dust and his hair is thick with cobwebs. His body shakes with the force of his sobs.

Looking up at you with tear-filled eyes, he holds up his right hand. The wrist is abraded and raw, weeping a trickle of blood.

"I heard you calling," he says. "I tried to come, but the chain got me."

Lenk is all but incoherent with fear. All he can tell the character is that he was in hiding in a "dark place" with "horrible dead things." Somehow he became tangled in a length of chain. If asked, he says his hiding place was inside the tower but is unable to say where.

The answer is that Lenk found the secret trap door in room 2—and followed it down into the escape tunnel. He also found the secret door in this tunnel (see **The Escape Tunnel**, page 30). If the heroes search Room 2 carefully, they find cobwebs on one of the carpets and two child-sized, dusty handprints on the floor under this carpet. The handprints mark the secret trap door, which blends so well into the floorboards that it would otherwise be invisible.

Option 2

This option should be used when one or more of the heroes are on the main floor of the tower, late at night. Perhaps they want a late-night snack, or perhaps they hear a suspicious noise.

Mircea makes regular trips to the secret escape tunnel to update the visitor book. He usually does this late at night, when the students are asleep. He carries a candle with him to light his way.

They notice this light, coming through one of the partially open doors leading to room 2. When they investigate, they startle Mircea, who has just tugged into place the carpet that hides the secret trap door. He is carrying a pot of ink and a quill pen; as the heroes enter, he jumps with fright and drops the ink onto the carpet.

Mircea is rather vague about why he has come to the lounge so late at night. He claims to have been writing some notes for tomorrow's

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lecture, yet observant characters can see that he doesn't have any paper with him.

If pressed Mircea admits that there is a trap door in the floor, leading to an underground tunnel. The tunnel emerges in an alley a block or two away and is to be used as an escape route should the Talons ever raid the

magic school. He urges the heroes to keep its existence a secret. "Not even the students know about it," he says.

Option 3

This option can be used at any time. It is the most blunt method of getting the heroes into the secret tunnel and requires no investigative skills, since Mircea shows them the way.

At some point during their stay at the Radiant Tower, the Talons discover that Mircea has bribed them with false gold created with his *fool's gold* spell. Furious at the deception, they send a unit of 50 soldiers to attack the tower. They are clearly intent on killing everyone they find inside it.

The wizard locked front door will hold the Talons off for a while, but it is clear that they will eventually succeed in battering it down. (It feels as if their battering may even bring the whole dilapidated building crashing down!)

The heroes may want to meet the threat head-on, but Mircea says that fighting back is both futile and suicidal. "There are

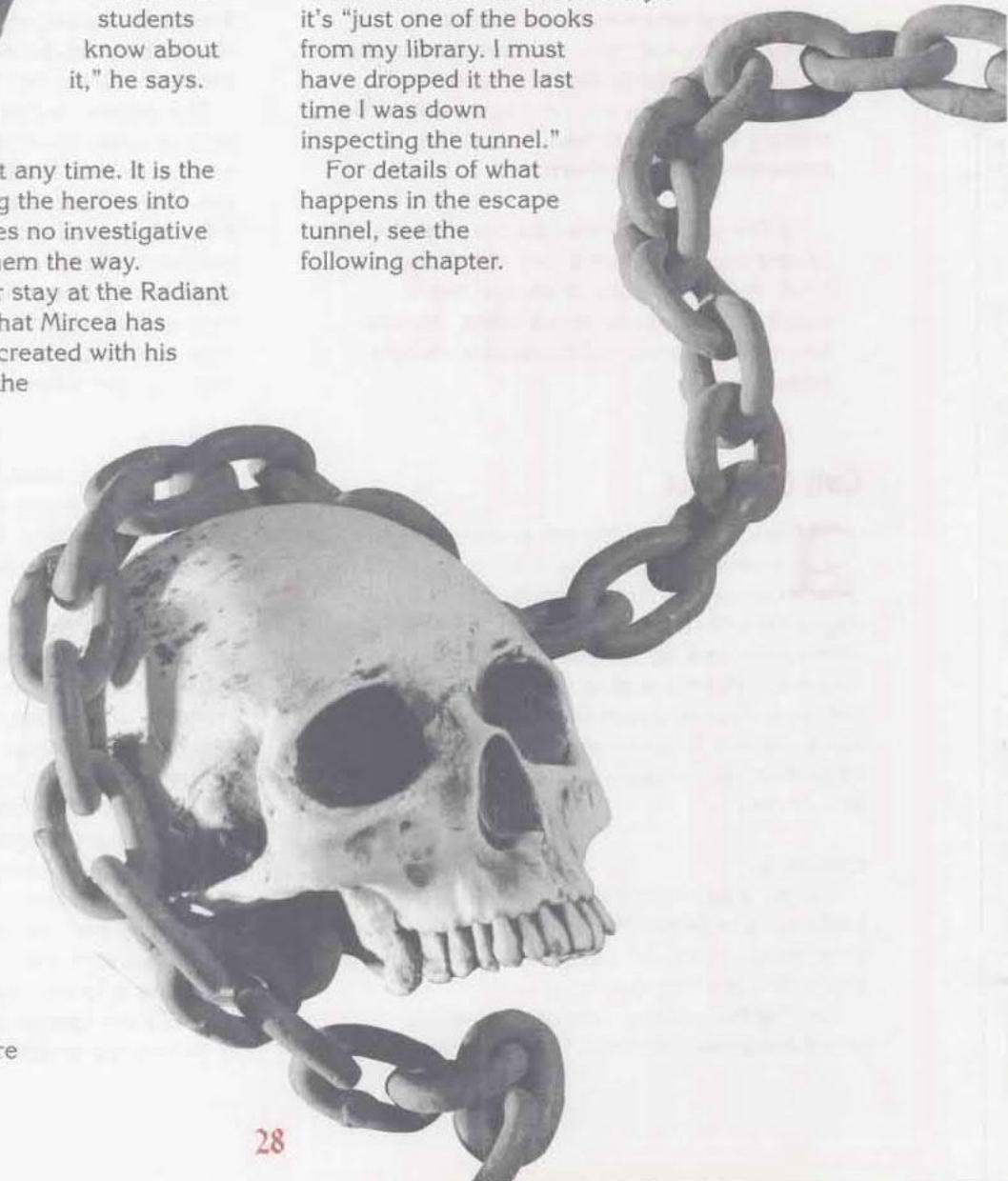
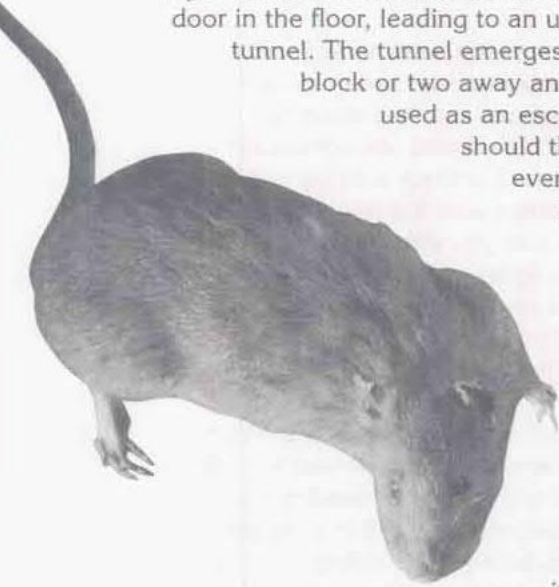
3,000 soldiers in Lekar—all of whom can be mobilized at a moment's notice," he says. "We're better off sneaking out the back door."

Mircea hurriedly packs his spell books and the school's magical items in a haversack and urges the students and heroes to gather up their own gear. He then leads everyone to room 2 and down the secret trap door into the underground tunnel. Tying a thread to the carpet, he closes the trap door behind them and pulls the carpet back into place so the Talons won't find the escape route.

"With luck, they'll think we magically vanished," he says.

He herds the students through the tunnel, which leads to an alley a couple of blocks from the school. Along the way he gathers up the visitor book from its place on the floor. If asked what it is, he says it's "just one of the books from my library. I must have dropped it the last time I was down inspecting the tunnel."

For details of what happens in the escape tunnel, see the following chapter.



Descent into Darkness

D

Death, be not proud,
though some have
called thee

Mighty and dreadful,
for thou art not so;

For those whom thou think'st thou
dost overthrow

Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst
thou kill me.

John Donne

The remainder of the adventure takes place underground, in the ancient catacombs that lie under the Radiant Tower magic school. (This area is detailed on the poster map.)

The catacombs and tower were originally built in a land far removed from Ravenloft, centuries ago, by the Czegas, a family of wizards who were responsible for performing ritual magic to preserve the dead and laying their spirits to rest. Living in the tower above, they expanded the original catacombs below, known as the Well of Bones, creating a labyrinth of secret tunnels and chambers. Here, they conducted necromantic experiments with an eye to restoring health to the sick and healing injuries. Their ultimate quest was to "awaken" the nobles who had been laid to rest below.

Increasingly, however, the Czegas' experiments took an evil turn, especially once they discovered how to prolong their own lives by hastening others to the grave. When they at last set in motion the pendulum at the heart of their labyrinth (see **Chamber 11: Pit and Pendulum** on page 45) and drew the life from hundreds of innocent victims, the tower and the catacombs below it were wrenched into Ravenloft—and the Czegas were left behind.

Stripped of their magic and wealth, they died and were buried in a paupers' graveyard.

When the Radiant Tower first appeared in Falkovnia, lights were blazing in its windows (hence the name). The tower was furnished and provisioned, but unoccupied. It was quickly appropriated and looted of its furnishings by one of the nobles of Lekar. For a time, another wealthy family lived in it. Then the magics that had sustained it began to wane, and the tower began to deteriorate markedly.

Eventually it developed a perceptible tilt and was abandoned. The lease passed to Mircea for a modest fee, and he established a home and magic school. He discovered the escape tunnel—but not the catacombs below. These were discovered by the necromancer Ladislav Sintesti, who was drawn to the dark magics that still permeate the ancient burial chambers.

In and Out of the Catacombs

If the Talons have not yet attacked the Radiant Tower, the heroes may try to use it as a base of operations, retreating to it between explorations of the catacombs. To make the adventure more of a challenge, the DM can take this place of refuge away from the heroes. Perhaps the Talon attack occurs while they are down in the catacombs, causing them to return to an empty tower from which Mircea and his students have fled (or a tower filled with dozens of angry soldiers). Or perhaps the necromancer Ladislav decides that Mircea is no longer useful and has his assassins slay the wizard and all of the students in their sleep. When the heroes return to the magic school, they find only corpses (and possibly one or two half-mad survivors).

If the characters discover the secret door in the tunnel while Mircea and his students are fleeing from the Talons, the wizard refuses to

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accompany them into the catacombs. His first priority is to get his students to a place of safety. He explains that they will flee to the city of Stangengrad, where a fellow wizard will take them in.

Mircea promises that, once the students are safe in their new home, he will return to aid the heroes. Whether or not he keeps this promise is up to the DM. If they are having a tough time of it, Mircea may appear in the catacombs to bail them out.

If the heroes have forged strong friendships with any of the students, one or two of them may accompany the characters into the catacombs as retainers. If Mircea finds out, he will forbid the students to go. Both Mircea and the hero must make a Charisma check on 1d20; the character who rolls lowest under his Charisma is the one the student will listen to. (If both rolls fail, Mircea wins by default.)

If the heroes are investigating the escape tunnel on their own, they find Mircea's visitor book lying on the floor, about 40 feet from the secret trap door. In it are recorded the names of noteworthy individuals who visited the Radiant Tower over the past year. Among the most

recent entries are the names of Hathril Hasselin and her five companions—and those of the heroes. Beside each name is recorded any magical abilities or special skills that Mircea saw the character use, as well as the address where the character is staying in Lekar. Hathril's "address" has been noted as: "Snagov Chapel, four miles southeast of Lekar." (The DM should make up appropriate entries for the heroes, based upon their interactions with Mircea.)

If confronted and asked about the book, Mircea is vague. He says only that it is a record of visitors to the Radiant Tower, and that he hid it in the escape tunnel so that the Talons would not find it.

The Escape Tunnel

The secret tunnel underneath the Radiant Tower magic school is five feet wide and curves gently to the left. The first 65 feet of it is a brick-walled, arched tunnel that pierces the foundation of the tower itself, sloping down at a gentle grade. The tunnel then straightens out and becomes more like a mine,



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with rough dirt walls that are shored up by wooden beams. This second section runs for the equivalent of two city blocks before ending under a false storm drain in the street.

Read the following when the characters first enter the tunnel:

As you lift the trap door, the smell of stale air and aging masonry fill your nostrils. Below is a narrow tunnel that curves away into darkness, hugging the foundation of the tower. It is thick with clinging cobwebs, and dust coats the floor.

Just at the point where the brick walls end is a secret door. It was built to look like part of the brick wall, but if the right sequence of bricks is depressed, it will pivot open. If any of the characters are dwarves, elves, or half-elves, use the rules for detecting shifting walls and secret doors to see if they spot it.

Option

If the heroes need help finding the secret door, the DM should have each of them make a Wisdom check on 1d20 as they pass it. The character who rolls the lowest under his wisdom sees a scrap of cloth, protruding from one wall. It is the corner of a cloak worn by an Ebon Fold assassin that has become wedged in the secret door. Read the following aloud:

Your eye is caught by a scrap of dull brown cloth that protrudes from one wall. Looking at it more closely, you see that the fabric is caught in a crack that seems to run at a right angle to the floor.

■ Although the Ebon Fold members may have recently used the secret door the dust and cobwebs that fill the underground tunnel appear undisturbed. The fact is, the assassins use a pinch of *dust of tracelessness* to hide their passage through the tunnel. (If this is the heroes' second venture into the tunnel, all marks of their previous entry have been magically erased.)

The secret door leads to area 1 on the poster map. Just inside this tunnel, hanging on a peg in the wall, is a pouch holding 1d12+1 pinches of *dust of tracelessness*. Some 30 feet beyond the secret door, the characters encounter the first of the traps that guard the Ebon Fold's lair. Read the following to the players:

It looks as though this corridor may have been used to hold prisoners at some point. Three pairs of rusted manacles hang from the walls. Below each lies a skeleton, bleached white with age and dressed in tattered rags. Rats scurry away at your approach.

The manacles are magical and act in the same manner as a *rope of entanglement*. Any character walking past them is immediately attacked by the chains, which whip out to snap around his wrists and ankles. There are six lengths of chain in all, each with a manacle at its end; up to six characters may thus be held. Like the *rope of entanglement*, the chains cannot be broken by sheer strength—their links must be smashed apart by a blunt weapon. Each chain is AC-2 and takes 22 points of damage to smash through; all damage must be inflicted by the same creature (not the one entangled). Damage under 22 points repairs itself in six turns.

A chain can be pulled out of the wall on a successful bend bars roll. Pulling it loose (or smashing it) destroys the chain's magic.

These were the chains that the student, Lenk, became entrapped in when he found this tunnel during a game of hide and seek. The boy managed to escape because his hands are so small; the manacles are designed to hold adults. Tiny characters (gnomes, for example) can also wriggle free on a successful Dexterity check. If the heroes think to smear the hands of the victims with the *oil of slipperiness* that can be found just ahead in the tunnel, a character of any size can make this attempt.

Smashing the chains makes a lot of noise; pulling them from the wall or wriggling free can be done in relative silence. Any loud noise attracts the attention of the large spider in area 2. It waits just outside the end of this tunnel, clinging to the ceiling in the Well of Bones. It makes a surprise attack on the heroes as they peer into the pit by dropping on them from above—possibly knocking one or more of them down into its web, below (see **The Well of Bones** for the spider's statistics).

The brick-lined tunnel shown on the poster map as area 1 spirals down, eventually ending in an abrupt ledge that overlooks the wide, circular pit known as the Well of Bones.

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The Well of Bones

The Well of Bones (area 2 on the poster map) is a 50-foot-wide circular area that is many stories deep. Its flat ceiling is 20 feet above the floor of the brick-walled tunnel (area 1), and its floor is 100 feet below, giving this area a total depth of 120 feet.

