

THE CIRCLE'S END

AN ADVENTURE MODULE FROM THE GM'S SECRET STASH



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An Adventure Module from the GM's Secret Stash



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The Circle's End

A 5 - 6 Hour Adventure for 8th to 10th Level Characters

CREDITS:

Written and illustrated by Mauro Gotsch

Cover by Hieronymus Bosch (Public Domain)

Editing and Feedback by the Quickphix TTRPG Club



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Not with glory, or much noise at all did your travels come to a close. It is time to learn that you are small, not more important than most. I can offer you my teachings, and once you've finished your time spent, you'll have learned many new things. So, come, join me, at the circle's end. -Daraven the Watcher

Summary

Daraven was raised to be a priest of the Quiet – a religious order dedicated to help the souls of the dead passing on to what lies beyond. Daraven, a shy but determined child, grew into a well-loved pillar of his community. Soon he gathered several followers who saw the wisdom in his teachings. He expanded on the philosophy of the Quiet, proclaiming he'd seen the passage of souls: a circle of blinding, heavenly light calling out to all souls from atop a tall tower. For a while, these visions gave him comfort. However, as death constantly surrounded him, he soon began to wonder if there was any point struggling to stay alive at all. Plagued by doubt, he decided for his life to have any meaning at all, he'd need to find out if his visions were true. He gathered his most trusted disciples and set out to find the passage of souls. Reasoning he could find its location by asking the dead themselves, he abandoned his God's teaching in favour of more dark arts: Necromancy. After a lot of summonings, he finally managed to bind the soul of an old gnome able to pinpoint the location of the passage of souls. However, once Daraven got there, he found the tower of his visions dark and desolate. Convinced, that there must be something more, he and his disciples delved deeper into this strange underground land, infested with lost souls.

In this 5- to 6-hour adventure, a party of 8th to 10th level characters will stumble across what's left of Daraven's party. What rituals has he been conducting in this ancient ruin? What still draws restless souls down here? Is it possible for the living to escape the clutches of "The Circle's End"?

Premise

There are two ways to start this adventure: either in medias res, with the party stumbling across the remains of Daraven's camp in a dungeon, or with a quest from a nearby village to investigate the large number of undead lurking around this dungeon. This adventure can also be either combined or used as a sequel to our one-shot "Follow the Lights". If it is combined, replace the final chapter of "Follow the Lights" with the first chapter of this one.

What is left of the Quiet

After fighting their way through a treacherous cave and numerous undead, the party finally arrives in a wide-open cavern. Unlike the path leading up to it, this space was clearly man-made. What looked like stalagmites from a distance, turn out to be ancient cone-shaped pillars. Faded floral carvings cover the floor and appear to be growing up these pillars. Despite being in a wide-open space, the party's steps and speech seem weirdly muffled, not producing any echoes. After walking for about an hour, the cavern gives way to a small round chamber (see Appendix I). It contains the remains of a camp with several tents and a few broken barrels. A blinding light is emanating from a tent to the left. Suddenly, a piercing scream cuts through the silence. Roll for initiative.

Wailing Shadows (undead)

The second the party enters the cavern they can hear the high-pitched wailing of something moving in the

In your Campaign:

This one-shot is based on the standard D&D 5e ruleset. It can be easily integrated into any ongoing campaign, by substituting the order of the Quiet for an already established religion.

shadows. A huge silhouette is moving incredibly fast between the shadows of the pillars – screaming every time it is hit by the light from the tent to the left.

Ability Scores

AC: 13 / HP 61 / Speed 60ft.

STR: 8 (-1) / DEX: 16 (+3) / CON: 14 (+2)

INT: 8 (-1) / WIS: 12 (+1) / CHA: 8 (-1)

Traits

Resistances. Acid, Cold, Thunder, Bludgeoning, Piercing and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Immunities. Exhaustion, Frightened, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained, Unconscious, Necrotic Damage, Poison Damage.

Incorporeal Attacker. The Wailing Shadow can only attack while moving through other creatures and objects (treated as difficult terrain).

Lurker. If the Wailing Shadow ends its turn in darkness, it takes a free hide action. While in darkness, it gets +5 to AC.

Weakness to Radiance. While in sunlight or radiant light, the shadow has disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws.

Actions

Consume Life. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, no reach, one creature. Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) necrotic damage, and the target's Constitution score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Constitution to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. If a humanoid dies from this attack, a new wailing shadow rises from the corpse 1d6 rounds later.

How to run this encounter

The wailing shadows can't enter the lowered section of the cavern – because the light emanating from the tent is too intense. However, they want to stop the players from getting to this light. Therefore, they'll attack by speeding from shadow to shadow, draining the life of the players by passing through them. They'll always try to end their turn in darkness.

