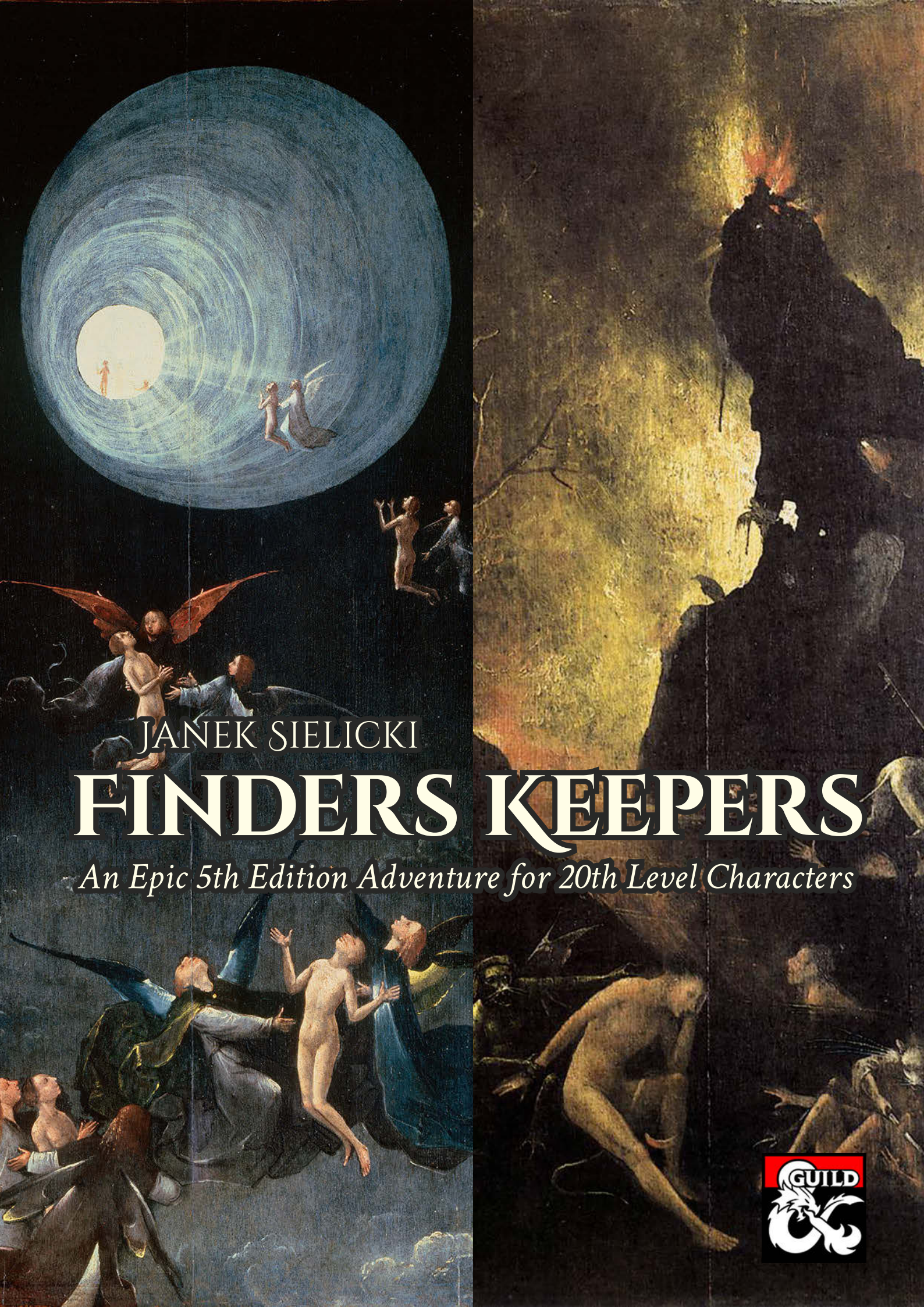




JANEK SIELICKI

FINDERS KEEPERS

An Epic 5th Edition Adventure for 20th Level Characters



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INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN NOTES

Finders Keepers is an adventure for 20th level characters, set in the Forgotten Realms. It is designed to allow you to have fun with some of the most powerful enemies from the Monster Manual and to allow your players to enjoy smashing these enemies to pieces using the most potent spells and abilities game gives them. Considering the fact that most likely you and your players don't play 20th level PCs that often, the adventure, especially the opening dungeon, is kept simple, with emphasis on action and short scenes. Sprawling dungeons at high-level games quickly get boring – there is a lot of hit points to calculate and even a simple damage roll takes a

bit longer than at lower levels, not to mention those 11D6 sneak attacks! Throughout the module I offer advice and suggestions, but you're welcome to ignore them – as always, it is YOUR game. Even if I could foresee all the ideas players might have and offer solutions here, this would make for convoluted reading and cumbersome execution. Ultimately, a published adventure is primarily a source of inspiration, something to get your ideas going. Have fun!