The last 10 feet of the tunnel that leads to the Well of Bones has been coated with *oil of slipperiness*; any character walking or standing upon it has a 95% chance per round of slipping and falling. That character must make a successful Dexterity check to avoid sliding off the edge and into the Well of Bones.

If the heroes find a way to avoid the dangers and get a good, clear view of the Well of Bones, read the following aloud:

The tunnel ends abruptly at the lip of a deep well. This circular area is perhaps 50 feet across and looks as though it descends some distance; its floor is hidden in shadow, and whispering echos reverberate below.

The walls here are made of stone. Just below your vantage point, a series of niches have been cut in a circle around the wall at regular intervals. Each is about four feet wide. Below you is a circle of 24 niches, and below that another circle of 24, and so on.

You hear a rustling sound inside one of the niches just below. Your eye is drawn to something round and white that seems to be rolling back and forth. As it at last tumbles over the edge, you recognize it as a skull. Its empty eyesockets stare sightlessly up at you as it plummets into the darkness below.

The skull was jostled loose by a rat. If the characters specifically ask whether they hear the skull land on the floor below the DM should tell them they hear nothing. (The skull became stuck in the spider's web, see below.)

If the heroes have a strong enough light source, they can see the floor below, which is lined with upright spikes—rusted, but still quite sharp and capable of impaling any who fall upon them. A fall onto these spikes does regular falling damage (1d6 points per 10 feet fallen, or 10d6 points for a fall from this ledge) plus impaling damage. Roll 1d4 to see how many spikes

impale the body of the unfortunate character. Each spike inflicts 1d6 points of damage.

Fortunately, a large spider has spun a web 70 feet below the tunnel entrance. The web acts as a safety net, preventing the character from becoming impaled on the spikes below. (If the light source was strong enough, they may have already observed the web.) Unfortunately, the spider is hungry; its regular diet of rats is hardly a satisfying one. It immediately attacks any victim who falls in its web.

If a character falls into the web (either from the tunnel above or from one of the slide traps) read the following:

Your wild plunge into darkness is broken by what feels like a safety net. You try to sit up, but find that the net is coated with an incredibly sticky paste that holds you fast. Suddenly, the net begins to vibrate. Moving toward you is a hunched shape the size of a small dog, with eight legs and gnashing mandibles. You realize that you have landed in a web—and that the spider who spun it is coming to claim its next victim!

Large Spider: AC 8; MV 6, Wb 15; HD 1+1; hp 7; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1; SA poison; SZ S (2' diameter); ML unsteady (7); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 175.

Poison: The spider's Type A venom does damage of 15/0. Because it is weak, victims get a +2 bonus to their saving throws vs. poison.
Web: Characters with a Strength of 19+ are unaffected by the web; for each point of Strength less than 19 it requires one round to break free of the sticky fibers. The spider gets a +4 bonus when attacking entangled characters, who lose any Dexterity-based Armor Class adjustments.

There are nine levels of niches in all. A handful of the niches give access to the labyrinth of secret passages and rooms that the Ebon Fold has claimed as its lair. Secret doors at the rear of these niches are activated by pressing the correct sequence of bricks.

There is no specific location for these secret entrances. Although the poster map provides a relative location for each of them, the DM should feel free to put the entrances wherever he wishes (making it easier or more difficult for the heroes to get into the labyrinth). Remember, the tunnels and passages run behind the niches,

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winding and twisting a path between the levels; the exact location of each secret entrance is not as important as the sensation of suspense and disorientation felt while walking and crawling through these corridors.

All of these niches are filled with skeletal remains—one corpse per niche. When the heroes explore a niche, read the following:

Lying inside this cramped, narrow opening is a skeletal corpse, dressed in rotted clothing. The body is intact, but its bones have been disturbed. One leg lies off to the side and is pock-marked where rats have stripped its flesh.

It is very important that the characters discover the labyrinth early in their explorations. When the first of the heroes reaches the niche below the tunnel entrance he should accidentally discover the first of the secret tunnels. As he examines (or climbs past) the niche, read the following:

Under the pressure of your hand (foot), one of the bricks slides back slowly. The enclosed area is filled with the sound of stone grinding on stone and a dank, musty draft blows in your face. A section of the wall has opened to reveal a passageway, only a few feet high, which extends back into the earth. From down the tunnel you can see tiny eyes looking back at you curiously. Then they disappear as the rats scurry into the darkness.

Corridors of Corruption

The burial chambers that lie beyond the Well of Bones were designed to hold the corpses of the nobility—those who were deemed worthy of an eventual “awakening” from death. The corridors leading to these rich burials were well protected by a series of traps, which have since been augmented with magical wards set by Ladislas. Members of the Ebon Fold are fully aware of these traps and know how to avoid them.

There are two types of corridors—*high* (whose ten-foot ceiling allows characters to walk upright) and *low* (those that are only a few feet high, in which the characters must crawl). Both are five feet wide, with stone walls. The

corridors may be level or may follow an upward or downward slope.

There are also a number of vertical connecting shafts. These are square and are five feet wide on each side. Some have ladders, while others are sheer drops.

When a trap is sprung, read the appropriate description below to the player:

Slide Trap. Suddenly, a portion of the floor falls away. You tumble into a shaft that slopes away at a steep angle. The walls and floor are slippery with grease. As you slide headlong, the trap door above swings shut, plunging you into darkness.

The slide leads to one of the niches in the Well of Bones. Unless the character can stop the descent, he is ejected into area 2 and suffers falling damage and impalement on the spikes below. If the exit niche is on level 1–6 and the spider web is still intact, the web acts as a safety net. (See the **Well of Bones** section, page 32.)

Ladder Trap. While climbing (descending) a ladder, you suddenly feel a sharp pain in your hand (foot). As blood wells in the wound, you can see that the rung of the ladder is not round, after all, but instead is a sharpened blade!

The vertical metal ladder is normal for the first three feet at the top and bottom. The middle section, however, consists of rungs made of razor-sharp blades, made to appear round by a padding of soft black soap. Anyone gripping a blade-rung (if climbing) or stepping onto one (if descending) suffers 1d4 points of damage to a hand or foot. If this is a rapid ascent or descent, the damage increases to 2d4 points; the victim grasps or steps on more than one rung before the damage is felt. The blades can cut through glove or boot leather, but not through metal gauntlets.

At the DM's discretion, the victim may also need to make a successful Dexterity check to stay on the ladder. A failed check results in normal falling damage.

Drop Trap. You could have sworn the corridor was solid here, but suddenly there is nothing below you! Tumbling wildly, you fall into a vertical shaft that was not there a moment ago.

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A simple covered pit (a hole in the floor covered by a cloth and a thin layer of dirt) has been made undetectable by means of the *nondetection* spell. The bottom of this shaft has been lined with caltrops. The victim suffers normal falling damage, plus 1d4+2 points of damage from the caltrops.

Note: Due to its magical concealment, this trap can not be detected using the *Eye of the Certain Path*.

Water Trap. A heavy stone falls into place behind you, blocking the corridor. You hear a grating noise

above as a hole opens in the ceiling.

Water begins to pour through the hole, rapidly filling the corridor.

A successful bend bars roll is required to lift the stone that blocks the corridor.

Within 10 rounds, the corridor will be full and the victim begins to drown. To escape (and then only into the dead-end corridor that held the water) the character must shed bulky equipment and armor and make a successful open doors roll (representing the force needed to widen the hole enough to squeeze through it.) Tiny characters—gnomes, for example—squeeze through automatically.

The air in this upper chamber will run out in 1d4 hours (2d4 hours for a small or tiny character). Kindly DMs may deem that a section of wall has been weakened, giving the character a chance to dig his way out.

Exploding Inscription. A niche in the wall holds a skeletal corpse. Above the niche is a brass plaque, on which an inscription has been engraved. The inscription is encrusted with dirt, and is difficult to read.

Reading the inscription triggers an *explosive runes* spell. The reader suffers 6d4+6 points of damage.

Chambers of Horror

The secret burial chambers that are connected to the Well of Bones now are used by the Ebon Fold as a hideout. Some have been cleared of corpses and converted into living or working spaces, while others remain in their original condition.

The heroes may explore these chambers in any order. Ideally, they should experience at least some of the encounters described in this section before moving on to the next chapter and the final confrontation with Ladislas.

Several of the entries for the chambers include a section titled **Ladislas's Opportunity**. These optional encounters suggest possible sniping attacks by Ladislas. Whenever the necromancer appears before the heroes in person (as opposed to casting spells at them from hiding), he first uses his *magic jar* spell to occupy the body of a member of the Ebon Fold. His real body remains hidden within 120 feet (usually behind a secret door) so that he can jump back to it if necessary. DMs should remember that every time Ladislas uses the *magic jar* spell he also uses up one of his available 5th-level spells for the day (so he can do it no more than 5 times per day). The more sniping attacks he makes, the less effective he will be in the final confrontation.

Ladislas will vacate the host body if it is in danger of being slain. Should he not be quick enough, however, refer to the section **Combat**, on page 58 for details on what happens next.

Ladislas Sintesti (in Ebon Fold host body)
hm/hf, W12: AC 8 (Dex bonus); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 10; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg special (see *Death Shards* page 61); SA spells; SD spells; MR 10%; SZ M (5'2"); ML elite (14); Int genius (17); AL NE; XP 120.

By now, the heroes may know about Ladislas's phobia of dogs and may be using it against him; a barking dog (or a passable imitation of one) is often enough to drive the necromancer away. Ladislas's other two weaknesses are revealed in the two encounters described below, which should be run before moving on to the next chapter.

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A Meal of Maggots

If Ladislas ever has the heroes at his mercy after one of his sniping attacks (if, for example, he manages to capture or temporarily incapacitate any of them) the DM can give the players a respite and at the same time reveal one of the necromancer's weaknesses. Read the following to the players:

You are certain that the assassin's next move will be to kill you. But instead he turns his attention to something on the floor. Scooping up a dead rat, he begins plucking wriggling white maggots from it. He pops them into his mouth and chews contentedly, eyes closed with pleasure.

This gives the heroes an opportunity to escape or attack. If they attempt the latter, Ladislas realizes his error and immediately vacates the host body. The Ebon Fold member, upon being returned to his own body, grimaces with disgust and spits out the half-chewed maggots.

Note: DMs with a theatrical bent may wish to purchase a soft white candy and act out Ladislas's craving for maggots.

The Master's Bath

This encounter can be placed in any of the high corridors (those tall enough to stand up in). It offers the heroes a chance to learn a vital clue. Read the players the following:

You hear footsteps up ahead, then a thud and the sloshing of water.

"Watch out!" a voice cries out fearfully.

"You nearly splashed me!"

"Don't worry," another voice says in a reassuring tone. "If it kills you, the master will bring you back to life."

The speakers are two Ebon Fold members. They are carrying wooden buckets that are filled with water that Ladislas used to wash off the contact poison that he coats his skin with; these two have been assigned the task of emptying it down a shaft. Only one of them is armed with a *death shard*, held in a sheath at his belt. The other is a new (and somewhat timid) recruit to the Ebon Fold.

The bath water is more than a week old. The Type N contact poison that was dissolved into it

now is quite weak; a good splash of it inflicts just 1 point of damage.

If the heroes can capture and interrogate either assassin, they can learn that Ladislas is protected from his coating of contact poison by a magical ring, which he can wear for only seven days at a time. (Ladislas has worn the ring since the day the heroes entered Falkovnia.) They can also get a good description of the necromancer from their captive.

The heroes will probably need to use magic to interrogate the more confident assassin, but the recruit is still dubious about his new master's powers and will speak freely if threatened. Unfortunately, he knows little about the layout of the lair or about Ladislas; he can divulge only the information given above.

Chamber 1: Dark Tomes

This chamber is accessed by a long vertical shaft. There is no ladder; the heroes will either have to find a way to climb it or use magical means to make the ascent. At the bottom of the shaft is a pile of bleached bones—the remains of the corpses that were originally buried in the chamber above.

The chamber is closed off with a metal door that has a *hold portal* spell cast upon it. Once the heroes are past this obstacle, read the following:

As the door opens, black candles inside this chamber burst into light. They burn with flickering red flames, casting eerie shadows and filling the air with tainted smoke.

This chamber is lined with niches—all of them now filled with books bound in cracked leather. A shiny black coffin on the floor seems to be in use as a makeshift table; papers are strewn across it, and a quill pen sits in an inkwell made from a gilded human skull. A black silk pillow has been placed in front of the coffin as a seat.



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This chamber is guarded by a homonculus, who attacks anyone that touches the coffin, the papers on it, or the books.

Homonculus: AC 6; MV 6, FI 18 (B); HD 2; hp 11; THACO 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (bite); SA bite causes sleep; SD saves as 12th-level wizard; MR 50%, saves as 7-HD monster; SZ M; ML Elite (14); Int genius (17); AL NE; XP 270.

Sleep: Victims of the homonculus's bite must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or fall into a comatose sleep for 5d6 minutes.

The homonculus is telepathically linked to Ladislav and sends him an immediate warning that intruders are in the library. If the homonculus is destroyed, Ladislav suffers 2d10 points of damage. Thus he telepathically urges it to flee, rather than fight to the death.

The papers on the coffin-table are notations on variations to necromantic spell formulas. Also among the papers is a recently penned letter. Give the players **Player Handout 4: Letter from Ladislav**.

The books in the niches are primarily nonmagical texts dealing with death, vivisection, anatomy, burial customs, and embalming. They are embossed with a heraldic device (a skull enclosed in a necromantic symbol) and the name Czega; they were originally the property of the wizards who built the catacombs. One is a notebook, entitled "Clock of Ages," that includes sketches of what looks like the pendulum of a gigantic, square-shafted grandfather clock. (It's actually a sketch of **Chamber 11: Pit and Pendulum**.)

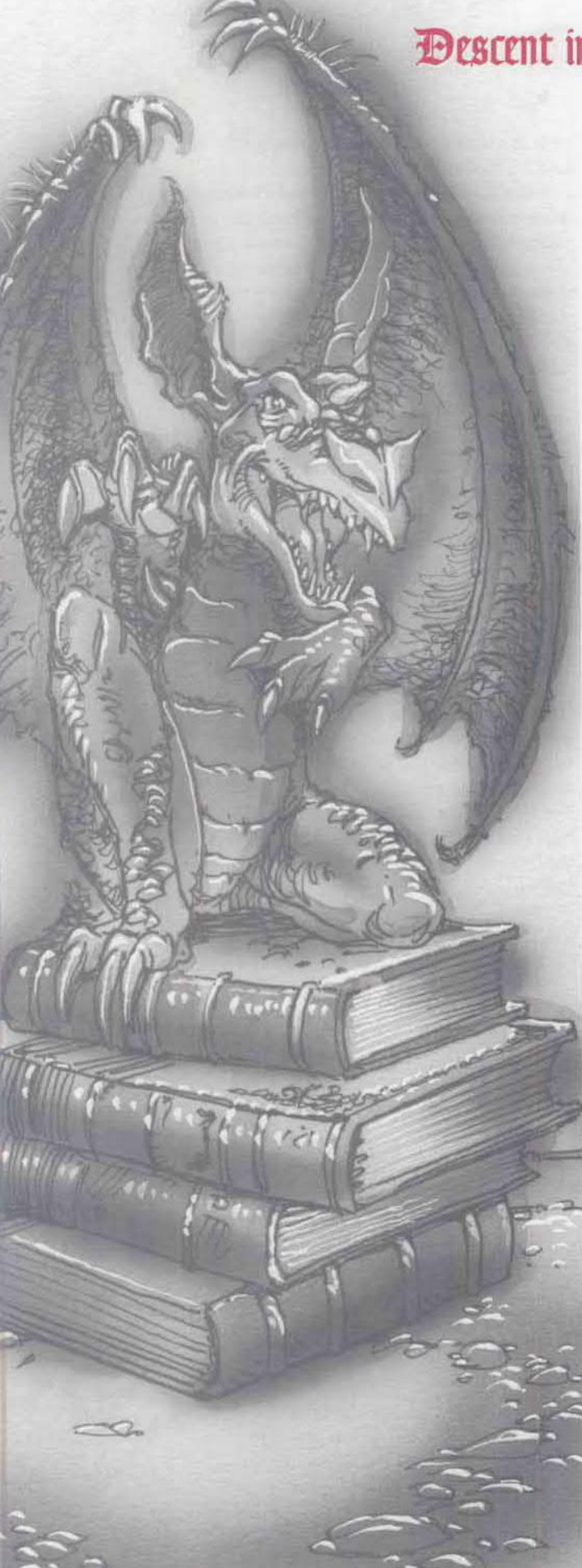
The coffin is empty, aside from writing materials (blank papers), candles, and a vial of *oil of timelessness*, used to preserve the texts.