Radiant Light

It takes players a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to get close enough to the lit-up tent to open it. Inside are two mummified bodies clad in the robes of the Quiet. One is lying on the floor in a blood-stained robe. Examining it will reveal it had its throat cut. Its head rests in the lap of another hooded figure. This figure is hunched over its dead friend, hands folded in prayer – holding a tiny crystal flask giving off an incredibly radiant light. An investigation check will reveal, that both bodies are female and that the woman with the cut throat probably killed herself. Their only possessions apart from the crystal flask are their bedrolls and the holy symbols of the order of the Quiet.

The Flask of Light

Once the flask is removed from the hands of the corpse, its light will dim immediately. Now the players can see that it contains about ten drops worth of a glittering liquid. These ten drops drive most of the mechanics of this adventure. They can be used for three things:

1. Drinking a drop immediately restores all hit-points.
2. An object or body part coming into contact with a drop will start emitting a radiant light in a 20ft. radius sphere, which shadows cannot enter. It also imbues any weapon it is used on with an additional 1d10 radiant damage. This effect lasts 1 minute (10 rounds).
3. If the chalice of silence (see later chapter) is filled with a drop, it'll create a 20ft. radius sphere of silence in addition to the radiant light. This effect lasts 1 minute (10 rounds).

Empty Campsite

The other tents contain the bedrolls of about 18 people. However, there are no other corpses. In one of the tents, the party discovers a ledger containing the story of the Quiet so far. The author speaks in an admiring tone about Daraven and his quest to find the passage of souls. The last few pages are getting increasingly

concerned, as the Quiet realize there's nothing guiding the dead down here. It ends with the following paragraph:

Have the Gods abandoned the passage? Was it removed, or did we destroy it simply by witnessing it? Either way, the souls are still drawn to this unfathomable temple. Daraven says, if the Gods no longer maintain the passage, it becomes the duty of mortals to guide their kin to the circle's end. Yet, our rites don't seem to work down here and the temple grounds remain dark.

The Excavation Site

There's a single narrow path of carved steps leading from the campsite into the heart of the mountain. It leads to an excavation site (see Appendix II), where the order of the Quiet was hauling away rocks and clearing away stalagmites, which have been blocking access to some of the temple ruins. Looking around, the players will notice the cave walls increasingly giving way to beautifully carved temple walls.

Wisp-puppeteer

Near the entrance to the site proper lies the corpse of one of the Quiet. He's surrounded by floating white lights (equal to the number of players). These lights are Will-O-Wisps (see MM p. 301). They will attack anything in a 15ft. radius of the corpse – meaning the party could just run past them. In battle, two of the wisps will take possession of the fallen disciple of the Quiet. If the party destroys his body, the Wisps will be unharmed and still able to fight.

Ability Scores

AC: 8 / HP 90 / Speed 30ft.

STR: 19 (+4) / DEX: 6 (-2) / CON: 18 (+4)

INT: 3 (-4) / WIS: 6 (-2) / CHA: 5 (-3)

Traits

Cleric's Body. While inside the cleric's body, the Wisp's have resistance to radiant damage and "Turn Undead" has no effect on them.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the puppeteer to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 +the damage taken, unless the damage is from a critical hit. On a success, the puppeteer drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Staff. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

After this encounter

Investigating the body of the Quiet will reveal, that his original cause of death has left no visible mark – as if he just collapsed. In his pocket the party can find a broken flask, which looks remarkably like their flask of light, as well as note reading:

Daraven and his four advisors are willing to take on this burden. I'm not. Brother – the passage was not made by the Gods – you must see that too by now. Let us flee during the ritual. We'll take one of the flasks of light for the wounded and to repel the shadows.

Shadows Lurk

While walking through the excavation site, Shadows (MM p. 269) are prowling in the darkness. They'll attack one at a time while the players are trying to examine the scene. They seem to just grow out of the exposed temple walls. The DM should use these Shadows to drive the players away from the shaft and towards the impaled corpse (see Appendix II).

The Cursed Banshee

The party stumbles across a peculiar scene while searching through the excavation site. A dim light is emanating from two corpses. One of them is lying on its back on the floor– its face distorted in a silent scream, holding up a chalice with two handles. He's

been stabbed through the heart (and one of the chalice's handles) by a staff with the holy symbol of the Quiet on it. This staff is emitting the dim light – probably keeping the shadows at bay. The corpse on top is still clutching this staff and is slumped over it. Examining these two will reveal, that the person on top seemed to just have dropped dead. Moving anything in this scene, will allow a spirit to rise from the stabbed corpse. It will immediately grab the chalice.