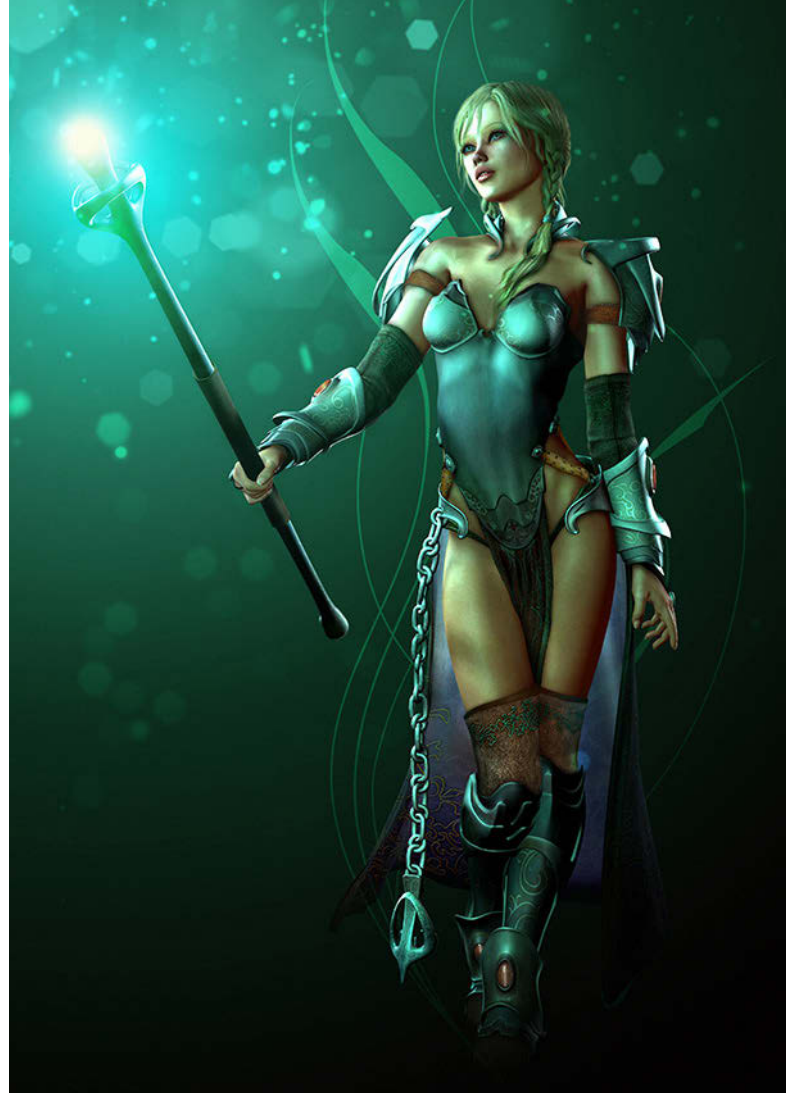
PREPARATION

The advice below is useful mostly for groups who create 20th level characters specifically for this adventure. Running adventures for 20th level characters requires some preparation from both the DM and the players. First of all, the DM should,

as always, familiarize themselves with the abilities, powers and spells of NPCs, read the information in the Monster Manual about the Yugoloth, Night Hags, Beholders and other monsters that appear throughout this adventure. Remember that at 20th level both players and NPCs have access to the most powerful spells and you should be able to predict their effect on your game. Likewise, if players have created their PCs specifically for this adventure and have never really played a 20th level character, they should try to make their PCs a few days before the game, since it takes at least 1 hour of work (usually more) and – with your help, should they need it – try to analyse their character’s potential. This adventure comes with several pre-generated 20th level characters which can be found in the attached zip file.

Of course, don’t expect your players to know everything – nothing can substitute the gradual build up of a PC level by level – and when running the game allow them (or even advise) to check their sheets, look up spells etc. There are also several very useful online or mobile apps and sites that speed up the process.

The DM should also consider providing newly created 20th level characters with magic items. The number and rarity of these objects will vary and depend on your approach to the subject, but take a look at the table on p. 38 of the Dungeon Master’s Guide, which suggests starting equipment for high-level characters. However, even if your regular games



fall in the middle category, consider allowing your players to pick magic items as per the last column – let them feel the power! Again, this should be done before the game to give you a chance to verify your players’ choices, since some objects might not fit the adventure’s themes or simply break it (for example, the Deck of Many Things, although fun, is very likely to derail the game).

Finally, you, as the DM, should change your approach. Go epic! At 20th level PCs are resilient monster-killing, spell-flinging, continent-hopping, time-stopping mythical super-heroes. Act accordingly, on both game mechanics and narrative levels. Use 9th level spells and lair abilities; even if a PC dies, they can be resurrected quite easily; consider providing

each PC with a scroll of resurrection. Unleash your descriptive skills when narrating the story, and remember that in the game world the PCs are mighty, famous heroes and NPCs should treat them as such.

BACKGROUND

It all began with the creation of the Books of Keeping, tomes containing true names of the Yugoloth and even other devils, supposedly even archdevils (more details of Yugoloth origins in **MM, p. 311**). Over the millennia the books disappeared and resurfaced, only to vanish again. Forces of Good and Evil sought them, for to have a demon army under one's command ensured a place among the greatest powers of the Realms and beyond.