Ladislav's Opportunity

While the heroes are inside the library, Ladislav fills the vertical shaft that leads to it with a wall of fog. Then, in the possessed body of one of the Ebon Fold assassins, he uses *spider climb* to maneuver partway up the shaft. As the characters descend, he lashes out with a *death shard*, trying to stab them as they go past.

Chamber 2: Shallow Graves

Although the catacombs have not been used in centuries, thieves in Lekar discovered them



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some time ago and used them as a hiding and meeting place. (Indeed, it was these rogues who first told Ladislav of this place.) This chamber was used as a burial ground for their victims, several dozen of whom lie buried in shallow graves in its earthen floor. The yearning of their spirits for justice has manifested a rather unusual effect; read the players the following:

As you cross the floor of this empty chamber, you feel a drop of something warm and wet on your skin. A round red stain has appeared on your arm, and now another appears beside it.

The liquid—which smells and looks like blood—seems to be dripping from the ceiling, whose crevices have taken on the appearance of lacerated flesh!

The blood is real; only a few drops of it fall on each character. Most of it seems to be dripping on specific spots on the floor. If the heroes look closely, they can see telltale signs of burial—a white bit of bone or a tattered bit of cloth—just visible under the soil.

The blood continues to drip, gradually forming a damp pattern on the ground. The letters form, "AVENGE ME! DESTROY THE SKULL!"

They can unearth a corpse with a minimum of digging. It shows signs of violence, perhaps a wire around the neck (used to strangle the victim) or an obviously broken or cut bone. One of the corpses was carrying, in his pocket, a vial of *Keoghtom's ointment* that was somehow overlooked by the robbers. This ivory jar now lies beside his skeletal corpse.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav is unable to animate these corpses. He instead uses a *slow* spell against the heroes. He then uses his *passwall* spell to travel through the floor, emerging, in the possessed body of one of his assassins, from among the corpses for a surprise attack with a *death shard*.

Chamber 3: Unblinking Eyes

This chamber is filled with upright sarcophagi that resemble statues. Each holds a corpse. As the heroes enter the area, read the following:

This chamber is filled with a number of statues, each a finely carved stone figure of a man or woman in noble dress. All were once painted in bright colors, but now this paint is faded and chipped.

Each of the statues is set with extremely realistic eyes, made of fine polished stone. They seem to be watching your every move.

If the characters inspect the statues closely, they can see that each has a hairline crack, running up one side, across the top, and down the other side. By pressing a hidden button near its base, they can cause the lid to spring open like a door. When this happens, add the following:

It seems that the statue is in fact a repository of some sort. A lid springs open at the touch of the button, and a musty puff of dust assails your nostrils. At the same time, a desiccated husk of a corpse tumbles out into the room.

The corpse is just that—an ordinary body, old, dry, and brittle.

For each sarcophagus that the heroes explore, there is a 25% chance (noncumulative) that they will find a single piece of jewelry of a value not more than 500 gp. However, taking the jewelry constitutes graverobbing and requires the heroes to make a powers check.

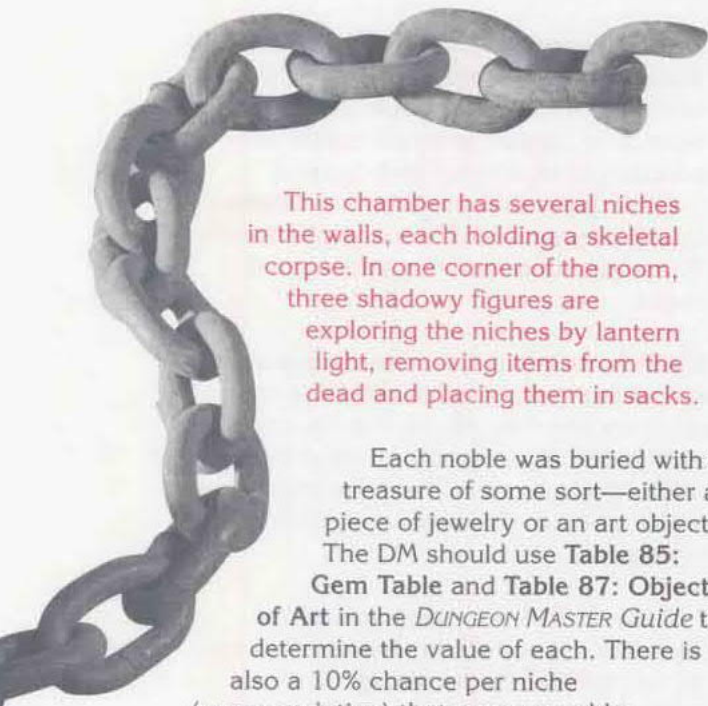
Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav is watching this area with a *wizard eye*. If the heroes start to open the sarcophagi, he chooses one that he knows to be empty and *teleports* a member of the Ebon Fold into it, then uses the *magic jar* spell to possess the body. Ideally, this will be the third or fourth sarcophagus that the characters open, and the characters will have relaxed somewhat. Ladislav then springs out, making a surprise attack with a *death shard*.

Chamber 4: Bone Pickers

Due to the complexity of the catacombs and the large number of secret doors, the Ebon Fold is still discovering new chambers. This chamber is one that they have only recently begun to investigate; read the following to the players:

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This chamber has several niches in the walls, each holding a skeletal corpse. In one corner of the room, three shadowy figures are exploring the niches by lantern light, removing items from the dead and placing them in sacks.

Each noble was buried with a treasure of some sort—either a piece of jewelry or an art object. The DM should use **Table 85: Gem Table** and **Table 87: Objects of Art** in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* to determine the value of each. There is also a 10% chance per niche (noncumulative) that a nonreusable magical item such as a potion or a scroll was interred with the corpse.

The DM should roll to see how many niches the Ebon Fold members have plundered. (If there are ten niches, roll 1d10.) The treasure from these niches is in a sack that one of the assassins is carrying; if the heroes attack, he flees with this treasure.

When the heroes enter, at least one or two of the Ebon Fold members will be inside a niche. These assassins hide quietly, waiting for the chance to make a surprise attack with a *death shard*.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav takes control of one of the assassins that is hidden and waits until the others are fighting the heroes. He then casts *wall of fog* in order to cause confusion and increase the assassins' chances of successfully backstabbing the heroes. Finally, he uses his *animate dead* spell to bring two or three of the as yet undisturbed skeletons to life.

The skeletons are the remains of 6th-level warriors, knights and retainers from another land who were buried here centuries ago. They no longer have weapons; Ladislav uses them instead to distract or grapple and hold the characters, creating even better opportunities for the *death shard*-wielding assassins. If all the others are defeated, he will vacate the body and leave the last assassin to his fate.

Each successful attack by a skeleton means that one of the heroes' arms is gripped; that character must make a successful open doors roll to break free. The victim may continue attempting this roll once per round. Until the roll succeeds, the character's Armor Class is penalized by +1 per grappling skeleton.

Chamber 5: Treasury Trap

The corridor ends in a locked wooden door. If the heroes succeed in picking the lock and opening the door, read the following:

The chamber beyond the door appears to have been used as a prison cell. A pile of dirty straw lies in a corner beside two lengths of chain that end in manacles. The cell is currently unoccupied.

The chamber beyond the locked door appears to be utterly empty, except for some manacles attached to a wall and a dirty pile of straw (placed here to disguise it as a prison). In fact, the room is full of treasure, hidden by a liberal sprinkling of *dust of disappearance*. The treasure was looted from corpses in the catacombs (treasure type D), and from victims of the Ebon Fold. Any valuables taken from the characters can be found here.

This chamber is guarded at all times by two members of the Ebon Fold. They are stationed behind a secret door, and through a peephole they watch the locked wooden door that leads to this chamber. They are under standing orders to attack any strangers who try to remove the valuables found in this chamber. Their tactics involve one member trying to lock the intruders inside the chamber while the other goes for reinforcements (using the secret passage). If this tactic works, the heroes face a force of ten Ebon Fold members, who open the door and rush them, attacking with *death shards*.

If forced to attack the heroes, the guard who is not running for help uses *dust of disappearance* to make himself invisible, then slips out through the secret door to attack with a *death shard*. A bag of this magical dust hangs inside the guard post; it contains 1d6+1 pinches after the guard has used it.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Instead of running for reinforcements, the second guard finds Ladislav and tells him about

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the intruders. The necromancer orders the two guards to use the *dust of disappearance* to make themselves invisible and to station themselves in the corridor that leads to the treasure chamber. He then lures the heroes into range of these assassins by using a *telekinesis* spell to cause valuables to float down the corridor toward the spot where the guards are waiting, ready to attack with *death shards*.

Chamber 6: Dining With the Dead

This chamber is used by the Ebon Fold as a meeting place. Here, they eat their meals surrounded by the corpses of the dead nobles.

The corridor leading to this chamber is lined with six stone statues (three on either side) of warriors in plate-mail armor. Each has been carved with skeletal head and hands. Ladislav has placed a permanent *magic mouth* spell on each of them; any time a character walks past, they chorus (two at a time) the following greetings: "Welcome, friend, to the feast of the dead." "Their years shall give life to the living." "Will you join us, or be consumed by us?"

When the heroes enter this chamber, four members of the Ebon Fold are dining here. Read the following to the players:

This chamber is dominated by a rough wooden table, on which a meal has been set. Goblets hold a blood-red beverage, while slabs of partially cooked meat, still pink with blood, lie on serving platters.

Around the table sit four living figures, two men and two women, and four skeletons, which have been propped up in their chairs with food and drink placed before them. The living converse and laugh with one another, while the dead sit motionless, silently contemplating the gruesome repast.

Other skeletal figures lie in niches in the walls. Red candles have been placed in their bony fingers and eye sockets; the sputtering candlelight sends flickering shadows across the scene.

At the back of the room, set into the floor, are two low fountains in which red liquid bubbles.

If the heroes can sneak up on the Ebon Fold members, they can observe them eating and drinking. One raises his glass and proposes a toast: "To filling the skull—and to life eternal."

If, however, they make any noise (or trigger any of the *magic mouth* spells) the Ebon Fold members are watching the entrance to this chamber, expecting to see some of their companions enter. Unless the heroes are somehow able to persuade the Ebon Fold

members that they have any business being here, the assassins immediately pull out their daggers and attack.

The "bubbling red liquid" in the fountains and goblets seems to be ordinary red wine, but has the same magical properties as a *potion of longevity*—and an incredible kick. Each subsequent glass consumed within a 24-hour period will require the character to make a saving throw vs. poison to avoid suffering a loss of coordination; each failed roll results in the loss of 1 point of Dexterity for the next two hours. (All results are cumulative.)

The meat has not been properly cooked; anyone foolish enough to eat it has a 10% chance of succumbing to severe intestinal and stomach cramps (see the section on *Disease* on page 56 for details).

Lying on the floor beside one of the fountains is a magical item—a *flask of curses*. Anyone touching this ornate silver decanter must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or succumb to a compulsion to drink large amounts of any beverage that resembles blood (the wine in the fountain, for example). After a period of 3d4 days, this compulsion shifts to a yearning to drink a cup of actual blood. The affected character must make a successful Wisdom check each day to resist this urge until this curse is lifted.

Ladislav's Opportunity

The seated skeletons are mere table decorations—corpses pulled from the niches in the wall that have been set up as "dinner companions" by someone with a macabre



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sense of humor. Ladislav, however, can use his *animate dead* spell to bring them to life.

The skeletons are the remains of 6th-level warriors, royal princes from another land who were buried here centuries ago. They no longer have weapons; Ladislav uses them instead to grapple and hold the characters, who are then attacked by the *death shard*-wielding assassins.

Each successful attack by a skeleton means that one of the heroes' arms is gripped; that character must make a successful open doors roll to break free. The victim may attempt this roll once per round. Until the roll succeeds, the character's Armor Class is penalized by 1 point per grappling skeleton.

Skeletons (4): AC 7; MV 12; HD 6; hp 35 each; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg nil; SA grapple; SD immune to cold, half damage from edged or piercing weapons; SW holy water, turning; MR immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *fear*, and *hold* spells; SZ M (6'2"); ML fearless (20); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 650 each.

Chamber 7: Whispers in the Dark

No matter how bright the light source being used, this chamber seems perpetually gloomy and shadow-filled. Read the players the following:

This gloomy chamber is a veritable storehouse of coffins of every size and description that have been jumbled together in an untidy pile. Some are made of polished wood with ornate brass fittings and yellowed silk cushions, while still others are made from rough-hewn fir. All are intricately carved with scenes of whirling dancers, bears, and covered wagons.

The coffins are empty, their lids ajar. From each, a ghostly whisper seems to issue: "Come! See your future. Come see how you will look in the final repose."

If any of the characters looks directly into a coffin, that character must make a saving throw vs. spell. If the roll fails, the character sees an image of a dead body—his own! The corpse is



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ghastly to look at, either mutilated by wounds or horribly disfigured by disease. The hero must immediately make a horror check.

These coffins were created by a mad Vistani woodworker who had the fortuneteller's gift. She thought that customers might enjoy seeing how death would come (and at what age). Naturally enough, not a single coffin sold. They were slated to be burned—but instead the Ebon Fold gathered them up and now amuse themselves by peering inside them.

Rather than telling the future, the coffins actually manifest a phantasm, drawn from the onlooker's worst fears of death. A character who feared spiders, for example, might see her body riddled with spider bites, while a character who feared strangulation would see a deep bruise across his neck.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav chooses one of the characters who saw his own body inside a coffin and then casts a *curse* upon that character (using the *spectral hand* spell to cast from a distance). If that character fails a saving throw vs. spell, he will see the same phantasm that appeared within the coffin every time he looks at a suitable receptacle for the dead (a coffin, sarcophagus, or niche in the wall, for example). Each time this happens, the hero must make a horror check.

Ladislav's aim is to separate the character from the others by causing that character to blindly run away in fear. When this happens, Ladislav attacks through a possessed Ebon Fold member with a *death shard*.

Chamber 8: Dreams of the Dead

This chamber was once the tomb of a wealthy family. Now the skeletons that occupied the six niches in its walls have been pushed onto the floor and members of the Ebon Fold sleep in these makeshift bunks. Three of the assassins are in the room when the characters enter. Read the players the following.

The floor of this gloomy chamber is strewn with human bones. Perhaps half a dozen skeletons lie tangled together on the floor.

Six niches have been carved into the rear wall. In three of them candles flicker, casting a sickly yellow light. In the other three niches, shadowy forms are stirring. It seems you have disturbed the slumber of whatever creatures are inhabiting this tomb!

If the heroes hesitate, the Ebon Fold assassins awake and leap from the niches. They attack the heroes with *death shards*.