Ability Scores

AC: 12 / HP 58 / Fly 40ft. (hover)

STR: 1 (-5) / DEX: 14 (+2) / CON: 10 (+0)

INT: 12 (+1) / WIS: 16 (+3) / CHA: 17 (+3)

Traits

Resistances. Acid, fire, lightning, thunder, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Immunities. Cold, necrotic, poison, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained.

Detect Life. The banshee can magically sense the presence of living creatures up to 5 miles away. It knows the general direction they're in but not their exact locations.

Incorporeal Movement. The banshee can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Actions

Corrupting Touch. Melee Spell Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 12 (3d6 + 2) necrotic damage.

Horrifying Visage. Each non-undead creature within 60 feet of the banshee that can see it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the banshee is still within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends, the target is immune to the banshee's Horrifying Visage for the next 24 hours.

Wail of Despair (Recharge 5-6). The banshee releases a mournful wail, if it isn't in sunlight. This wail has no effect on constructs and undead. All other creatures within 30 feet of it that can hear it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature drops to 0 hit points. On a success, a creature takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.

After this encounter

The Banshee will try to keep the chalice away from the party. The chalice itself seems to resonate with the flask of light the players are holding.

The Chalice of Silence

A large, stone-carved chalice. It is the holy artefact of Daraven's sect of the Quiet, used in many of their rituals. The outside is polished smooth, but the inside looks like it wasn't worked on at all. Touching the chalice directly draws all warmth from the hands of the person holding it. Doing so for a prolonged period of time, will draw out blood from the holder's pores. If the chalice is fed enough life energy, it will emit a 20-foot-radius sphere of silence for 1 minute (10 rounds). This means, players can't hear the Banshee's Wail, but can't communicate with each other either.

Players can charge the chalice by pressing a wound against the chalice's inside and losing a third of their total HP or by using one drop of the elixir within the flask of light.

On the chalice's bottom is an inscription, reading the following poem:

The stone whispers of your great fate

You give it life, you can't deny it

Its cold allure is setting the bait

and like a fool you buy it.

With your spark extinct,

all that remains is Quiet.

The Descent

The party finds a weirdly rectangular and smoothly polished shaft in a corner of the excavation site (see Appendix II). It leads 60ft. straight down into darkness. From below, the party can hear the distorted sound of rushing water. Scraping marks along the shaft indicate, that a lot of things have been moved down this shaft. It currently presents the only exit from the excavation site. It is up to the players to utilize the spells and equipment they have, to safely descend.

The Temple of Passage

At the bottom of the shaft, the party find themselves in a featureless square room, which, judging by the surrounding rubble, once held a stairwell. It overlooks a dimly lit temple ground, with four prominent buildings and a 280ft. high tower with an open rooftop. A bright light can be seen emanating from it (see Appendix III).

The Barrier of Light

Depending on the length of the adventure the DM is aiming for, this section can be shortened by skipping several or all the buildings mentioned below. The tower in the back of the temple grounds only opens, if its connection to the buildings is severed. The party can visit them in any order that pleases them.

Building 1: The Young Disciple

The building contains nothing except a carved throne with a big spike protruding from its backrest. The throne is surrounded by half as many corpses as players. Impaled on the spike is a young disciple of the Quiet. His skin is greyed but judging from his twitching muscles he's still very much alive. Despite the tip of the spike protruding from his forehead, he'll greet the players once they enter. The young disciple known as Tapharel will answer the players' questions – saying he's here to fulfil Daraven's vision. He'll freely share any information on how to unlock the tower (remove the four disciples from the thrones) or what Daraven is doing (guiding the

dead to their rest in his opinion). Should the players try to remove him from the throne or attack him, he'll cast spirit guardian immediately and as many Wisp Puppeteers as corpses will appear. Tapharel himself has 80HP and won't participate in the fight after casting Spirit Guardian. If he's removed from the spike while still alive, a cursed banshee will emerge from his dead body. However, removing the body will break the link it has to the tower.

Building 2: The Wise Woman

This building contains much the same scene: A throne with a disciple of the Quiet impaled on it. However, there are no corpses strewn about and the figure impaled on the throne is an old woman with her eyes closed. She's not able to attack and she won't react to the players, but she's reading their thoughts with a detect thoughts spell. She has 80Hp and won't react to damage caused (although it does hurt her). If a player touches the woman, he'll freeze in place for a moment, his mind completely taken over by the woman. While the player is touching her (he won't be able to let go), he must convince his party members to leave the building. This can either be done through roleplaying, or if the party tends to metagame, the GM could hand the player a note explaining the situation. If the players leave the building, a cursed banshee will emerge from the woman's body and get a surprise round to scream the Banshee's Wail. The Banshee also appears, if the players reduce to woman's HP under 20. Removing her body from the throne will break its link to the tower

Building 3: The Quiet Shrine

The Quiet have appropriated this building to erect a shrine for their own religion. Here the party learns the fate of the rest of the order – written in detail within a tome resting on the makeshift altar in the middle of the room. Following points of information can be learned from it:

- Daraven has found a way to reopen the passage. He will stay on the tower with four of his

most loyal subjects to keep it open for all eternity.