Talanthiel, a fallen solar, was one of these powers. He learnt about the legendary Yugoloth general and captured him, hoping to extract the information about the location of a book from him. However, before the general was taken, he sent a group of hags, perhaps the very coven that actually made the Yugoloth in the first place, to retrieve one of the books he actually knew where to find.

All the hags perished on the quest, save for one, the youngest witch, who learned that the book was hidden in a slain god's dreams and that the key to access the dreams, a fragment from the god's shattered skull, was located on the mortal plane – in the lair of an ancient red dragon Santhrixaris, also known as Heartblaze. Alone and

weakened, she realized she was not ready to face the dragon whose power equalled some celestial entities.

So she did what she did best: under the false name of Mela, she manipulated and schemed until she managed to win the heart of a young ruler of Phlan, King Adran. Then she convinced him that the dragon, for centuries dormant and forgotten in his cave in the Dragonspire Mountains, was awake and marshalling his forces to strike. She even united the goblins and other creatures dwelling in the mountains to start harassing villages and settlements, a campaign that went so well that the king ordered most of his forces, such as they were, out of the city and marched towards the mountains. Next, when everything was ready, Mela made an orc chieftain go and wake the dragon to warn him about the approaching army, thus forcing him to leave the lair, where she could finally find the secret she sought.

As Mela predicted, Heartblaze woke up, in his fury ate the unfortunate warchief, and then, not even bothering to attack the 'army' (for him, a rag-tag group of mortals unworthy of his attention) headed directly towards the city, to execute a wholesale punishment on those who dared to rouse him, their families, friends and everyone else. When the PCs arrive in Phlan the dragon is about to attack and it's up to them to deal with the wyrm! And while they're doing so, Mela is frantically (because she knows the dragon should be back soon, not expecting anyone able to withstand

its fires in the city) searching the lair for the way to access the god's dreams and retrieve the book.

THE UNOFFICIAL HISTORY OF PHLAN

Phlan is a city with a turbulent history. It's been destroyed and rebuilt several times, teleported to another dimension, made the seat of power of the Zhentarim and conquered by a demon-possessed brass dragon, only to be rescued by stalwart adventurers. But people always returned there – perhaps because of a sense of historic obligation or tradition, or maybe because the site is just too good for settlement to abandon. In recent years yet another warlord appeared who decided to take control of Phlan.

However, this usurper was different. A former adventurer who spent his turbulent childhood in Phlan, after years on the road, Adran Lichbane returned to the city to settle there and protect its people, walls and the temple of Tyr. With his small band of hardened veterans he easily rooted out various crime lords, destroyed Zhentarim takeover plans before they came to fruition and eventually led the defence of the city when a horde of orcs swept in from the North. He then proceeded to forge several trade deals and non-aggression pacts with other Moonsea cities. Not even 25, he was so beloved by the denizens of the once again thriving Phlan that no-one opposed him when he declared himself King Adran, the First of His Name, and Phlan – a free city-state.



A few months ago a woman appeared in his life. Hardy adventuress and a pirate queen, she was captured by the king himself in a sea battle and little by little, as he was convincing her to join his cause, she won his heart. That woman, who introduced herself as Mela, was secretly a powerful hag, the last member of the coven which once created the Yugoloth. Manipulating the young king was child's play for her and soon his friends and most suspicious supporters were in disfavour, departed to complete the quests Adran suddenly assigned to them, or mysteriously vanished. Meanwhile the goblins, ogres and other villainous creatures of the Dragonspire Mountains began launching attacks at villages and trade caravans located under Phlan's "umbrella of protection."

The king, knowing the city's history well and having studied the mistakes of previous rulers, decided to act immediately. Both the annals and his own experience taught him that allowing evil to fester for too long brings even worse troubles. However, no-one except Mela and him knew about the dragon, because the king in his wisdom decided that revealing the fact would spread panic, and people believe that the orcs, goblins and such rabble were the danger. And so King Adran assembled his forces and rode towards the mountains, wholeheartedly believing that his beloved Mela would keep his city safe during his absence. Instead, she launched her last intrigue and staged a kidnapping during which she was 'taken' by the dragon's agents, when

in reality she left for the lair. She could have just disappeared, but a night hag had to have some fun...

SYNOPSIS

Finders Keepers is divided into three parts. In Chapter 1 the PCs arrive at the city of Phlan, only to learn that it is about to be attacked by a giant red dragon. An epic battle ensues and when the dragon is dead, the PCs have to race to the beast's lair, beat its defences and finally encounter Mela, the hag who has been pulling the strings from the shadows, and a cadre of Yugoloth devils. Another fight ensues, and when Mela is brought down she begs for her life and reveals the nature of her quest – acquiring the Book of Keepers.

In Chapter 2 the PCs travel to a pocket dimension where the slain body of Valigan Thirdborn, a long forgotten deity of anarchy, is located and visit the strange settlement that arose around the god's arrow-pierced head. To find the book they must successfully navigate the dead god's dreams and nightmares. Once they do so, the god's body awakens, and the Yugoloth and other parties interested in obtaining the book arrive. The PCs will have to fight for their lives, get the book and escape, with the help from Talanhiel's envoys.