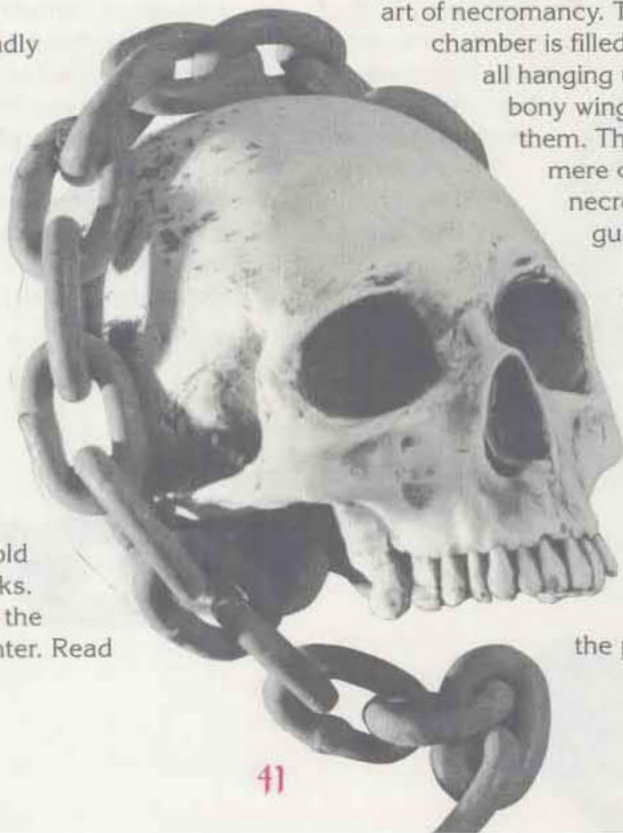
Ladislav's Opportunity

One of the Ebon Fold members in the niches is Ladislav, who has used his *magic jar* spell to take over the body of this minion. He has cast a *feign death* spell upon himself and remains still while the other two assassins attack. If the heroes inspect this "corpse" (which has a gold ring with a value of 100 gp on one finger) Ladislav attacks with a *death shard* that is concealed up his sleeve. He automatically gains surprise.

Chamber 9: Ladislav's Laboratory

In this chamber (which was used by the Czego wizards before him), Ladislav performs his magical experiments, delving ever deeper into the art of necromancy. The high ceiling of this chamber is filled with 24 skeletal bats, all hanging upside down with their bony wings wrapped around them. These are more than mere companions for the necromancer; they also guard this area.

The door leading to this chamber is made of black wrought iron and has a *hold portal* spell cast upon it. The entrance is further protected by a drop trap. Once the heroes get past these obstacles, read the following to the players:



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This large chamber is filled with laboratory equipment. On tables made from dark, highly polished wood sit beakers, filters, crucibles, retorts, and funnels—all the tools of the wizard's trade. Blue fires flicker inside metal braziers, casting an eerie light. On shelves above and behind the tables are several urns, made of brass and silver. They look like those used to hold the ashes of the dead.

Sounds echo off the walls and high ceiling of this chamber. In addition to your footsteps, you can hear a strange rattling noise, similar to the shaking of dice. The noise stops as suddenly as it started, and the room is still once more.

The source of the noise is impossible to pinpoint. If the characters specifically look up, however, add the following:

Several bundles of bone-white sticks are attached to the ceiling. They hang there, swaying slightly, and occasionally making a faint clicking noise as the sticks tap against one another.

These "bundles" are skeletal bats, which Ladislav created using an *animate dead* spell. They remain motionless until the heroes attempt to touch or move any of Ladislav's laboratory equipment. When this happens, all 24 of the skeletal bats swoop down. Those viewing them in flight must make a successful fear check in order not to flee this area.

The bats attack the offending character until the laboratory equipment is dropped, then pick it up in their claws and return it to its proper place. They then return to the ceiling.

The burial urns are used by Ladislav to store material components for spells. If the heroes are looking for components used in a necromantic spell, they will definitely be here. There is a 5%–20% chance that any other type of component can be found (adjust the percentage depending on the rarity of the item).

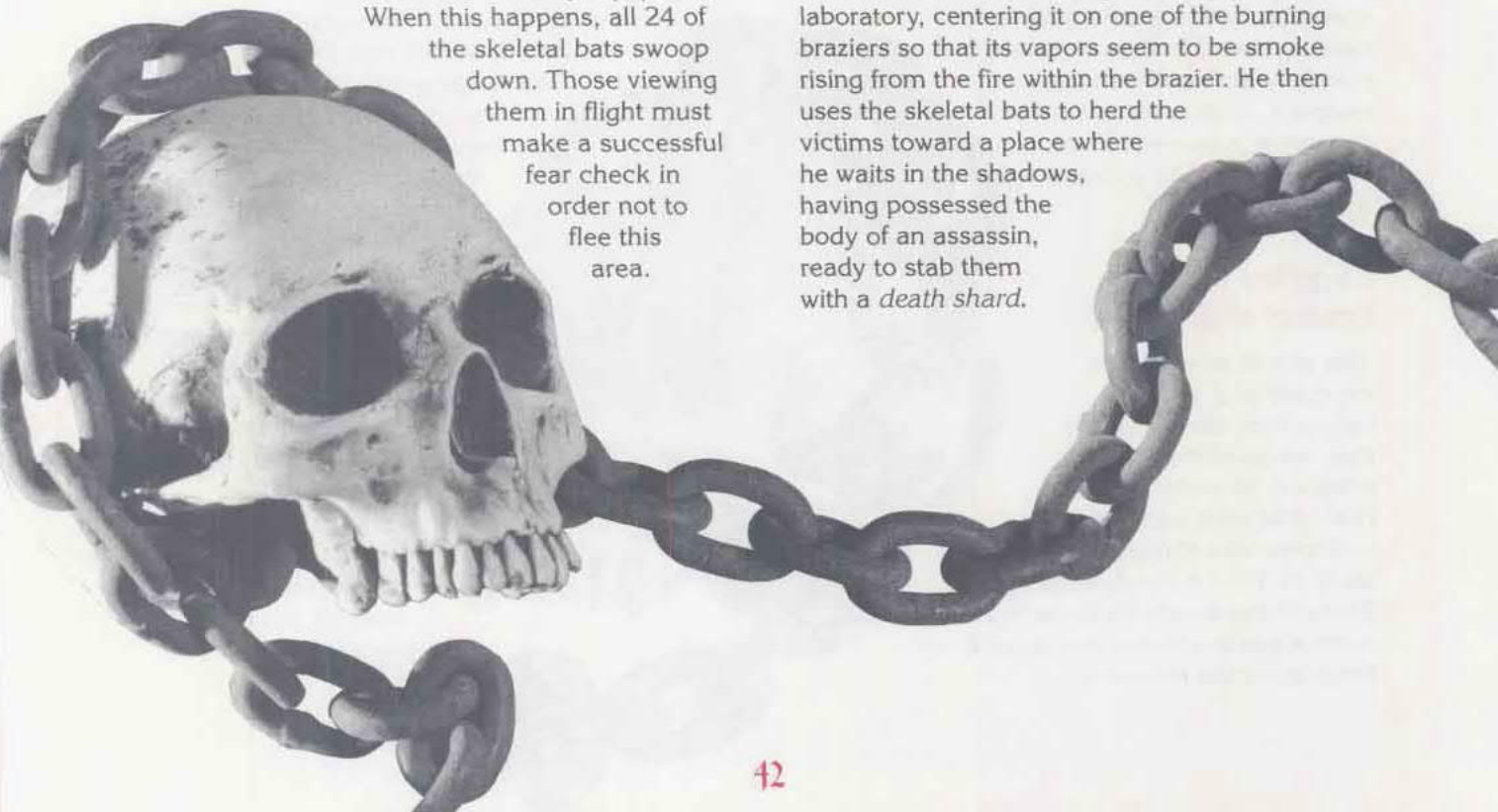
Laying open on the bench is a crumpled map. It has been scribbled on and altered so many times that it is currently indecipherable. On it, Ladislav has written: "Another chamber searched, and nothing but bones! Where did the Czegas sleep? Must search again, after the newcomers are dealt with."

Skeletal Bats (Bat, Ravenloft) (24): AC 5; MV 1 Fl 15 (C); HD 1–1; hp 3 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (claw); SD fear aura; SW holy water, turning; SZ T (1' long); ML fearless (20); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 65 each.

Fear aura: Those viewing a skeletal bat must make a fear check; a bonus of +1 is allowed on the check for every 3 full Hit Dice that the victim has.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav casts a *stinking cloud* spell in the laboratory, centering it on one of the burning braziers so that its vapors seem to be smoke rising from the fire within the brazier. He then uses the skeletal bats to herd the victims toward a place where he waits in the shadows, having possessed the body of an assassin, ready to stab them with a *death shard*.



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Chamber 10: The Mournful Dead

This chamber is entered as the result of triggering one of the traps leading to it. Ideally, only one character will wind up in this chamber. Being alone in this area will make it all the more terrifying. Read the player the following:

Your fall is broken by something soft and squishy. A putrid smell fills the air.

The area in which you find yourself is utterly dark. To either side of you are sharp, pointed objects with a cold, metal feel.

All around you now, a ghostly whisper has arisen. "Getzi!" they mourn. "Getzi was unjustly killed!"

As the whisper builds into a wail, you can see faintly luminescent shapes whirling around you. Trails of ghostly vapor brush against your skin, leaving you shivering.

"Getziiii! Getziiii!" the shapes wail.

Then a single ghostly form, more distinct than the others, rises from the corpse you landed upon. It sits up, passing through you with a rush of cold, then turns and looks you in the eye. You can see it clearly. It is the glowing white shape of a man whose body is twisted and bent, as if most of his bones had been broken. Indeed, the more-solid patches of white that poke out through the skin appear to be the jagged stumps of broken bones.

"Get off of my body," it whispers in an echoing voice. "How dare you defile the dead!"

The sight of so many apparent ghosts is cause for the hero to make a fear check. Failure means flight through an utterly dark room and results in the character suffering 1d4+2 points of injury from the caltrops that litter the floor. This headlong flight ends with the terrified character slamming into a stone wall for another point of damage.

In fact, the apparitions are not harmful. The only spirit in this room is that of Getzi—a greater geist. All of the mourners are illusionary figments of his imagination. Their wailing soothes Getzi, who in life had no friends to mourn him.

Getzi was a member of the Ebon Fold until a few weeks ago, when he disobeyed one of Ladislas's direct orders. Getzi's refusal to kill a

woman whom he was secretly in love with infuriated Ladislas, who had Getzi tossed in this empty cavern as a punishment. Getzi died here and now his ghostly form harbors a bitter grudge against the necromancer.

As long as the hero acts in a friendly manner and sympathizes with Getzi (and especially if he offers to honor Getzi by saying last rites over his body or shows some other mark of respect for the dead) Getzi will be talkative and helpful. He can name the necromancer and describe his true appearance, and he can provide information on Ladislas's propensity for taking over the bodies of others via a *magic jar* spell. He knows that Ladislas smears his body with contact poison and that he must wash it off every seven days. He does not know why, however (Ladislas' *ring of vitality*).

Getzi can also tell the hero that the *death shards* are only a conduit for the life force that they steal. This energy is stored in a crystal skull, hidden somewhere in the catacombs.

"By destroying this skull, you can destroy Ladislas," he says. (This is not quite correct.)

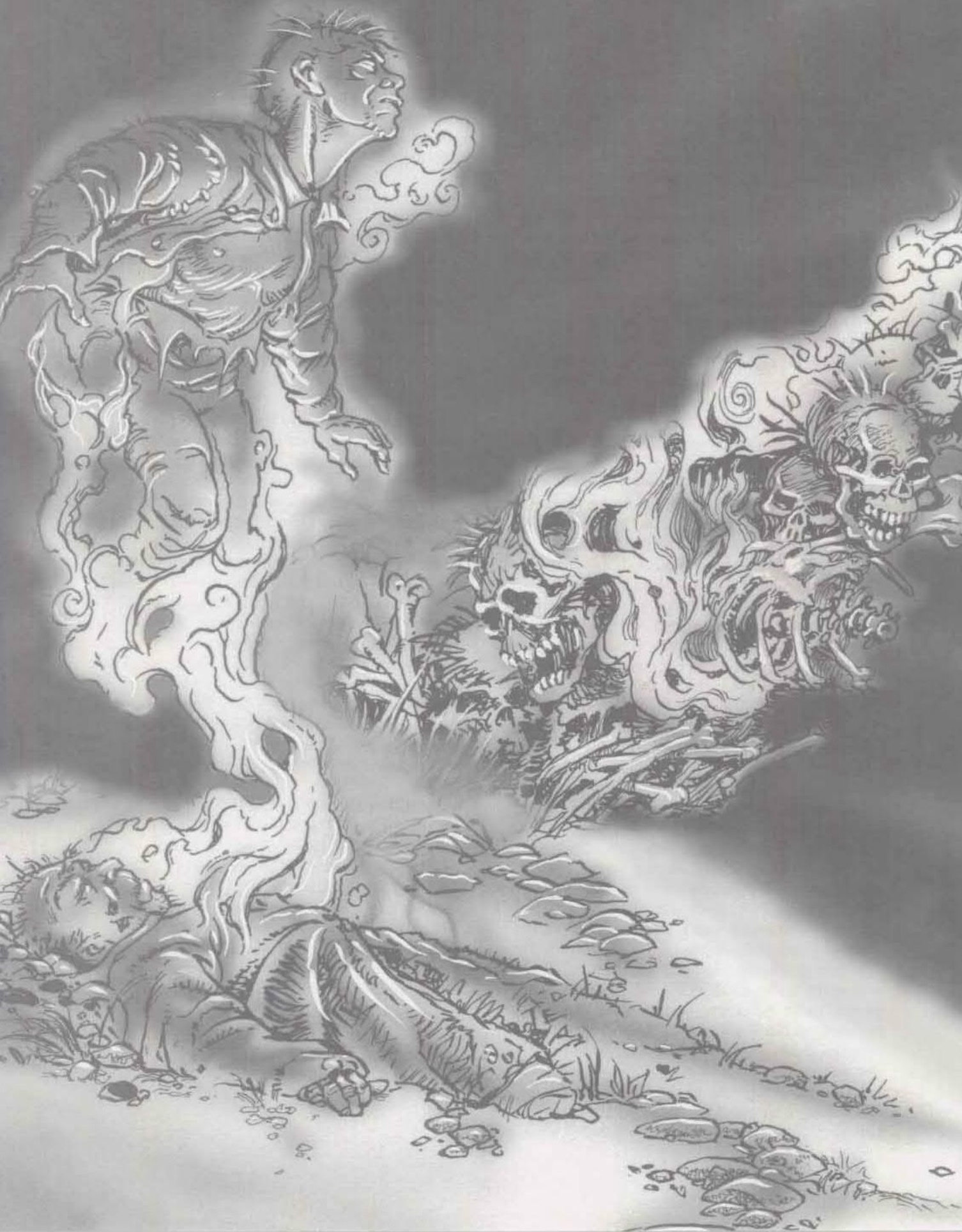
Rather than volunteering the above information, the DM should wait until the hero asks for it. The one thing Getzi does let slip is that much of the magic in the catacombs is powered by something called "the clockworks." He can offer no details, however.

Getzi can also show the hero a way out of this chamber—through a secret door in one wall. "If only I had lived to discover this, I might have exacted my revenge on Ladislas in person," Getzi says mournfully.

The geist cannot leave this chamber.

Getzi (Greater Geist): AC 10; MV FI 12; HD nil; hp nil; THACO nil; #AT none; Dmg none; SA panic; SD invulnerable; MR 100%; SZ M (5'6"); ML fearless (20); Int avg (10); AL N; XP 0.

Panic: Characters seeing a geist must make a successful fear check or flee in panic from it. *Invulnerability:* A geist can be "hit," but all attacks pass harmlessly through its body. It likewise is unable to strike another character.



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Chamber 11: Pit and Pendulum

This high-ceilinged chamber spans several levels of the catacombs, and has a number of corridors leading to it. Its square walls are carved from same material as the Well of Bones—but there are no niches here.

When the heroes reach this area, read the players the following:

The corridor you were following ends abruptly at an edge. There is a gap of perhaps 15 feet, and then the corridor begins again.

In between is a square room whose floor lies far below and whose ceiling is high overhead. Its walls are of smooth stones, fitted so closely together that you doubt that you could insert a knife between them.

Below, you can see a tangle of white bones that completely carpets the floor. Above, you see an object moving slowly through the darkness. It seems to be a heavy stone ball, mounted on a metal lever. The ball swings back and forth, nearly touching the wall on either side. Each time it reaches the limit of its swing, you hear a loud, echoing click.