- He developed a spell to bestow a person's soul with the banshee's curse, effectively giving them an immortal soul in a withering body.
- Four other souls are required to keep the tower sealed and prevent intervention from the outside (the people in the buildings).
- The rest of the disciples were supposed to be the first souls, to go through the new passage (meaning they killed themselves).

Building 4: The Lovers

This building has crumbled in on itself after being struck by several giant boulders, presumably falling from the cavern ceiling somewhere above. They have torn up the floor and opened a hole to the building's fundament (see Appendix IV). There's a narrow, crumbling path leading to the throne. The person on the throne is a young woman, her eyes closed. To her feet lies a corpse with a cursed banshee hovering above it. The banshee will do anything to keep the players away from the throne. The young woman on the throne has 80 HP but won't fight back at all. The link to the tower is broken if she dies or is forcibly removed from the throne.

Building 5: The Illusionist

This building is dimly lit through a crack in the ceiling. The person impaled on the throne in the middle is an older man. He warns the party upon entering not to get any closer. He introduces himself as Erdal, Daraven's second disciple. He'll tell them, that it is paramount they don't disturb Daraven on his eternal mission. He's convinced, without Daraven, there's no way left to reach the afterlife. If the players step closer, Erdal will give them one final warning, that he'll use all of what's left of his considerable might to smite them.

Erdal has 100HP and can cast Counterspell with a level 4 spell-slot 3 times. If approached, he'll summon 2

Wailing Shadows, but will make it look like twice as many Shadows as players through illusion magic (see the spell Major Image for details). All these illusions take normal turns, just like the real ones. However, they cannot do any damage. Since Shadows are incorporeal like illusions, it'll be hard for the players to figure out if they are just missing the Shadows or fighting illusions. The link to the tower is broken if Erdal dies or is forcibly removed from the throne.

The Tower Unlocked

After all the links to the tower have been severed, the players can hear a loud clang coming from the tower. Approaching it, the party will also hear the faint sound of a continuous Banshee's scream coming from within.

The Tower at the Circle's End

The tower itself is empty. A spiral staircase leads up to the open roof, where Daraven waits. The problem is, that the Banshee's Scream is constantly filling the entire tower. Meaning, if the players do not use the chalice of silence or plug their ears, they won't be able to enter the tower without dying.

How Daraven's Ritual works

Some Backstory on Daraven's ritual: This ancient ruin was used by its builders to convert the energy of souls into life essence – using the tower as well as the flasks of light to capture it. However, Daraven is convinced, that this tower is the true passage to the afterlife. Therefore, he thinks the sacrifice of himself and his disciples is necessary to keep the passage open. Without it, he reasons, nobody can move on from this world. Yet, he's just been collecting the energy of the many souls passing through the cave in a flask.

His four disciples up here with him have sacrificed themselves and turned into Banshees (see Appendix V). Their scream is constantly in effect, meaning if the players can hear, they'll perish. Their barriers have an AC of

15 and HP of 70. Destroying them all will stop Daraven to use his second lair action, because it is their energy that is drawing souls down here into the cavern. They are drawn towards the eternally kneeling Daraven, who is holding a bigger version of the party's flask of light. He's unable to hear the party – but he will see them as aggressors, should they take any hostile or suspicious action.

Daraven the Watcher

The only thing keeping his body alive is the glow of the flask of light. Before he started this ritual, he surrounded himself with a protective barrier – powered by the souls he's been drawing towards the tower. The following HP and damage threshold are purely regarding this barrier. Spells can't pass through the barrier, except if explicitly stated in the description. He himself has 1 HP and cannot move.

Ability Scores

AC: 10 / HP 200 / Damage Threshold: 20

STR: 1 (-5) / DEX: 1 (-5) / CON: 1 (-5)

INT: 16 (-3) / WIS: 20 (+5) / CHA: 5 (-3)

Lair Actions

On initiative count 15 and 5 (losing initiative ties), Daraven takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; he can't use the same effect two times in a row:

- **Summon Wisps:** Daraven summons 4 Wisps from his flask of light.
- **Repair the protective Barrier:** Daraven heals the Barrier for 40HP.
- **Sunbeam:** A beam of brilliant light flashes out from Daraven in a 5-foot-wide, 60-foot-long line. Each creature in the line must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 6d8 radiant damage and is blinded until your next turn. On a successful save, it takes half as much damage and isn't blinded by this spell. Undead and oozes have disadvantage on this saving throw. For the duration, a mote of brilliant radiance

shines from Daraven. It sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet. This light is sunlight.