The final chapter of the adventure takes place in the solar's palace-fortress. While a Yugoloth army storms its defences, Talanhiel's plan is revealed and the PCs have to decide the book's fate.

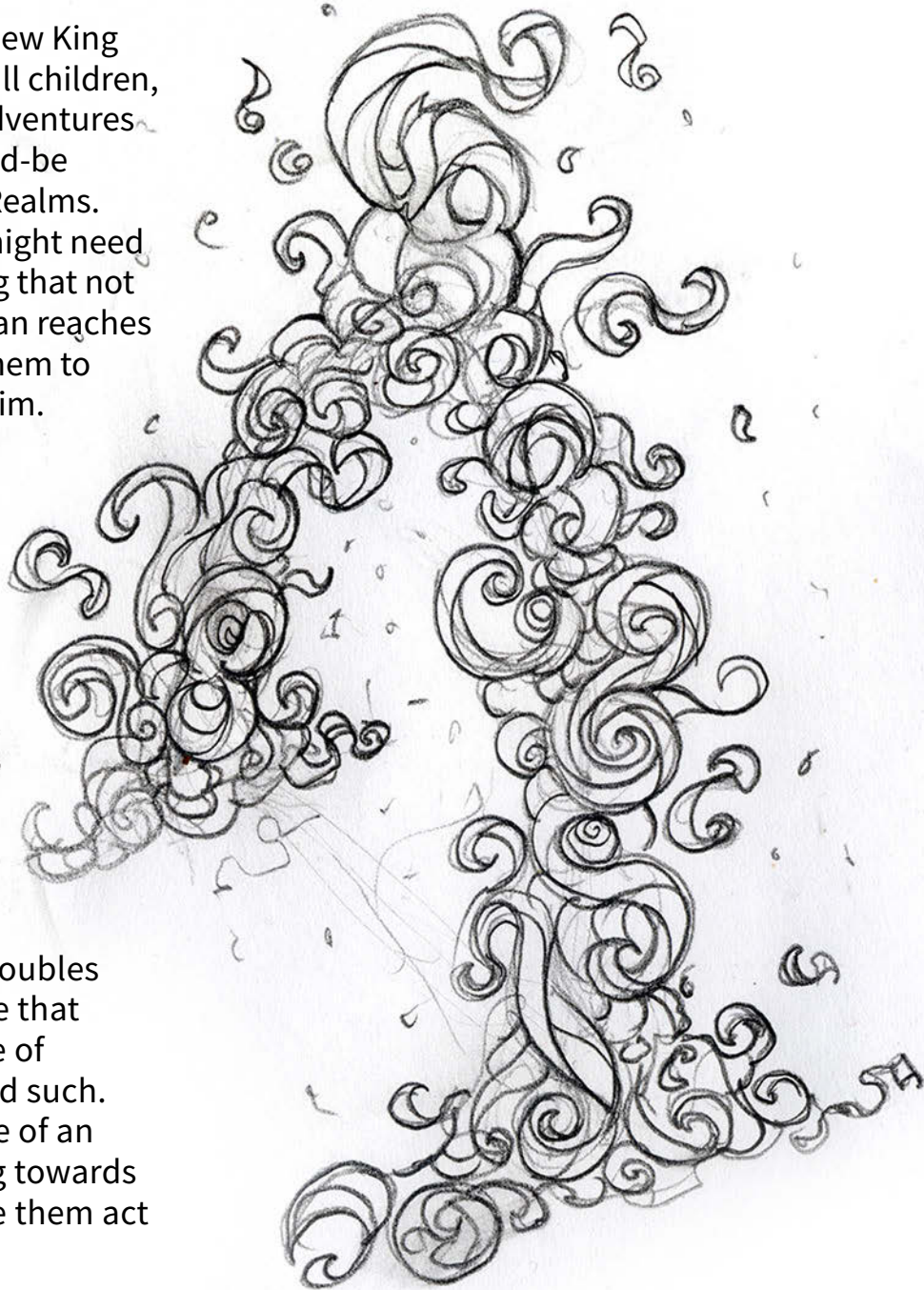
GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

There are several ways of introducing the PCs into the story. Even if your group has already had some adventures together, you might assume that they have settled down, started families, perhaps even govern their own cities or countries and then, hearing about the troubles in Phlan, have to ride – one last time. Consider the following ideas:

1. **Old friends.** The PCs knew King Adran when they were all children, or perhaps had some adventures together when the would-be monarch travelled the Realms. Now, realizing that he might need help, or perhaps sensing that not all is what it seems, Adran reaches out to the PCs, asking them to come to Phlan to help him.
2. **Heroes to the rescue.** The PCs are the Avengers or the Justice League of the Forgotten Realms. Based in their skycastle, they keep watch and respond whenever and wherever their help and might are required. Although they heard about the troubles in Phlan, they were sure that King Adran was capable of dealing with goblins and such. The sudden appearance of an ancient dragon heading towards the city, however, made them act

immediately and they set off to Phlan to kill the beast and find out the reason for its unexpected appearance.