The pit radiates an aura of intense magic. Were this not Ravenloft, anyone able to detect this magical aura would see it as intensely evil. Rather than being a proper place of burial, this pit was used to sacrifice those whose life force was used to power several magical effects within the catacombs (the talking statues and fountains in chamber 6 and the sleeping niches in chamber 12). The victims were thrown, alive, into this pit and left here to die from its magic.

Each time the pendulum completes a swing and emits the clicking sound, any character inside the pit is aged by 10 years. (Those who make a successful saving throw vs. death magic are instead aged by three years.) Each swing takes one round. Crossing the pit from one corridor to another (by means of a rope, for example) takes one round.

Those who have the misfortune to fall into the pit find themselves slowly falling, as if affected by a *feather fall* spell. They descend at a rate of 120 feet per round and land gently on the bones below.

The difficulty now lies in getting out of the pit. The walls are very smooth, inflicting a -20%

penalty to all climbing attempts. Characters can make repeated attempts to climb out of the pit, but each attempt requires at least one round of effort.

It is impossible to stop the pendulum by any means short of a *wish* spell. Should the heroes somehow accomplish this, the magical effects of this pit, as well as those in chambers 6 and 12, instantly cease to function.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav does not want to lose the heroes to this pit. He would much rather add their life force to that in the crystal skull. Thus, if a character becomes stuck in the pit, Ladislav comes to the rescue.

If possible, Ladislav uses his *magic jar* spell to take over the body of one of the other characters (or one of their retainers). He then teleports to a ledge overlooking the pit and lowers a rope to the trapped hero. As a second-best option, he takes over the body of an Ebon Fold member and tries to convince the trapped hero to trust him.

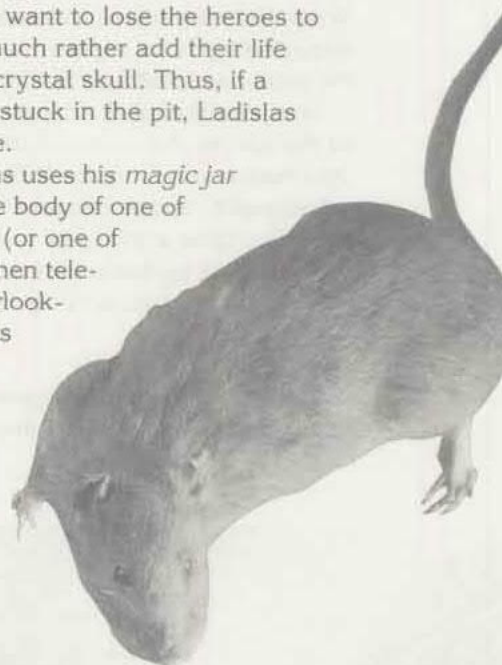
As soon as the hero has been lifted from the pit, Ladislav drops any pretense of helpfulness and attacks with a *death shard*.

Chamber 12: Eternal Slumber

This corridor lies behind a secret door that has not yet been discovered by the Ebon Fold. (It makes a perfect hiding place for the heroes.) Read the players the following:

The chamber beyond the door is utterly silent and has a musty smell, as if it has not been entered in some time. A thick layer of dust covers every surface.

Several niches have been carved into the walls; each is empty. Instead of a flat base, the bottom of each has been carved to resemble a sleeping couch. There is even a stone pillow on which to lay one's head.



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A large stone altar dominates the center of the chamber. It has been intricately carved with the symbol of a skull, encircled by a magical symbol. On the side closest to you is an inscription: "This is the tomb of the noble Czega family. May they rest here in peace and awaken refreshed."

Any character laying down in one of the niches must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or fall into a deep slumber for 1d4 hours. When the character awakens, it is as if he had experienced a full night's sleep. A total of 1d3 hit points are restored by this rest.

The next time that character reclines in one of the niches, he automatically falls asleep for 2d4 hours—and regains 2d3 hit points. Each subsequent repose increases by one die both the sleep time and the hit points restored.

The sleeping character can only be awakened by magical means, such as a *dispel magic* spell.

Ladislav's Opportunity

The longer the heroes spend in this room, using the magical niches, the more likely it is

that one of the Ebon Fold will discover their hiding place. For each character that uses the altar there is a 10% chance (cumulative) of discovery by the assassins.

When this happens, Ladislav possesses one of the assassins and makes an attack on the sleeping character. If the victim is alone, Ladislav can stab the character repeatedly with a *death shard*, draining all life force from the victim and reducing his body to a dry husk that crumbles when touched (see the description under the section **A Grim Harvest**, page 14, for details). The character will simply never wake up from his magical slumbers.

If other characters are standing guard over the sleeping hero, Ladislav casts a *darkness, 15' radius* spell, centered on his intended victim. Under cover of this darkness, he *teleports* to the victim's side and begins to make his attacks, successfully stabbing once each round that he can remain unmolested at the victim's side. As soon as the other heroes intervene, he breaks off this attack, abandoning the host body to its fate.



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Chamber 13: Corpse Crossing

Unlike the other chambers, this area is a natural cave. It is a deep, vertical fissure, through which an underground river flows. When the heroes reach this area, read the players the following:

Ahead you hear the steady hiss of flowing water. The air here is damper and noticeably chilly.

The corridor ahead leads to a large cavern—a natural fissure in the earth. Somewhere down below, water is flowing through the darkness.

A somewhat rickety rope bridge crosses this cavern. A number of its floorboards have fallen away, and the ropes that are tied to rusted iron rings in either wall of the cavern are somewhat frayed. Still, it looks sturdy enough to cross.

The heroes will need to watch their step since there are holes in the floorboards, but the bridge is in no danger of collapsing (although it could be made to do so if any of the characters cares to inflict 12 or more points of damage on either of the two ropes that hold it up). A fall into the river is only dangerous if the character is unable to climb out again; hypothermia will eventually set in.

If the heroes have an adequate light source and spend a moment or two looking down at the river, they can see three round, melon-sized objects bobbing in a natural whirlpool on the surface of the water. Whether or not they take the time to make this observation, these objects rise out of the water as the heroes begin to cross the cavern, rising to the level of the bridge when they are half way across. Read the following to the players:

As you make the crossing, you see something out of the corner of your eye, bobbing gently in the air beside the bridge. It is a severed human head! Most of its wet hair is plastered against its dripping scalp, but a few hairs stand upright, writhing like medusa curls.

The head emits a stench of rotting flesh. Its mouth hangs slackly open, as if ready to sink its yellowed teeth into your flesh. Slowly, it drifts closer, as if drawn by the heat of your body. Now you can see two more heads, also rising up from below.

This gruesome sight is cause for the heroes to make horror checks.

This cavern is used by the Ebon Fold as a disposal area for corpses. The severed heads rising out of the water below have been infested with gas spores; it is the natural buoyancy of these spores that is causing the heads to levitate.

These gas spores are slightly smaller than usual and thus do less damage if struck.

Gas Spores (Fungus) (3): AC 9; MV 3; HD less than 1; hp 1; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg nil; SA infestation; SD explosion; SZ T (6" diameter); ML avg (8); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 120 each.

Explosion: If a gas spore is struck for even 1 point of damage it explodes, doing 1d4 points of damage to all within a 5' radius. No damage is done to characters who make successful saving throws vs. wands.

Infestation: If the gas spore's rhizomes (the writhing "hair" on the head) contact bare flesh, they infest that individual. The gas spore immediately dies. If the victim is not treated with a *cure disease* within 24 hours, he dies; the body also sprouts 2d4 new gas spores.

Ladislav's Opportunity

Ladislav possesses the body of one of his assassins, conceals himself at one end of the bridge and uses his *telekinesis* spell to suddenly speed up the gentle, bobbing motion of the gas spore-infested head. While the characters are distracted, he darts out onto the bridge to attack the closest character with a *death shard*. If his host body is in danger of being slain, Ladislav jumps into the icy whirlpool below, abandoning the host body on the way down.



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Chamber 14: Tiny Terrors

This chamber is the lair of a dozen jermlaine who are nominally under the control of the Ebon Fold. These tiny, evil humanoids have recently discovered Ladislas's phobia and are using it to torment their master.

Neither Ladislas nor the Ebon Fold know of the existence of this chamber. When the heroes are passing the secret door that leads to this chamber, read the players the following:

You pass a spot in the corridor where the wall is cracked. Through the fissure, you hear the yapping bark of a small dog. It is followed by laughter and high-pitched voices, speaking the common tongue.

"You should have seen him jump!" one says. "It was hilarious."

"We can use it to keep him out of our secret places," another voice says.

"But how will we deal with the rest of the big folk?" another asks.

If they are able to open the secret door without much noise, add the following (if they

burst into the chamber or make a loud noise, alter the description to fit the circumstances):

This chamber is lined with niches that hold skeletal corpses. Candle-sized torches thrust into cracks in the wall illuminate the scene.

A dozen tiny humanoids, each no more than a foot tall, are sitting in a circle, perched on human skulls that they are using as stools. Each is dressed in baggy clothing and is holding a tiny spear.

One humanoid holds court at the center of the group. As you watch, he throws back his head and lets out an amazingly realistic imitation of a small dog barking. The other humanoids collapse into fits of laughter and then clap their hands in approval.

The jermlaine react with fear to the approach of intruders, scattering into niches and hiding. If the heroes can convince the jermlaine that they are members of the Ebon Fold, the jermlaine react with subservience and a hint of fear. They are terrified that Ladislas will discover the trick they have been playing upon him (frightening



Descent into Darkness

him away from this secret hiding place by imitating dog barks) and that he will exact a swift and brutal revenge upon them.

The jermlaines know something that the Ebon Fold members do not—that Ladislas plans to leave Falkovnia and abandon the assassins when the crystal skull is full of life energy, and return to his “master.” By spying on Ladislas, they have learned that he has been corresponding with someone in Stangengrad about this. If the jermlaines believe that the heroes are Ebon Fold members, they may offer up this tidbit in return for a promise not to tell Ladislas about their dog-imitating ploy.

Otherwise, the jermlaines are loyal to Ladislas and the Ebon Fold (despite their desire to hide treasure from them). If they know the heroes’ true purpose, they will betray them at the first opportunity.

Jermlaine (Gremlin) (12): AC 7; MV 15; HD ½; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (small spear); SA surprise; SD can detect invisible; SW fear of Ladislas; MR special saving throws; SZ T (1' high); ML steady (12); Int avg (10); AL NE; XP 15 each.

Surprise: Jermlaine move silently and are 75% undetectable when hiding. Their stealth causes opponents to suffer a -5 penalty to surprise rolls.

Detect Invisibility: Keen senses of smell and hearing allow a jermlaine to detect invisible creatures 50% of the time.

Saving Throws: Jermlaine save as a 4 Hit Dice monster. Due to their small size, they escape all damage from magical attacks that normally do half damage if a saving throw is successful.

The jermlaine treasure is hidden in the niches and includes 5d6 gems, a *potion of healing*, *oil of fumbling* (which they pour onto opponents if a fight ensues), a *scroll of protection vs. poison*, and a *scroll of protection vs. undead*.

The jermlaines’ primary motivation is that this treasure not be found. They try to hustle the characters out of this chamber, promising them anything (even that they will aid in the battle against Ladislas). As soon as the characters have left, they move their treasure to a new location.

If forced to fight, the jermlaine use nets that they have hidden in the uppermost niches, dropping these on heroes from above.

Ladislas's Opportunity

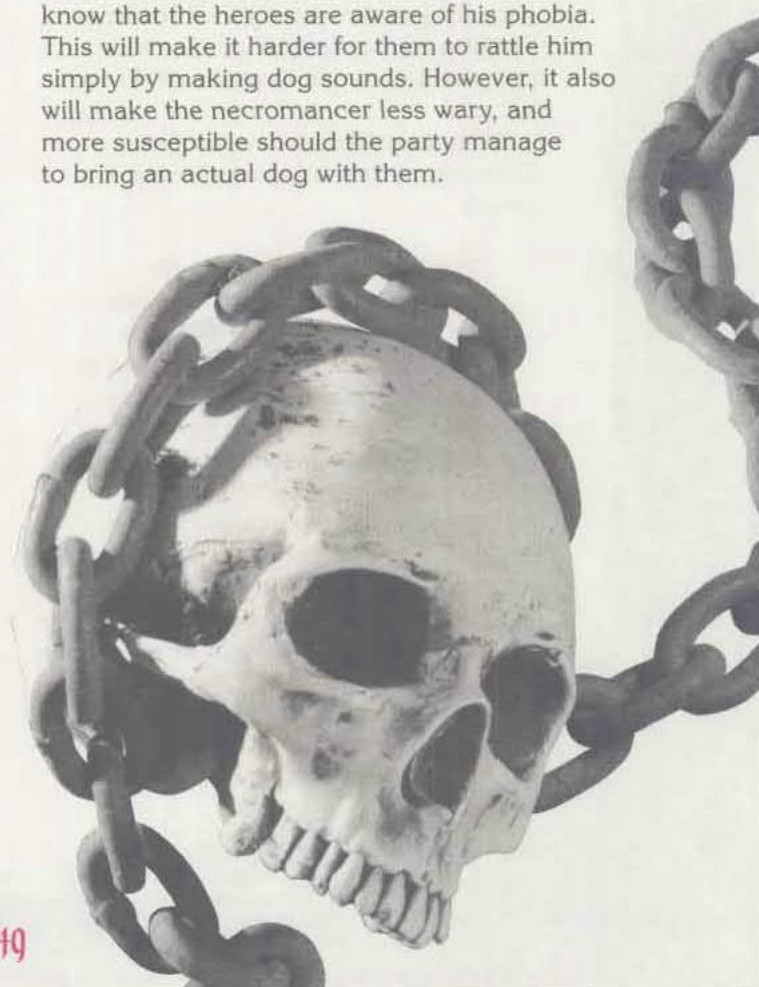
One of the Ebon Fold members sees the heroes entering the secret door and contacts his master. Ladislas sends a group of five assassins to lay in wait for the group outside the room and uses his *magic jar* spell to take over one of them.

If the jermlaine disclose their knowledge of the necromancer’s phobia, he will fly into a rage and order the assassins to attack immediately. However they will be charged with slaying the jermlaine rather than the heroes. Ladislas cannot abide being the butt of the creatures’ jokes and is furious that they played upon his worst fear for their amusement.

The Ebon Fold members will follow their orders, attacking the jermlaine and ignoring the heroes (although they will defend themselves if the heroes decide to join the fight). Once all the jermlaine are killed, then the focus of the attack will turn to the characters.

The assassin possessed by Ladislas will lead the charge on the jermlaine, howling wildly and flailing about with his *death shard*. Once his host suffers any damage at all, however, Ladislas will abandon the body and leave the assassin to fight for himself.

As a result of this encounter, Ladislas will know that the heroes are aware of his phobia. This will make it harder for them to rattle him simply by making dog sounds. However, it also will make the necromancer less wary, and more susceptible should the party manage to bring an actual dog with them.



Sealing the Tomb

H

is palms are folded on
his breast:

There is no other
thing express'd
But long disquiet
emerged in rest.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The climax of this adventure occurs when the heroes at last reach the Chamber of Skulls (area 3 on the poster map). In this inner sanctum, the necromancer Ladislav has placed the Ebon Fold's most precious object—a skull, carved from clear crystal, in which the life energies drawn by the *death shard* daggers are stored for eventual transference to Ladislav's master. The heroes now face a final fight to the death with the necromancer unless they have somehow beaten him already.

Reaching the Chamber of Skulls first involves getting past the gates that bar entrance to this area. The heroes must either negate the *hold portal* spell that Ladislav cast upon the gate, or must make a successful lift gates roll to open it.

When the characters enter the Chamber of Skulls, read the following aloud:

The floor of this chamber is paved with rounded white stones—after looking at them a moment, you realize that they are the tops of skulls. At the center of the chamber is a low altar, made from bones that have been lashed together with silver twine. On top of it sits an object shaped like a huge human skull. It has been carved from clear crystal, stands half the height of a human, and is filled with swirling red smoke. The stare of its empty eye sockets seems to follow your every motion, and its teeth are carved in a wide and humorless grin. The smoke inside it

seems to pulse in time
with a silent plea.