- **Moonbeam:** A silvery beam of pale light shines down in a 5-foot-radius, 40-foot-high cylinder centred on a point within range. Until the spell ends, dim light fills the cylinder. When a creature enters the spell's area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it is engulfed in ghostly flames that cause searing pain, and it must make a Constitution saving throw. It takes 4d10 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A shapechanger makes its saving throw with disadvantage. If it fails, it also instantly reverts to its original form and can't assume a different form until it leaves the spell's light. The beam stays there for one round.
- **Raise the Dead:** Daraven imbues the corpse of one of the fallen players with two Wisps, creating a Wisp Puppeteer.

The Passage closes

With his final breath, Daraven will catapult his filled flask of light from the tower. If the players don't catch it, it'll fall off the tower and shatter. Its contents mix with the water of the underground lake and for a minute, the entire cave will be illuminated, as millions of souls disperse and float off. Seeing this, Daraven will die with a smile on his face.

Rewards

The players are now in possession of two powerful artifacts: the flask of light and the chalice of silence. What more could they possibly want?

What's next?

None of the players have ever seen or heard of the civilisation who could've built this massive temple, converting soul energy into life essence. If this ruin exists,



maybe there are even more out there. Who knows, maybe some of them contain even more fantastical arcane engines, just waiting to be discovered.

Appendix I – Cursed Campsite

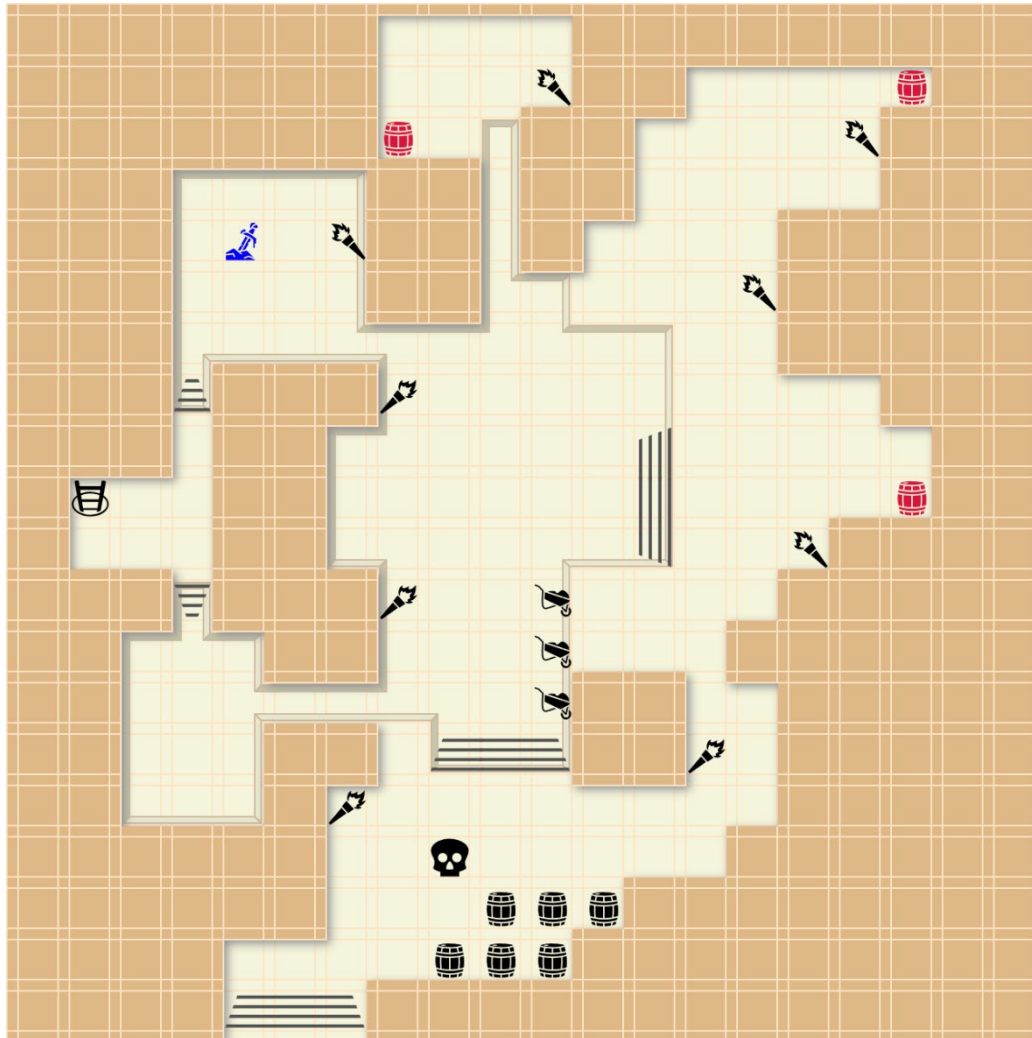


Legend

A blinding white light is emanating from the red tent, throwing shadows against the cavern wall. The fireplace has clearly been abandoned for a while. The four tents on the left are on a lowered part of the cave, about 5ft. deeper. The entire chamber is about 80ft in diameter and about 15ft. high.