3. **Agents.** The PCs are agents of Talantheil, Asmodeus, the Great Yugoloth General or some other power interested in the book. However, their 'boss' does not trust them enough to reveal



the whole truth about their quest and sends them to Phlan instead to find Mela and bring her back for interrogation. This is probably the most interesting – and simultaneously the most dangerous – introduction, especially if different PCs work for different entities, which may lead to a very exciting, tense and likely bloody finale. Therefore, it's not for the groups that don't allow player vs. player combat at the table. Moreover, this introduction needs to be discussed beforehand with the players (individually!) and requires some planning from both the DM and the player(s). An agent PC will be also informed that Mela is a hag and works for a Yuguloth general.

Warning: if any of the PCs is Asmodeus' agent, remember that they were ordered not only to get the book, but also to learn who is behind the whole affair. This should help to get all the PCs to Chapter 3 (see last paragraphs of Chapter 2).

4. **Divine quest.** Tyr is a god whose presence and influence is subtly interwoven with the adventure. The only temple in Phlan is devoted to this deity and Valigan Thirdborn, the dead god the PCs encounter in Chapter 2, was slain by Tyr. A cleric, paladin, or any

righteous hero might receive a vision urging them to go to Phlan and serve their deity. The vision will also show the PC that Mela is a hag sent by some extraplanar power.

5. **Concerned travellers.** By accident the PCs happen to be in Phlan when the dragon attacks. Perhaps it was a stop during their journey to some other place, a miscast teleportation spell, or they arrived from half a world away to visit a family member who lives in the city. However, since they are living legends, they were immediately invited to meet with the king's consort, Mela. Before they know it, the dragon is upon them! This introduction works best with players who are late to the party and didn't prepare any backstory for their characters.

Needless to say, you'll get best results when you give each PC a different start. Again – this doesn't mean that the PCs don't know each other (and even if do not, they might have heard about each other's exploits), it just assumes that they don't live together and makes the game much more interesting. If you want a straightforward game, it is also a good idea to make it clear from the start that Mela is evil and should be dealt with as soon as possible.



CHAPTER 1: THE BATTLE OF PHLAN

The adventure begins when the PCs arrive in Phlan and await a meeting with the king's seneschal, Desmond Wright (**Noble, MM, p. 348**). You might want to briefly explain the situation in Phlan – that King Adran is a local hero who brought peace and prosperity to the city, that he is currently away fighting goblinoids in the mountains, and that all citizens love Mela, the king's beloved. On their way to the castle they have already

heard the news: the king is already gone, taking the fight to the goblins and king's fiancée – Mela, who was supposed to stay and protect the city – has been kidnapped. The citizens are distraught, everyone is afraid and confused. Read or paraphrase the following:

“You are in the Valejo Castle – famous for being one of the largest castles on Toril. Although it is still a glorified ruin, the king has managed to restore significant parts of it,

like for example the tower and the splendid waiting room you are in, the city of Phlan stretching beneath your feet, the Moonesea glittering in the distance... A view that shows a promising future, even despite the dire news that brought you here. The king already rode towards the Dragonspire Mountains, but you can't shake the nagging feeling that something is profoundly wrong here. The people are nervous, there was some kind of a commotion in the castle when you were led to the waiting chamber and the seneschal is far past being fashionably late."

Give the PCs a few minutes to talk and get into character. Let them describe their physical appearance, exchange information, etc. Remember, even if they don't know each other, they probably heard stories about other PCs' achievements, so they can refer to that. Don't make this conversation too long, though. When the moment is right, read or paraphrase the following:

"Suddenly the door to the room bangs open and an opulently dressed middle-aged man stumbles in, steadies himself and – ignoring you – rushes towards the window, his hand outstretched towards something on the horizon. Finally, he manages to catch his breath, the stutter quickly turning towards a panicked scream: "D..D...DRAGON!"

An epic battle with the beast commences! If the PCs don't know what to do, seneschal Wright points out that they are mighty heroes – why are they standing doing nothing?

RUNNING THE BATTLE

This combat should be much more than a simple exchange of blows with Heartblaze. Print out the map of the city to keep track of the PCs' positions and to mark which buildings are aflame, which are collapsing and blocking streets. Don't try to track movement too meticulously, foot by foot; try to make the combat a bit more narrative. A good solution is changing the grid scale (if you're using a grid) – one inch square representing 30 feet, so the dragon moves 3 squares (yes, give him +10ft) and PCs 1 square (or 2 flying etc.).

Remember that the PCs are not the only people in Phlan. And, although most citizens will be running or hiding, some will try to help. For example, a priest of Tyr might heal a PC, a resident wizard might support them with a spell, or a friendly guardsman will give them a weapon (or ammunition) and so on.

Heartblaze's tactics

The dragon (**Ancient Red Dragon; MM, p. 97**) is not expecting any meaningful resistance. He has lived for millennia, fought giants, rival dragons and extraplanar beings, always emerging victorious.



He begins his attack with a strafing run, fire spewing from his cavernous mouth, cutting a swath of destruction across the city centre. Then he circles back, methodically turning the city into a conflagration. Curiously, he leaves the castle alone. If attacked, and if the attack actually harms the mighty wyrm, the dragon pulls back to reassess the situation, see how many foes he has to deal with, what their weak points are, and how to split them.