"Free uss," it whispers. "Send
our spirits to their proper ressst."

The chamber is guarded by magical wards. Each of the skulls set into the floor has had a permanent *alarm* spell placed upon it. Any creature treading upon a skull or moving through the air above it (even one who is invisible, gaseous, or flying) triggers its alarm. The skull immediately begins to scream. If enough skulls are triggered (when a character fully enters this chamber, as opposed to just placing a foot inside it), the chorus will be ghastly indeed; any characters within 60 feet of the source of the sound must make a fear check to avoid becoming unnerved by the sheer volume of noise.

As soon as this alarm sounds, eight Ebon Fold members immediately converge upon the Chamber of Skulls. They appear from all four directions simultaneously, accompanied by Ladislav, who at last confronts the heroes in person.

The life energies that were stolen by the *death shards* have been channelled back to the crystal skull and now rest within it.

This valuable repository is protected with an *avoidance* spell. Any living creature attempting to touch the skull must first make a successful saving throw vs. spell or be unable to approach within one foot of it.

Anyone actually able to touch the crystal skull triggers a *magic mouth* spell that has been cast upon it. The skull immediately speaks in a voice as cold and grim as the grave: "Unhand me, fool, or I shall have your head!" If the character touches the skull a second time (or continues to touch it for more than one round) he must make a successful saving throw vs. spell at a -4 penalty or suffer the effects of a *contagion* spell. The

Sealing the Tomb

character suffers hair loss and blisters; his face becomes a horrifying, diseased ruin. (Gloves do not offer any protection from this spell. Touching the crystal skull with another object, a pole or a sword for instance, will also trigger these two spells.)

Hoping that his assassins might yet succeed in stealing the heroes' life energies, Ladislas at first tries to merely incapacitate them. Should the attack by his minions go poorly, however, he decides to kill them outright and seek easier targets elsewhere. He attacks using his bare hands, taking advantage of the contact poison that is smeared on his body. Any successful hand-to-hand hit by Ladislas is deemed to have smeared this poison upon his victim (see Ladislas's description on page 58 for details of the effects of the poison).

By now, the heroes should realize that a quick way to defeat Ladislas is by either removing the ring from his hand (which involves coming into contact with the poison, unless a spell such as *telekinesis* is used) or cutting off his hand entirely. If either of these happen, the DM should read the following to the players:

As blood wells from the stump of his wrist (or the ring flies from his fingers), the necromancer grimaces from the pain of the poison. At the same time, he shakes a fist at you in defiance. Froth flying from his lips, he screams:

"A curse upon you all!

The cold of the grave
claims even the brave.

Before your proper time has come
your lives shall surely be undone!"

The Final Blow

When the battle ends, the heroes face the problem of what to do with the crystal skull. It is magically protected against spells and cannot be broken open by mundane means; a blow from a weapon does it no harm. A series of four *dispel magic* spells will be required to negate its protections: one for the *avoidance* spell; one to dispel the *magic mouth*; one for the *contagion* spell; and one for the spell that protects the skull from magical or mundane attack. The first three castings permanently dispel these effects; the fourth,



however, drops the skull's defenses for a mere 1d4 rounds.

During this time, the skull becomes vulnerable to attack. It may be broken open by any blow that inflicts 12 or more points of damage to it, or by appropriate spells (a *shatter* spell, for example). If they don't succeed in breaking it open on the first try, the magical protection resumes. Another *dispel magic* casting will be required to negate the skull's protections for another 1d4 rounds.

As the crystal skull is broken open, any *death shards* within the catacombs shatter simultaneously. Any character holding one at the time (including Ebon Fold members) suffers cuts to his hand from flying glass, resulting in 1d4 points of damage. *Death shards* outside of this area, however, retain their magical abilities. (They begin channelling life energy elsewhere; details will be revealed in the module *Death Ascendant*.)

As the crystal skull breaks open, read the players the following:

Sealing the Tomb

With a jagged crash that sounds like the breaking of a thousand goblets at once, the skull shatters into pieces. The red smoke spirals out into the chamber in frenzied whisps, swirling this way and that as if seeking an exit.

At the same time, you hear a chorus of whispered voices. "Free!" they whisper joyously. "We are free!"

The shards of crystal that lie on the floor crumble, rapidly becoming piles of glittering dust. In another moment, an invisible wind has swept them away.



The life energies trapped inside the skull (and any shattered daggers) flow out in all directions, seeking to rejoin with the characters from whom they were stolen. Just as is the case when a *death shard*, is broken, characters now can regain any life levels that were stolen from them. (They are restored to their original experience levels.)

Fortunately, the characters don't have to be standing within five feet of the skull or dagger that holds their energy for this to occur (as they did when a *death shard* was broken). Their life force automatically seeks them out. Unfortunately, this process does not restore life to the dead; the life energies of those who are already dead simply flow to whatever final resting place that character's spirit now dwells in.

Aftermath

With Ladislas dead, the heroes face the relatively easy task of mopping up any remaining members of the Ebon Fold. Once these assassins know that their leader is dead (and thus that magical revivals from death are no longer possible) their morale drops to unsteady (7). They flee the catacombs and the city of Lekar.

At this point the heroes have defeated the Ebon Fold—but they still have to deal with the day-to-day dangers of life in Falkovnia. As at the start of the adventure, the Talons will be a constant threat—and may even be actively hunting the heroes by now. If it hasn't happened already, the Talons now attack the Radiant Tower, sending Mircea and his pupils fleeing to the city of Stangengrad.

The next adventure in this trilogy, *Death Ascendant*, begins in Stangengrad. If the DM is planning on running that adventure next, the characters will need to be directed there. Some of the encounters inside the lair of the Ebon Fold will have already established a connection with that city, and they may follow these clues.

If they don't pick up on these hints, a variety of tactics can be used to nudge them in the direction of Stangengrad. They might receive a letter from Mircea (perhaps even a plea for help and protection) or might simply be chased in this direction by the Talons. A more subtle (and character-driven) method of getting the characters to head toward Stangengrad would be to have any surviving members of the Ebon Fold flee in this direction, committing acts of violence and injustice along the way. The heroes are then drawn there during the pursuit.

If the DM wishes the characters to remain in Ravenloft but does not want to run *Death Ascendant* next, he can simply allow the characters to elude the Talons and cross the border under their own power. The lord of Falkovnia, Vlad Drakov, has no way of closing the border aside from sending Talons to patrol it, and thus, if the heroes are stealthy, it is possible to escape.

If the DM wishes to transport the heroes back to their homeland at the close of the adventure, this can be done when the crystal skull is broken. The red smoke it releases engulfs the characters and allows them to regain any lost life energy and experience levels. Wrapped in its misty embrace, they are magically transported back to the site of the funeral procession that started this adventure. They experience a sense of *déjà vu* as the mourners drop the coffin, once again. This time, however, the body is inside it, and no mist emerges.

Appendix 1: The Domain of Falkovnia

T

hey say it was a
shocking sight
After the field was
won;
For many thousand
bodies here
Lay rotting in the sun.

Robert Southey

Falkovnia formed out of the Mists from the twisted desires of Vlad Drakov, the mercenary warrior from Krynn who is its lord. It feeds his lust for conquest and domination, for its land and people are his utterly, to do with as he will. At the same time it taunts Vlad, depriving him of the one thing he sought above all else—the respect of his fellow rulers and acknowledgement as their equal.

Trapped within the confines of his domain, Vlad is unable to follow his dream of becoming an honored member of the governing elite. The other dark lords scorn him, and his military ventures into their domains consistently meet with disaster. On no less than five separate occasions, Azalin of Darkon has inflicted crushing defeats upon his forces, turning Vlad's own dead soldiers against him.

Frustrated in his attempts to expand his borders, Vlad instead takes what "victories" he can at home. His militia—as brutal a band of thugs as ever were collected under one banner—terrorizes the populace, inflicting severe corporal punishments for all manner of "crimes." The terrified victims are impaled on stakes in public places, hung in chains from gibbets erected along the roadside, boiled alive in cauldrons of scalding water, or have the flesh flayed from their bones. Each day there are public beatings and tortures; each night the screams of the condemned ring out.

Amazingly, some survive.

Falkovnia is filled with people who have had eyes gouged out, noses or ears cut off, hands and feet

crushed, or limbs bent and broken. It is truly a land of horror and nightmare.

The Talons

Falkovnia was named in honor of Vlad Drakov, the mercenary lord who was known as "the hawk" to his soldiers. The troops who followed him came to be known as the Talons; like the claws for which they were named, they are hard, merciless and cruel.

Prior to entering Ravenloft, these soldiers served as shock troops. Vlad would hire his army out to the highest bidder, wreaking destruction and leaving a bloody trail in his wake. Today, while the troops still practice maneuvers and train for battle, they act more as a private police force, enforcing laws that are based solely upon Vlad Drakov's whims.

Only humans are admitted into the ranks of the Talons. The vast majority are men, and all are chosen for their size and strength (all have at least a Strength of 16). They are recruited through an unusual method; upon conscription into the army, each is forced to drink a foul brew, the recipe for which is known only to Vlad Drakov (it is rumored to contain the gritty powder of a ground-up *talisman of ultimate evil* and swamp water from the lair of a will o' wisp). The unwilling imbiber must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or be driven mad. This insanity manifests itself as a switch to an evil alignment and an intense pleasure that is gained by witnessing a slow and painful death. The drink also provides a limited magical resistance.

The effects of this potion can be removed by subjecting the Talon to a *remove curse* spell. Unfortunately, the "cured" victim invariably goes mad upon realizing the acts of

The Domain of Falkovnia

extreme cruelty that he has performed. Only by curing this madness can the former Talon be made a whole, functioning individual once more.

The Talons are unquestioningly loyal to Vlad Drakov and accept his word as law. They know that, were they not serving him, they would be reviled as the criminals they are. In Falkovnia, however, they can revel in their power.

Ordinary citizens of Falkovnia (everyone except the PCs and fellow visitors to this domain) react to the Talons as if the soldiers were radiating an *aura of fear*. This is not a magical effect, but rather the result of decades of subjugation and systematic abuse.

The uniform of the Talons consists of a quilted doublet of blood-red velvet, black breeches, and a swirling black cape trimmed with red. Bracers made of black iron are secured on each wrist with a *wizard lock* spell; each is embossed with the image of a falcon in flight—the royal seal of their master, Vlad Drakov.

When on patrol, the Talons wear black scale mail or banded mail, and carry a shield. They are armed either with a broad sword, spear, or pike.

The Talons, hm/hf, F3/4/5 (2d4):
AC 5 (scale mail, shield); MV 11 (lightly encumbered); hp 20/27/35; THAC0 18/17/16 (17–16/16–15/15–14 with Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 or 2d4 (spear/pike or broad sword; +1–+3 Str bonus); SA magical items; SD magical items; MR 5%; SZ M (5'8"–6'6"); ML elite (14); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 270/420/650.

Special Equipment: The Talons' bracers are magical. Half are *bracers of defense* (AC 4), while the rest convey the same abilities as *gloves of missile snaring*. Both bracers must be worn to gain the magical effect. Opening a bracer, either with a spell (such as *dispel magic*) or by cutting it, destroys its magic. The bracers can be removed by cutting off both of the Talon's hands, but using them may prove a problem; if a character's hand is small enough to fit through the sealed bracer, there is a 50% chance (modified by subtracting the user's Dexterity) that the bracer will slide off when the character throws up a hand to catch a missile.

Half of the Talons in any group encountered

by the heroes also carry one additional magical item each. Choose from the following: +1 weapon; +1 shield; +1 *cloak of protection*; +1 *ring of protection*; *net of entrapment*; *sword of wounding*. One of the Talons in the group might instead carry any of the following, used to torture their victims: *bag of devouring*; *cloak of poisonousness*; *dust of sneezing and choking*; *necklace of strangulation*; *pipes of pain*; *rope of constriction*; *scarab of death*.

The Laws and the People

The vast majority of the population in Falkovnia is human. All who have been born there (everyone under twenty) have their foreheads branded with the sign of a hawk, marking them as the property of Vlad Drakov.

Most of the populace live at a subsistence level; their small wheat farms are heavily taxed. Almost all of Falkovnia's resources go into the maintenance of its army. Beggars are commonplace, and everyone dresses in drab clothing, not wanting to wear anything that would catch the attention of the Talons.

Those demihumans who venture into Falkovnia are hunted down by the Talons and declared property of the state. They are held in chain gangs and forced to work until they drop from exhaustion, at which point they are killed. They are typically put to work hauling the massive stones used to repair the fortified walls of Lekar, felling the black hardwood trees of Falkovnia's dark forests, or carrying away and burning the corpses left by the plagues that frequently sweep through this domain. Musicians may be asked to join the orchestra that performs in Vlad Drakov's palace each evening at supper time—accompanying the screams of the wretches he impales for his dinner guests' amusement.

The laws of Falkovnia are many and change frequently upon the whim of Vlad Drakov. Insulting a member of the Talons or failing to pay "taxes" (actually a bribe) to a soldier is cause for mutilation. Remaining on the streets after the midnight curfew or speaking "treasonous" words against Vlad Drakov is punishable by mutilation or death. Every night there are at least half a dozen impalements.

Carrying a weapon in Falkovnia is also a capital offense; only the Talons are allowed to

The Domain of Falkovnia

arm themselves. Not only is the offender killed (after the briefest of on-the-spot military "trials") but so is his entire family. Anyone wandering about in armor is automatically assumed to be an enemy soldier from a neighboring domain. They may either be attacked on sight or hauled in for questioning, especially if it looks as if they are advance scouts for a possible invasion force.

Lekar

Lekar is Falkovnia's largest city, with a population of 15,000. Nearly a quarter of them (some 3,500) are soldiers who are garrisoned here.

The city is encircled by massive walls nearly 20 feet high, studded with a tower every 200 feet. There are two main gates—one leading to a bridge that crosses the Vuchar River into the domain of Lamordia, the other giving access to roads that lead to the Falkovnian cities of Morfenzi, Silbervas, and Stangengrad.

The walls around Lekar seem designed to intimidate the population, as well as to stave off

any invasion. The inner face of the wall is studded with rusted iron spikes, on which the corpses of those killed by the Talons are impaled and left to rot. The wall itself is constantly being "repaired," as sections of it are torn down and rebuilt by emaciated and exhausted demihuman slaves.

The city is a squalid place, filled with the smells of garbage and dung. It is built on a slope, overlooking the Vuchar River. Atop the hill is the palace of Vlad Drakov, which looms over the city like a hungry vulture. Clustered around it are the opulent homes of the officers who command the Talons.

The one building that stands out from the rest—the so-called Radiant Tower—is actually quite inappropriately named. It is four stories tall and thus towers above the wretched hovels on either side, but it is obviously a very old structure and has a perceptible lean to it.

(If the heroes notice the tower and begin to ask about the building or its inhabitants, the DM can read some of the rumors found on page 21.)

Lowest on the hill is the twisting maze of alleys that makes up the Laborers' Quarter. It is



The Domain of Falkovnia

here that the raw materials that arrive by boat are reworked into saleable goods.

Leatherworkers, metalsmiths, potters and carpenters crowd this quarter, which is filled with tiny, cramped workshops. More than once, the area has been levelled by fire, which sweeps through the crowded buildings. It has thus been rebuilt several times—each time with more wretched buildings than before.

Every night at midnight, a bell tolls in the city's central square. This is the signal for the citizens to leave the streets; when the twelfth toll sounds the curfew is in force. The streets, however, are usually long since deserted by this time, the windows and doors of the houses and shops already tightly shuttered and bolted.

Inns are virtually unknown in Lekar; given the predations of the Talons, few in their right minds want to stay here. Travelers may find a squalid room at the back of a private residence or shop, lined with flea-infested straw and perhaps having a moth-eaten blanket or two.

Disease

Death and disease are the everyday lot of the people who live in the squalid cities of Falkovnia. Unless the characters take extreme precautions (boiling or adding *sweet water* to their drinking water, cooking their own food, avoiding those who are obviously ill, bedding down only in clean areas) they are eventually going to get sick.