Appendix II – The Excavation Site



Legend

Each square equals 10ft. The excavation site is about 15ft. high. The lowered part are 9 ft. deeper and connected with simple dirt ramps to elevated ground. The tar torches are extinguished but functional. The black barrels contain brackish water and bug-crawling food. The red barrels contain a thick, flammable oil.

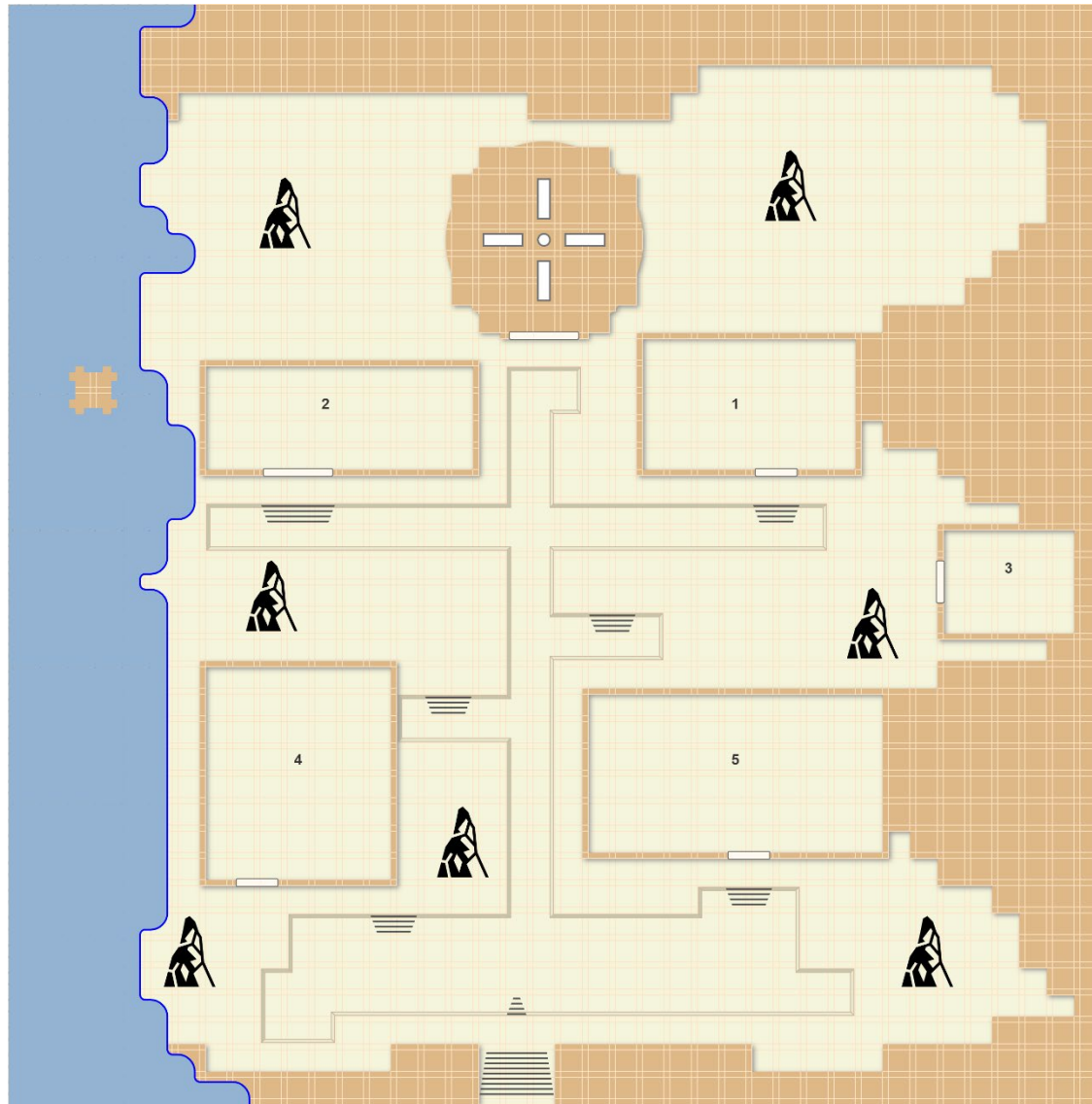
The hole to the left (icon with the ladder) drops about 60ft. down a 10ft. wide shaft. There's a broken wooden ladder at the bottom.