He knows his mobility and breath are his most powerful weapons. He is also very, very clever and experienced. He'll try causing collateral damage and endangering civilians, a situation that will keep a PC busy for a round or two. He will hide among burning buildings or in the smoke (as the battle commences, the easternmost part of the city is on fire), trying to set traps for those PCs who rush blindly into the fight. He will try to snatch (grapple) weaker

characters (wizards, sorcerers), take them hundreds of feet into the air and then release them, fighting them all the time. You can also assume that he can guess who the spellcaster concentrating on the fly spell is and focus his attacks on that PC to make other heroes fall. Finally, to make the fight more interesting, consider adding additional legendary actions for Heartblaze to choose from, especially if your group has more than 4 players:

- ☞ **Dispel Magic (2 actions)** – the dragon casts Dispel Magic (as a 9th level spell, so automatically ending the effect of any spell).
- ☞ **Move (2 actions)** – the dragon moves another 90 ft (flying).
- ☞ **Breath Recharge (3 actions, once per encounter)** – the dragon instantly recharges its breath attack.

☞ **Fireball (2 actions)** – instead of the standard cone, the dragon's next breath attack is a fireball, with the range of 120 ft, 20 ft radius and normal breath weapon damage.

☞ **Breath Type Manipulation (3 actions)** – the dragon's next breath attack has a different type (acid, cold, electricity, poison).

☞ **Wall of fire (2 actions)** – the dragon unleashes his breath weapon, but not to its full potential, creating a circular wall of fire around himself. Anyone entering or beginning their turn in the area makes a **25 DC Dexterity saving throw** or suffers 2d6+10 fire damage.

☞ **Maximize Breath (6 actions, once per encounter)** – the dragon's breath weapon deals maximum damage (182).

Characters might try drawing Heartblaze away from the city. Although intelligent, the dragon is also a creature of passion and fire. If a PC succeeds at **DC 25 Wisdom (Persuasion/ Deception)** check (depends on what they actually say), the dragon focuses on that PC, even chasing them beyond the city. When the dragon loses half of his HP, he decides to retreat to his cave to rest and better prepare for combat. Some PCs, especially if they know a thing or two about dragons, should realize that's a bad idea – not only is the dragon even more powerful in his cave, but also allowing him to prepare for combat is a recipe for death. Therefore, a similar **DC 25**

Wisdom (Persuasion/Deception) check might make the dragon stay and fight until his HPs drop to 25%, when the check is repeated every round. This kind of convincing is an action. During this “conversation” the PCs might accuse him of kidnapping the king's beloved; naturally, he doesn't know anything about Mela or her plan.

Troubleshooting: If the dragon manages to escape, he heads straight to the lair, where – given time – he heals himself with magic items and awaits the PCs. Naturally, on his return he encounters Mela and her demons; he is in no shape to fight and allows Mela to leave with her prize – the key to the dreams. When the PCs arrive and fight him again, and again are victorious, he will ask them to spare his life. For this, he will reveal what he knows about Mela and the object she left with. Being wise and ancient, he knows or he is able to deduce most of the information Mela provides (see below). The PCs should realize, though, that leaving the dragon alive means trouble, and the wyrm will try to lie and deceive them, already planning his vengeance.

However, having Mela survive complicates things. If you prefer to keep the story simple, consider this: When Heartblaze escapes to his lair, he encounters Mela and her devils. Both sides fight, destroying much of the lair in the process. When the PCs arrive, they encounter Mela, as explained below, but with only half of her devils, and the dragon is dead.

TO THE LAIR

Once the dragon is dead, the PCs and several other people in the city realize two things: the king might be wounded, since he was in the vicinity of the lair (which is assumed to be in the mountains, because the dragon marked his way to the city by burning villages), and that the lair – presumably full of legendary treasures – can be plundered. And although many inhabitants of the city