For every two days spent in a city in Falkovnia a character must make a successful saving throw vs. poison. This saving throw is modified by a +1 bonus for each of the precautions taken above or is deemed automatically successful if all four of these precautions are observed. The saving throw need not be made at all if the character carries any magical protections against disease, such as a *periapt of health*.

If the character fails the saving throw, he develops one of the following symptoms, which manifests on the day the saving throw was failed (roll 1d6):

- 1) deep, wracking cough
- 2) severe intestinal and stomach cramps
- 3) nausea and vomiting

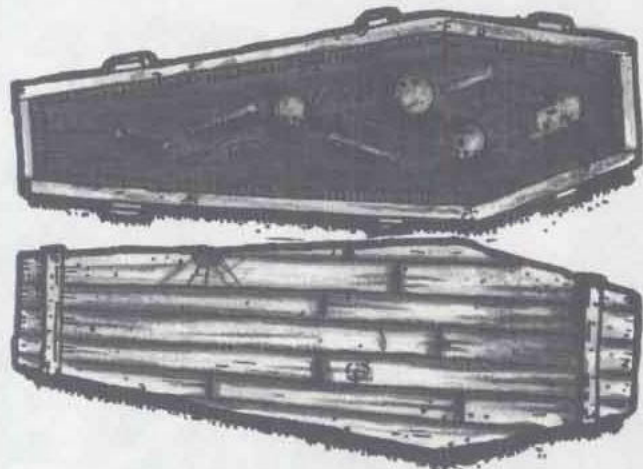
- 4) itchy, weeping blisters on skin
- 5) chills, plus muscle and joint aches
- 6) severe head cold and mild fever

These symptoms linger for 1d4+1 days (including the onset day) and result in the temporary loss of 1 point of Strength, Constitution, or Dexterity (DM's choice) during this time.

Even after a disease has set in, the character must continue to make saving throws to avoid catching additional diseases. If the same symptoms are rolled, the condition worsens. Whether the disease is the same or a new one, there is an additional, temporary 1 point loss from an ability score.

The duration of each disease caught is concurrent with that of subsequent diseases. In other words, if a character fails a saving throw and suffers a deep, wracking cough that lasts four days, and on the second day of the disease fails another saving throw and succumbs to nausea (this time for a duration of two days) the total period of illness is still four days. During the first two days, the character suffers the cough and loses 1 point from an ability score; during the third and fourth day (when both the cough and the nausea are in effect) the character suffers an additional 1 point loss from an ability score.

All of these diseases are nonmagical and may be cured using a *cure disease* or *healing* spell, an *elixir of health*, a *potion of vitality*, a *staff of curing*, or any other magical spell or item that cures disease. Any magical healing immediately wipes out all of the diseases that a person is suffering.



Appendix 2: The Cast of Characters

L

Ladislav Sintesti

12th-Level Necromancer,

Neutral Evil

Armor Class	10	Str	8
Movement	12	Dex	9
Level/Hit Dice	12	Con	15
Hit Points	40	Int	17
THACO	17	Wis	17
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	12
Dam/Attack	1d4 (dagger)		
Special Att	Spells, contact poison		
Special Def	Spells		
Special Weak	Phobia, compulsion		
Magic Res	10%		
Morale	elite (14)		

Spellbook (5/5/5/5/5/2): 1st—*alarm, cantrip, chill touch*, hold portal*, shield*, spider climb, wall of fog*, wizard mark**; 2nd—*darkness 15' radius*, irritation*, knock, locate object*, magic mouth, spectral hand*, stinking cloud**; 3rd—*explosive runes, feign death*, hold undead*, non-detection, protection from good 10' radius*, slow*, vampiric touch**; 4th—*contagion*, curse* (reversed remove curse), enervation*, fire trap, minor globe of invulnerability*, wizard eye**; 5th—*animate dead*, avoidance*, cloud kill*, magic jar*, passwall, sending, teleport**; 6th—*death spell*, disintegrate, life spell (reversed death spell)***.

* Indicates favored spell.

** New spell. For details see the section *The Ebon Fold* (page 59).

If the DM has *The Complete Wizard's Handbook* the following spells may be added to Ladislav's spell book: 1st—*corpse visage*; 2nd—*choke, ghoul touch*; 3rd—*hovering skull*; 5th—*throbbing bones, wall of bones*.

If the DM has *The Complete Necromancer's Handbook* the

following spells may be added to Ladislav's spell book: 1st—*animate dead animals, corpse link, spectral voice*; 2nd—*skeletal hands*; 3rd—*skulltrap*; 5th—*bone blight, graft flesh*; 6th—*corpse host*.

Description: Ladislav is a small man, barely 5'2" tall and slight in stature. If it were not for his thick black moustache and authoritative, self-confident demeanor, he might be mistaken for a teenage boy.

Ladislav has long dark hair, which he wears tied back in a ponytail. In order to blend in with the people of Falkovnia, he wears plain, somber clothing and a simple wide-brimmed hat, pulled low over his eyes. He has a number of disguises and occasionally goes about dressed as a member of the Talons.

Background: Ladislav is originally from a world outside of Ravenloft—a world in which the practice of necromancy was shunned and forbidden. On his home world he was a criminal who stole corpses from tombs and re-animated them, using them for vile purposes.

When his evil experiments were at last discovered, Ladislav was forced to flee a mob who used dogs to track him. As they closed in, he used a *wall of fog* spell in a desperate attempt to hide himself from view. He stepped into it—and into the domain of Darkon.

Here, Ladislav became a protege of the lich, lord Azalin, who taught him how to kill with a touch and how to reverse the *death spell*. Azalin also taught him the *magic jar* spell and promised to one day show Ladislav how to create a phylactery and become a lich himself.

Before these secrets would be revealed, however, Ladislav would have to prove himself a willing and able servant of Azalin. He was

The Cast of Characters



assigned the duty of infiltrating the neighboring domain of Falkovnia and using his necromantic talents to create a secret society of assassins there. These individuals would use magical crystal-bladed daggers, supplied by Azalin, to steal the life force from powerful individuals. Thus the Ebon Fold was born.

Combat: When attacking opponents who pose no real threat to him, Ladislav likes to torment the victim, using the spells *cantrip* (to invest the victim with the stench of rotting flesh) and *irritation*. Against tougher opponents, he uses any of the damaging spells at his disposal, ranging from those that can cause immediate death (*cloudkill*, *death spell* or *disintegrate*) to those that merely cause severe injury or debilitation (*chill touch*, *enervation*, *stinking cloud*, *vampiric touch*).

Ladislav rarely enters a dangerous situation in person without first casting protective spells on himself (*protection from good 10' radius*, *minor globe of invulnerability*, or *shield*). He prefers to attack from a distance, using the *spectral hand* spell to increase the range of

spells that are normally inflicted by touch.

Ladislav often uses his *animate dead* spell to surround himself with allies; the availability of corpses provides him with a good supply of raw material. Ladislav can animate up to 24 human-sized skeletons or 12 zombies—or as many as 48 small animal skeletons or 24 small animal zombies. Alternatively, he can animate the dead body of a monster of up to 24 Hit Dice, turning it into a 12 HD skeleton or a 13 HD zombie.

Ladislav almost always faces his opponents in a host body that he has stolen via the *magic jar* spell. If the host body is in danger of being slain, Ladislav immediately abandons it, returning first to a gray quartz crystal that hangs around his neck (this takes one round) and then to his own body (this also takes one round). He can be driven out of the host body with a *dispel magic* spell.

If the host body is slain, Ladislav must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic (by rolling an 11 or better on 1d20) to return to the gem. If he fails, he is trapped in the host body, which rises one day later as a wight.

Ladislav Sintesti (as wight) Nec12; AC 5; MV 12; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (claws); SA life energy drain, wizard spells; SD harmed only by silver or magical weapons, immune to poison and paralyzation, wizard spells; MR 10%, completely immune to *charm*, *sleep*, and cold-based spells; SW sunlight, holy water, *raise dead* spell; SZ M (6'2"); ML elite (14); Int genius (17); AL NE; XP 1,400.

Energy drain: A successful hit by a wight drains one experience level from a victim.

Those slain by a wight rise as wights themselves (with half their Hit Dice) and are under the control of Ladislav until he is slain.

Weaknesses: A wight cannot tolerate bright light but is not harmed by it. Holy water does 2d4 points of damage to a wight, and a *raise dead* spell instantly annihilates it.

Should he be forced to appear in person and need to escape, he *teleports* back to the safety of the catacombs under the Radiant Tower. If this isn't possible, he uses the spells *darkness*, *15' radius* or *wall of fog* to cloak his escape.

When Ladislav casts spells from the necromancy school, the victims of these spells suffer a -1 penalty to their saving throws vs. spell. When Ladislav himself is the target of a necromancy

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spell, he gains a +1 bonus to his saving throw vs. spell. The DM should also note that a number of Ladislav's spells are altered in the RAVENLOFT setting. Many have increased effects, duration, or range.

As a final line of defense, Ladislav wears on his left index finger a *ring of vitality*, a new magical item described below. When the heroes first enter Falkovnia, Ladislav is in his first day of wearing the ring—a gold band set with a skull-shaped ruby.

Because the ring provides complete immunity to poison, Ladislav has coated his body with Type N poison. Any character touching his flesh or clothing must make a saving throw vs. poison or die within two minutes (on the second round after contact). A successful saving throw means the character suffers just 25 points of damage—often enough to kill anyway. This damage manifests itself on the second round after contact.

Fortunately, this poison causes the part of the body it touches to go numb on the first round (one minute) after contact. If the victim can immerse the afflicted area in water during this round, the poison can be washed away and no damage is taken. (At the DM's discretion, other liquids might also be used.) The affected area, however, continues to ominously tingle for the next 1d4 rounds.

Before he removes the *ring of vitality* from his finger, Ladislav washes this poison from his body. Should the ring accidentally be removed prior to this clean-up (if his left hand is cut off, for example) Ladislav must make a saving throw against the contact poison or die. He must make this saving throw every round that the poison remains on his body. He can avoid damage if there is a body of water nearby in which he can completely immerse himself within one round of the ring's removal, thus washing the poison from his body.

Ring of Vitality: This magical item is similar in many respects to a *potion of vitality*. The person wearing it need not eat, drink, or sleep and does not get tired due to exertion. The wearer is also completely protected from poison and disease. The ring can be worn for up to seven days (168 hours) at a time. If worn for a longer period of time, the ring permanently drains hit points at a rate of one per four-hour period (or portion thereof; even slipping the ring on for a moment results in a lost hit point). To avoid this effect, the wearer must take the ring

off for a minimum of seven days (168 hours) before wearing it again.

Weaknesses: Ladislav's prolonged fixation upon death has driven him slightly mad. This manifests itself as a compulsion to eat the maggots that infest the corpses he works with.

Ladislav is compelled to pluck these wriggling morsels from a corpse and swallow them whole. The heroes might try to trick him into swallowing a rot grub (difficult, since he can recognize a rot grub by its antennae).

If he ingests a rot grub, Ladislav must make a Wisdom check to realize that the rot grub is gnawing its way to his heart. He must then take steps to kill it, or he will die within 1d3 turns. He might drink an *elixir of health*—or, if protected by the *ring of vitality*, he might drink a poison that will kill the rot grubs, perhaps even licking the contact poison off his skin.

Ladislav's second weakness is an intense and irrational phobia of dogs. Although he does not remember his pre-Ravenloft past, the fear that he experienced when being chased by the mob and their dogs still haunts him. Merely hearing the sound of a baying hound (or a fiercely barking dog) forces Ladislav to make a morale check; if he fails, he must avoid the area from which the sound is coming. He must also make a morale check if he sees a dog; if he fails, he flees from the animal at top speed.

Current Sketch: Ladislav is the undisputed leader of the Ebon Fold, whose members believe him to have utter control over the forces of life and death. He spends most of his time in the catacombs under the Radiant Tower in Lekar, but occasionally emerges to lead assassination attempts on exceptionally powerful individuals.

Like most of the inhabitants of Darkon, Ladislav believes he was born and raised in that domain.



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The Ebon Fold

This secret society was founded by Ladislav Sintesti, a necromancer from neighboring Darkon. This brilliant young wizard was taught by the lich, lord Azalin, how to reverse the *death spell* and was sent as an undercover agent into Falkovnia, where he used the spell to raise rogues from the dead. Convinced that Ladislav literally holds their lives in his hands, these wretches serve as his private army of assassins.

Each of the members of the Ebon Fold was a normal mortal who was killed by the Talons—usually by being impaled on a stake. The majority thus have fist-sized holes piercing their torsos. These do not gape open, but it is possible to insert an object entirely through the hole without harming the body in any way.

Ladislav chose the members of the Ebon Fold carefully; all are thieves who are adept at backstabbing and stealth. Unfortunately, many were driven mad by the prolonged and tortuous impalement that eventually killed them. Fully one-quarter of them display one of the forms of madness described in the *Realm of Terror* rules book from the RAVENLOFT Campaign Setting boxed set.

Ladislav has promised “eternal life” to each member of the Ebon Fold. He keeps this promise by repeatedly using the *life spell* to restore life to any of those killed in the line of duty. In return, the Ebon Fold kill whomever Ladislav chooses as a target, using magical daggers known as *death shards*.

Ebon Fold assassins are fearless in battle, for they have utter faith that their members will recover their bodies and that their master, Ladislav, will restore them to life. They work in teams, one distracting the opponent while the other moves in to backstab.

Members of the Ebon Fold recognize one another by a secret sign (a fist drawn across the throat) and the password and response: “The Ebon Lord has claimed me” and “I, too, am within his fold.”

The headquarters of the Ebon Fold is located in a labyrinthine system of catacombs hidden under the Radiant Tower magic school in Lekar. From this stronghold, Ladislav sends out teams of assassins to steal the life energies of powerful individuals, such as adventurers like the heroes.

When the Ebon Fold has channelled sufficient



The Cast of Characters

life force into the crystal skull, Ladislas will abandon them and return with it to Darkon.

Ebon Fold Member, hm/hf, T3: AC 8 (Dex bonus); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 10; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg special (see *death shards* page 61); SA backstab; SZ M (5'8"); ML fearless (19); Int avg (9); AL NE; XP 120.

Backstab: When attacking from behind, an Ebon Fold member has a THACO of 15. In addition, the target's shield and Dexterity bonuses to AC are negated.

Special Equipment: Each member of the Ebon Fold is armed with a *death shard* (see page 61).

Thief Abilities: PP15, OL 10, F/RT 5, MS 40, HS 30, DN 15, CW 60, RL 5.

Life Spell (reversed Death Spell) (Necromancy)

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 6

Area of Effect: One creature

When a *life spell* is cast, it draws the life force of a creature back into its body, restoring it to life once more. The body takes on a normal lifelike appearance. All rot disappears and the skin, hair and eyes look healthy. Any wounds sustained at the time of death, however, are still in existence. These wounds are not debilitating in any way (unless an entire body part is missing) and no longer bleed or cause pain. The *life spell* keeps the body functioning normally, despite the injury. The wounds may be fully cured by *regeneration* or a *wish*; this is usually more a form of cosmetic surgery than a necessity.

The body is restored with its full hit points. Aside from those wounds taken at death, it has no special immunities to damage; subsequent injuries or wounds affect it normally.

The *life spell* differs from the *animate dead* spell in that those restored to life are free-willed; they are not automatically under the command of the spellcaster. They are also very much alive; they cannot be turned as undead, nor do they have any of the spell immunities common to the undead.

It is possible to use the *life spell* to counter the effects of a *death spell*. It is not possible,

however, to use a *life spell* on undead creatures, lycanthropes, or creatures from planes other than the Prime Material Plane.

The material component of this spell is a crushed white pearl with a minimum value of 1,000 gp.

Death Shards

The Ebon Fold always carry out their assassinations using a magical +2 dagger known as a *death shard*. The hilts of these daggers are made of normal metal, but the blades are made of clear crystal. They are shaped much like stilettos, with a long, thin blade that is round in cross section. They are thus piercing rather than slashing weapons.