The skull marks one corpse of a member of the Quiet, who died from the banshee's wail.

The blue icon marks a corpse stabbed by a staff with a holy symbol. The corpse of its murderer is still slumped over it, still clutching the staff. Wedged under the stabbed corpse lies the chalice of silence.



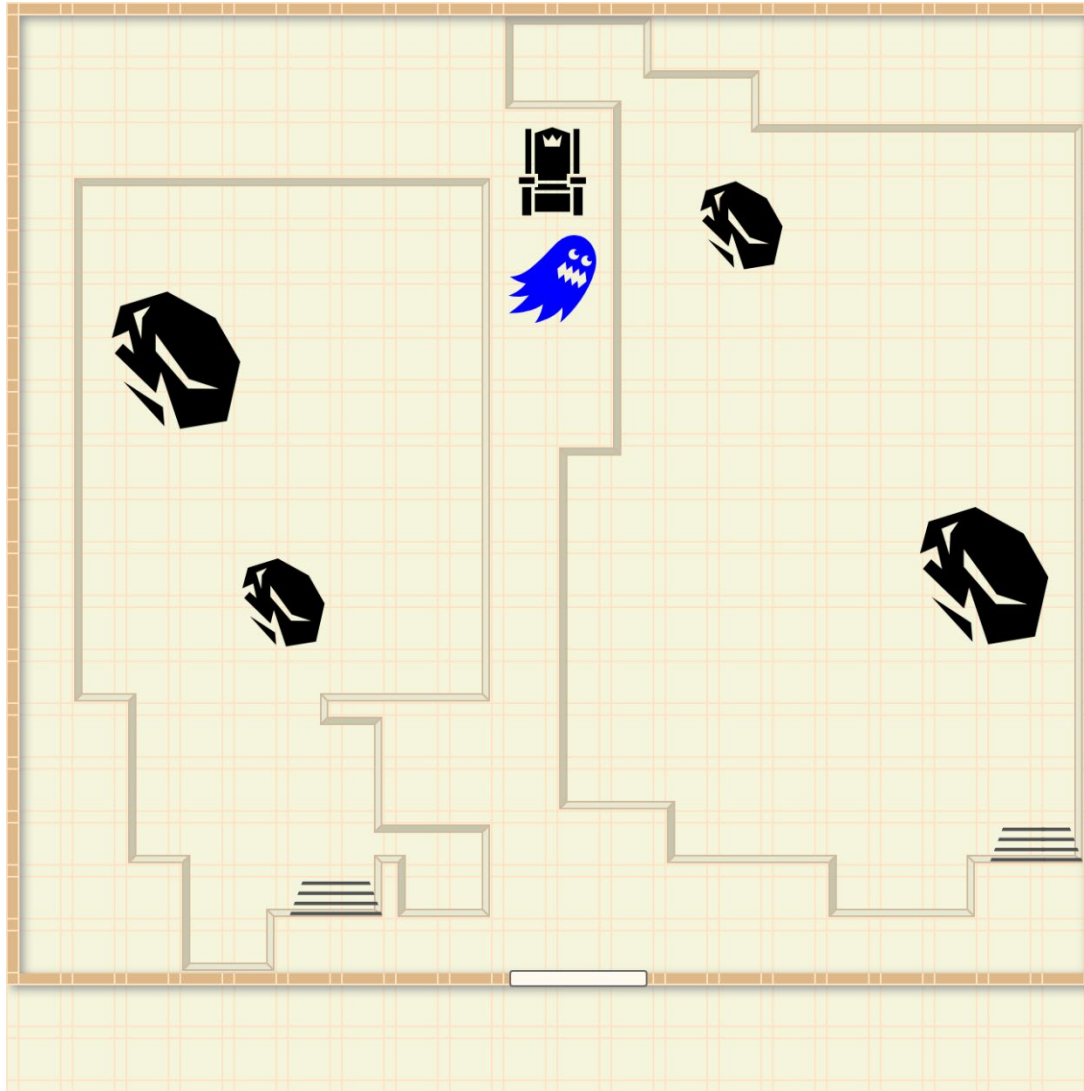
Appendix III – Underground Temple Overview



Legend

The temple is built next to a giant underground lake. The five squares are weirdly hard-angled buildings, with heavy black stone doors. The building in the back is a tower with four large metal spikes protruding from its top, a brilliantly glimmering light shining from between the spikes. The tower is 280ft. tall. The bigger quadratic buildings each contain a throne with one of the Quiet on it. Apart from building 3, the encounters could take place in any order.