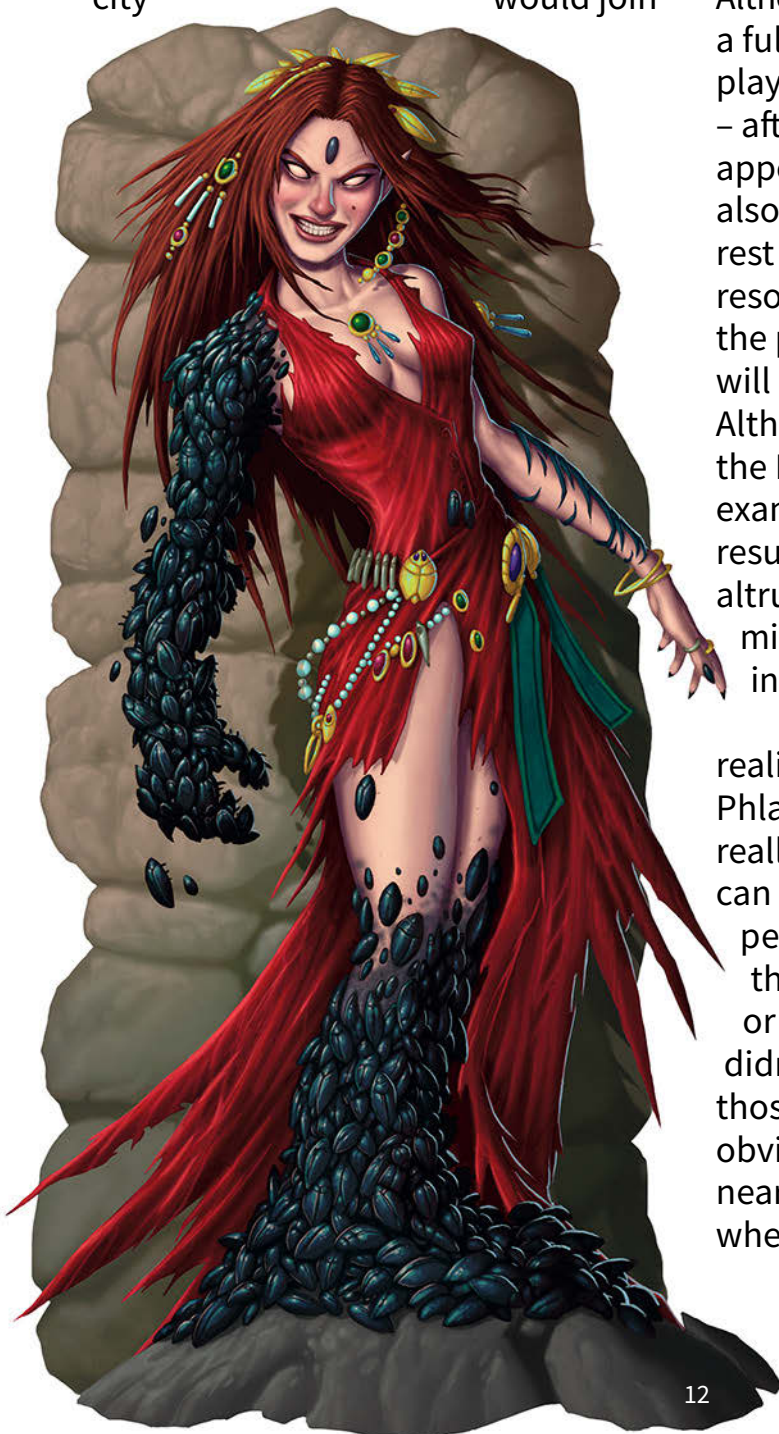
would join

such an expedition, remember that the city is still in flames and people are dying in collapsed buildings and capsized ships. Seneschal Wright assures the PCs that he'll coordinate the efforts in the city and urges them to go to the king to inform him about the situation in Phlan and check if he is all right.

After the battle

Although this scenario does not involve a full-fledged investigation, clever players might be asking questions – after all, a huge dragon does not appear out of nowhere. This might be also an opportunity for the players to rest (short rest), but unless the PCs resources are really low, try to keep the pressure on. The people of Phlan will also try to show their gratitude. Although they can't do much (by the PCs standards), they can, for example, offer a diamond or two for resurrections – although particularly altruist PCs might realize that these might be used to help those who fell in the dragon's attack.

Piece by piece, the PCs should realize that Mela is the power behind Phlan's troubles and that she wasn't really kidnapped, and most likely can be found in the lair. For example, people may talk about bad dreams they have had since Mela arrived, or the dreadful black gem she didn't want anyone to see (and those too curious vanished). A very obvious clue would be a secret room near Mela's castle chambers, one where she performed her vile rituals.