Although the blade appears to be made of a breakable material, it is impervious to normal damage. Because it is magical, it cannot be broken by a *shatter* spell.

A *death shard* does only one point of normal damage each time it strikes. Each successful hit, however, drains life force from its victim, resulting in the loss of one experience level—and a permanent loss of hit points. This loss is equivalent to the normal hit die for the victim's character class. (A wizard loses 1d4 hit points, a rogue 1d6 hit points, etc.) Any abilities linked with that experience level are also lost.

Each time a *death shard* drains a level of life force, its crystal blade fills with swirling, blood-red smoke. This smoke gradually fades over the next ten rounds as the energy within the blade is channelled back to a skull-shaped repository in the lair of the Ebon Fold. Once stored there, it cannot be restored to the person from whom it was stolen by any means short of a *wish* spell.

If *dispel magic* is cast upon a *death shard*, the dagger becomes nonmagical. The blade now may be broken by either magical or mundane means.

If the *dispel magic* spell was cast within ten rounds of the dagger stealing a life force, that life force remains trapped within it as swirling red smoke. It can be released by breaking the dagger's crystal blade. If the character whom the life force was stolen from is standing within five feet of the dagger when its blade breaks open, the mist flows toward that individual. His life force is restored; the lost hit points and experience level(s) are regained. Otherwise, the smoke immediately dissipates and the life force is forever lost.

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It is possible for its blade to be holding more than one level of life force within it at the time that its magic is *dispelled*. Thus if the above conditions are met, it is possible for a character to regain more than one level of life force by breaking the blade of a *death shard*.

A *death shard* does not drain life force from a character protected by a *negative plane protection* spell. This spell instead inflicts damage upon the wielder of the *death shard*; see the spell description in the *Realm of Terror* rules book for details.

Mircea Giurgiu

6th-Level Div, Neutral

Armor Class	8	Str	12
Movement	12	Dex	16
Level/Hit Dice	6	Con	14
Hit Points	16	Int	12
THACO	19	Wis	14
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	13
Dam/Attack	1-2 (punch)		
Special Att	Spells, wand		
Special Def	Spells		

Spellbook (5/3/3): 1st—*comprehend languages*, *detect magic**, *identify**, *message**, *read magic*, *shield**, *sleep**, *ventriloquism*; 2nd—*blur**, *ESP**, *fool's gold*, *levitate*, *locate object**, *wizard lock*; 3rd—*clairaudience**, *clairvoyance**, *dispel magic**, *tongues*.

* Indicates favored spell.

If the DM has *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*, the following spells may be added to Mircea's spell book: 1st—*detect disease*, *divining rod*.

If the DM has the *Tome of Magic*, the following spell may also be added: 3rd—*wizard sight*.

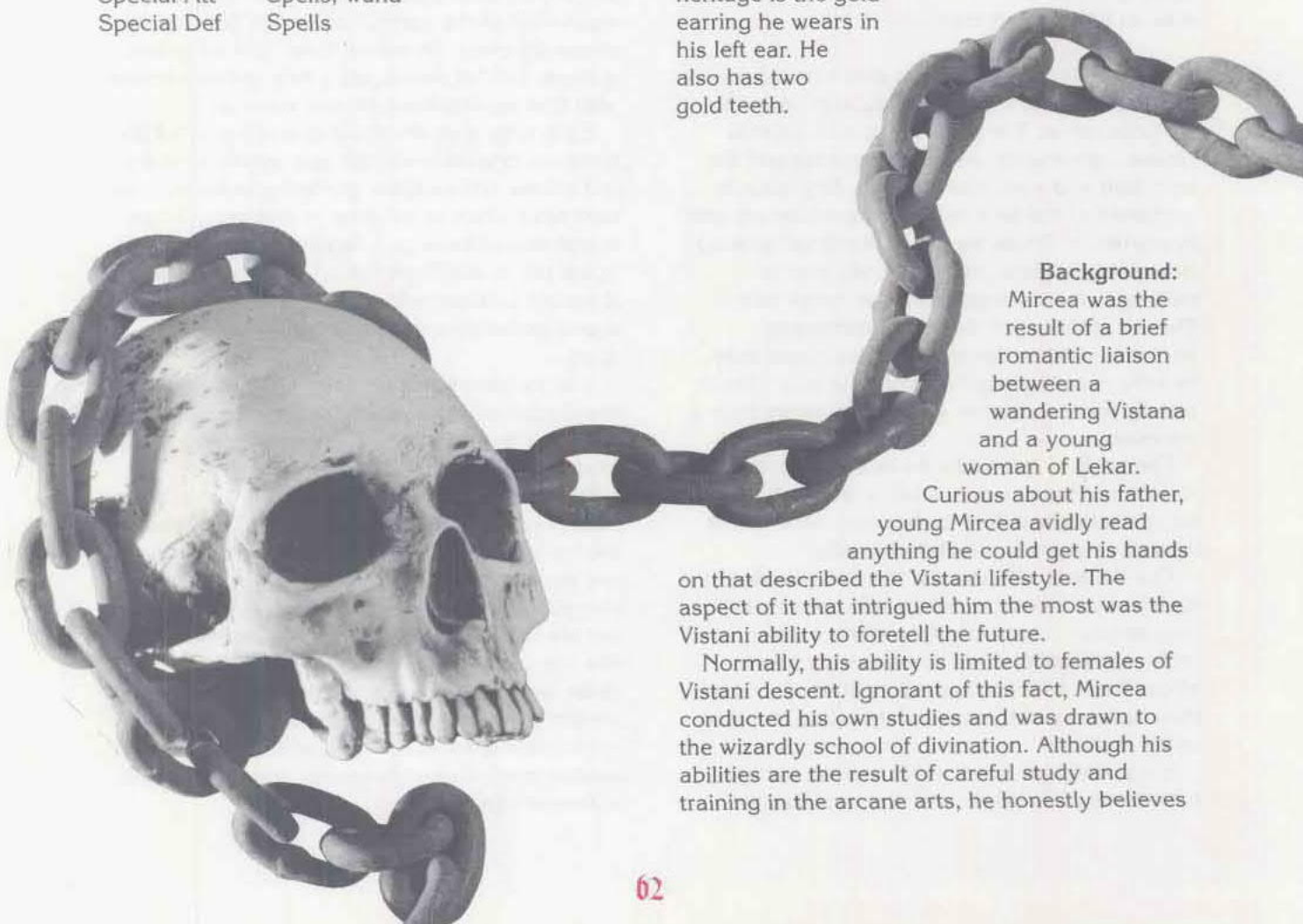
Description: Mircea is human, but he shows traits that are rare in Lekar. He has dark curling hair combined with pale green eyes—a hallmark of Ravenloft's wandering Vistani tribes.

Like the other citizens of Lekar, Mircea dresses in drab brown clothing. Under his hat, however, he wears a bright red scarf (now quite frayed) that was once his father's. His other acknowledgement of his heritage is the gold earring he wears in his left ear. He also has two gold teeth.

Background: Mircea was the result of a brief romantic liaison between a wandering Vistani and a young woman of Lekar.

Curious about his father, young Mircea avidly read anything he could get his hands on that described the Vistani lifestyle. The aspect of it that intrigued him the most was the Vistani ability to foretell the future.

Normally, this ability is limited to females of Vistani descent. Ignorant of this fact, Mircea conducted his own studies and was drawn to the wizardly school of divination. Although his abilities are the result of careful study and training in the arcane arts, he honestly believes



The Cast of Characters

them to be due, in large part, to his Vistani heritage.

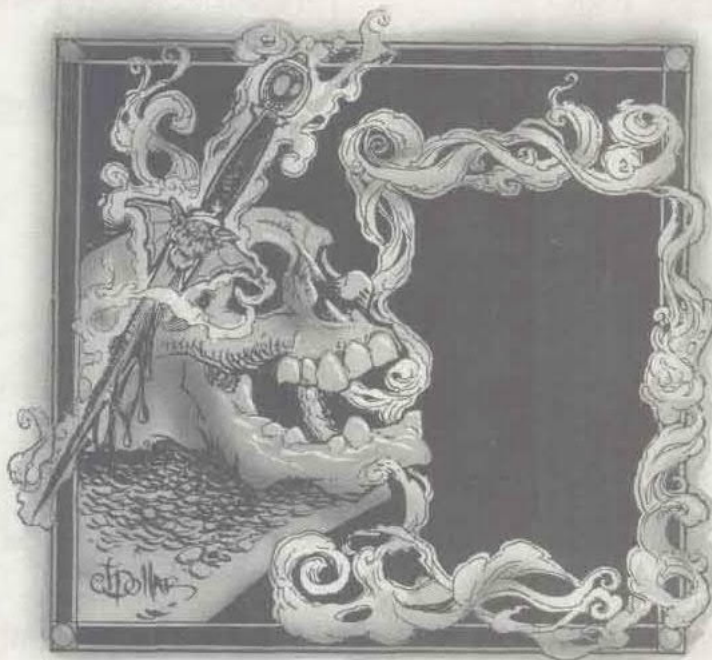
Combat:

Mircea is somewhat cowardly and prefers to avoid direct confrontation. Indeed, he rarely ventures outside of the Radiant Tower, instead letting his students run his errands.

If cornered, Mircea can use his defensive spells (*blur* and *shield*) to protect himself, and can fight with his *wand of magic missiles* (60 charges) or with his *sleep* spell. He makes extensive use of his *ESP* spell to determine whether a visitor to the Radiant Tower is a threat.

Current Sketch: Mircea's mother died when he was still in his early teens, and thus he knows how difficult it can be to survive without a parent in the harsh domain of Falkovnia. He runs the Radiant Tower as a combination orphanage and magic school. He takes in only the brightest children—those whom he thinks have a chance of succeeding as wizards. Given Vlad Drakov's predations on the populace of his city, there are always plenty of orphans to choose from.

Although these children might more properly be called his students, Mircea likes to refer to them as his "tribe." He not only gives them a basic education and lessons in divination magic, he also teaches them what he knows of the ways of the Vistani. Since he believes that one day members of his father's tribe will return to accept him into their fold, he wants his students to be prepared and to feel welcome in their new society. Unfortunately, most of this knowledge comes from books written by *giorgios* and so is wildly inaccurate. Still, he has done what he can to give the inside of the Radiant Tower the feel



of a Vistani encampment, decorating various rooms like *vargas* and painting scenes of "typical Vistani lifestyle" on several of the walls.

For their part, the children regard Mircea as a parent, and call him "Father." They hold the tales of Father's tribe someday returning as their most fervent dream. They believe that one

day they will be taken away to a place where they can sing and dance all day and never have to fear the Talons again. The children all consider themselves Vistani, like Mircea, and sport affectations, such as earrings or colorful kerchiefs, to display their heritage. Mircea is quite eager to meet any of the Vistani (who only rarely visit Lekar). He is especially hospitable to anyone who has a knowledge of divination—or to those who can tell him more about the Vistani practice of fortunetelling.

Mircea pays for the upkeep of the Radiant Tower using false gold coins created by his *fool's gold* spell. He also pays hefty bribes to the Talons to leave him and his students alone—usually with real gold, although lately money has been tight, forcing him to include some *fool's gold*. He knows that it will be only a matter of time before someone catches on to this trick, but he is comforted by the knowledge that he can always escape (preferably with his students) through a secret tunnel under the Radiant Tower. He does not know that this tunnel offers access to the lair of the Ebon Fold; indeed, he would be horrified to learn that the lair of an evil secret society lies below the Radiant Tower.

Mircea carries with him at all times a *peript of health*. It offers protection against the multitude of diseases one can catch in Lekar.

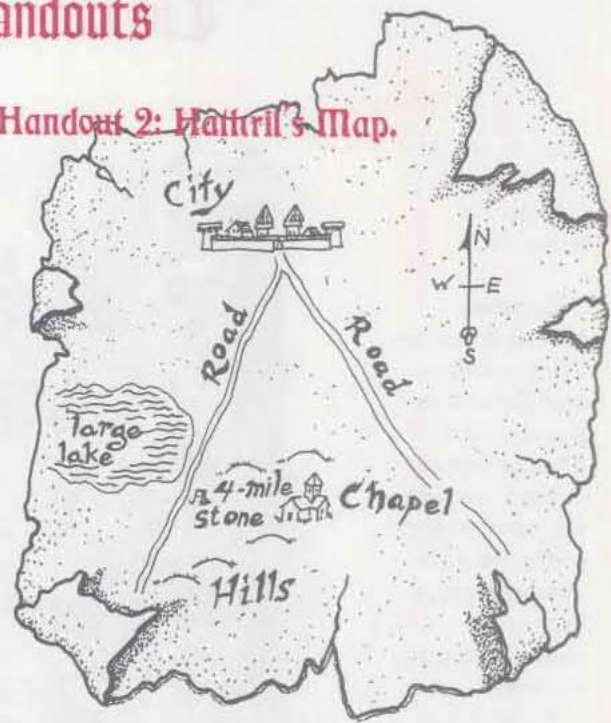
Player Handouts

Handout 1: Bloodstained Note.

You will know the woman by the
mark I have placed upon her forehead.
May your dagger strike true!

L.S.

Handout 2: Hathril's Map.



Handout 3: The Dagger Note.

To my newfound friends;

My companions are convinced that they are being watched, and so we have decided to move to a new hiding place. We will leave immediately after dinner. I cannot tell you where we will go, for I do not know myself. I thought I should leave this note as a warning, in the event this place truly is unsafe.

I took this dagger from the rogue who was stalking me, just after I took his life. My companion, Thilwhist, determined that it was indeed magical but, strangely, could not tell whether this magic was evil, benign, or good in nature. Thus he decided to dispel it.

I am convinced that the men who were hunting us will also hunt you—they seem to target those who are strangers to this land. Beware the crystal-bladed daggers, for I know not what powers they possess!

I plan to find another of these would-be assassins and take his dagger from him. The wizard who lives in the Radiant Tower, back in the city where I met you, has promised to help me determine exactly what magic it contains. Perhaps if I can learn this, I can also learn why we are being hunted.

Fare thee well, until we meet again.

Hathril

Handout 4: Letter from Ladislav

To: Lowellyn Dachine
Captain, Inner Circle

Greetings to a fellow servant of our undying master. My work in Falkovnia is going well. I have stored vast quantities of energy for our lord in the crystal skull. When it is full, I shall transport it to you with all haste. Please ensure that your courier is ready to meet me in Stangegrad at the appointed time!

Recently, my Ebon Fold anamins reaped a rich prize indeed, harvesting the life energies of a number of powerful elves who were visiting this domain.

Soon, I shall add the energies of several other powerful folk to the skull. These latest targets are not the snivelling citizens found in this domain, but adventurers from a land beyond the Mists. I think our master will like it well when their flesh feels the stabbing kiss of our daggers. May his ascent to mastery be smooth and swift, oiled by the hot blood of these new victims!

Yours in partnership in the service of darkness,

Ladislav Sintesti,

Apprentice to our most masterful lord

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Official Game Adventure

Death Unchained

by Lisa Smedman

You have no friends here

What can you do when the Mists deposit you in the city of Lekar? The militia is no better than a gang of sadistic bullies, the citizens are more contagious than a fleet of plague ships, and every foot of public space is covered with corpses of criminals who committed no crime greater than struggling to survive in the oppressive domain of Falkovnia.

Danger haunts your every move

A secret society of assassins, known only as the Ebon Fold, has been hunting down visitors to Lekar and killing them in a most grisly fashion; all that remains of the victims are desiccated husks that crumble to ash when touched . . . and you are their next targets.

There is no escape

When everyone who has befriended you is either dead or hunted by the authorities, you have no choice but to fight back. But the Ebon Fold is a numberless horde whose leader holds sway over death. How can you defeat enemies that won't stay in the grave? They strike from the depths of darkness and steal your life . . . one dagger stroke at a time.

This 64-page adventure can be played independently, or as the opening challenge in the Grim Harvest series that continues with *Death Ascendant* and concludes with *Requiem*. Inside this package is a poster map that fully details all 10 levels of the chilling complex known as the Well of Bones.

For three to six characters of levels 5-7

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