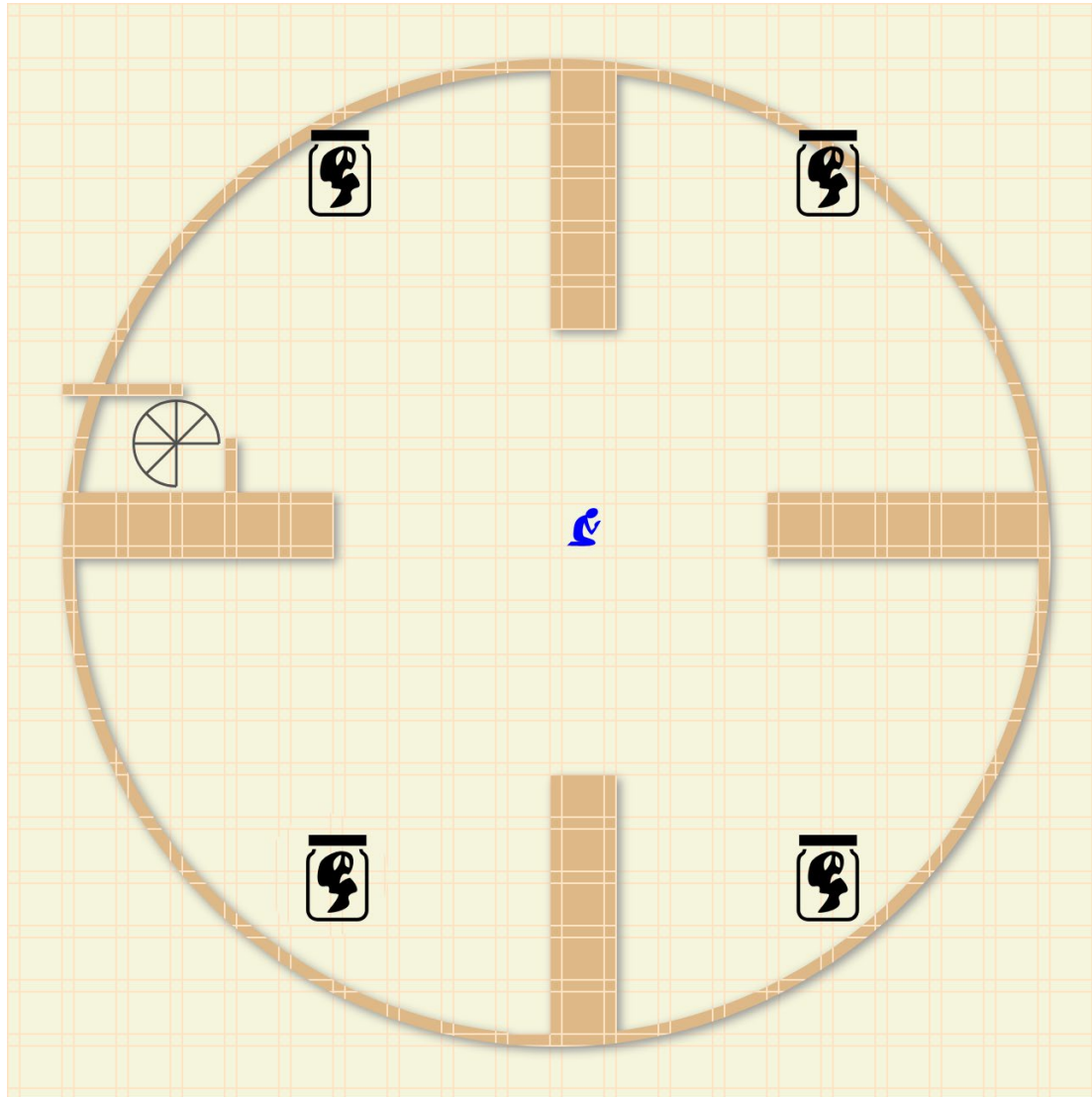
Appendix IV – Building 4: The Lovers



Legend

This building has crumpled in on itself after being struck by several giant boulders, presumably falling from the cavern ceiling somewhere above. They've torn up the floor and opened a hole to the building's fundament. There's a narrow, crumbling path leading to the throne. The pits on both sides are about 20ft. deep.

Appendix V – Daraven’s Tower



Legend

The spiral staircase on the left side leads down the entire tower. The thick walls pointing towards the middle of the tower are thick metal needles reflecting the light coming from the four forcefields beside them. Inside each of the forcefields is a cursed banshee, constantly screaming. It is their energy that is drawing souls down here into the cavern. They are drawn towards the eternally kneeling Daraven, who is holding a bigger version of the party's flask of light.