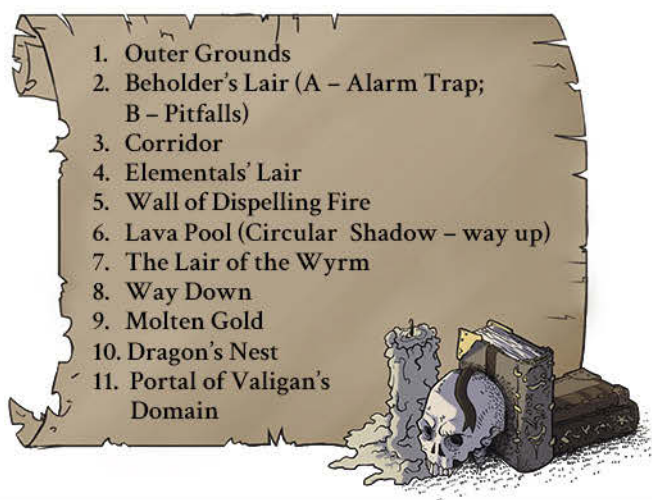
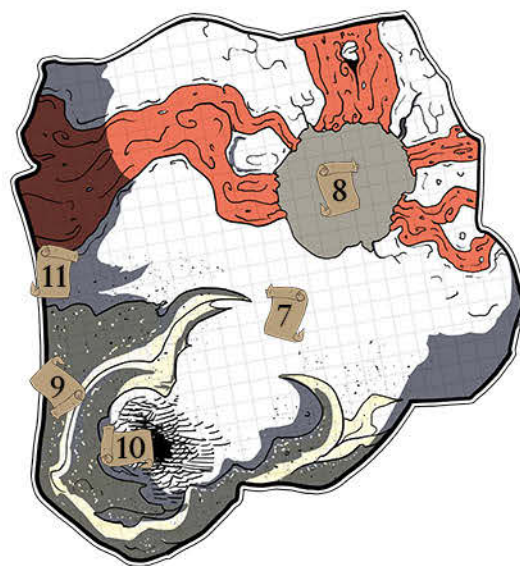
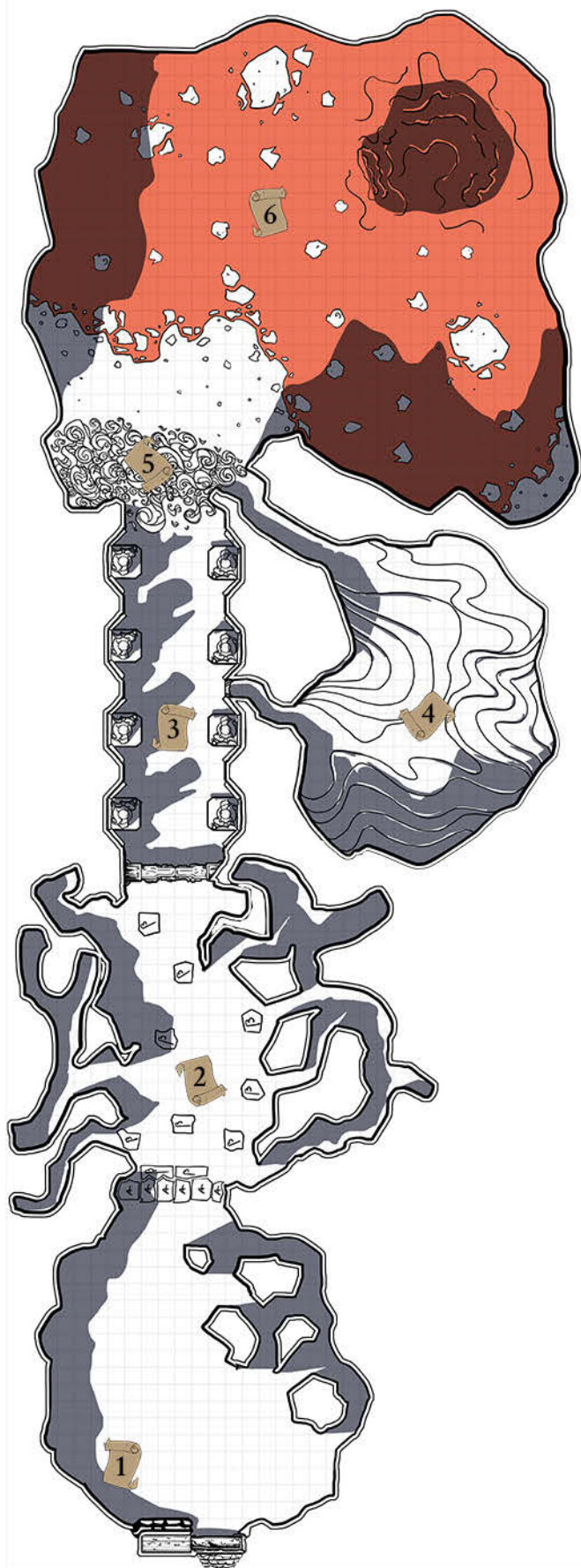
Don't worry if your players don't get all the information – the important part is that their next step involves catching up with the king or going directly to the lair, which – as it turns out – is practically the same.

While the PCs were travelling to Phlan and battling the dragon, the king vanquished goblin hordes, learned about the whereabouts of the dragon lair and managed to secure its outer defences. However, because the entire lair is shielded from scrying and blocks magical communication, the king cannot be contacted. The easiest way to find him is to follow the trail of the army from the city to the battlefield at the footholds of the mountains, where the main body of the army is camping and where they will get a local guide (a wounded soldier named Martha Twospur), who takes them to the king. Read or paraphrase the following:

“You pass through wide halls and hot caverns, over a pool of boiling magma and along a bottomless chasm. And at every turn, in every space, you see signs of the battle that raged while you were battling Heartblaze over Phlan. The bodies of the dragon's minions and the king's soldiers are everywhere. Traps were sprung, arrows launched, blades and shields broken. Finally, you see King Adran – bruised and weary, but otherwise unscathed. He smiles the wan smile of a victor, takes his crowned helmet off to ease the heat and explains the situation.”

King Adran (if you need stats use **Hobgoblin Warlord, MM, p.187**) explains that they are unable to press on because the way is guarded by two, or more, purple worms and they're too much to handle for him. What lies beyond – he doesn't know. He doesn't believe, or refuses to believe, the PCs when they tell him that Mela manipulated him and the city. Nevertheless, he thanks them for saving the city and killing the dragon and asks them to clear the way to the lair. He promises them the first pick of the treasurers, but also says that the gold will help to rebuild and strengthen Phlan.

Resting. After the epic opening fight, the PCs will probably want to rest and replenish their resources before heading to the mountains. Although the seneschal worries about the king, he understands that and offers the PCs the best guest chambers of the castle. It is about 80 miles to the mountains and the PCs can probably fly there or teleport to the army camp the king set up there (an NPC might provide an object from the area). Allow them one long rest after the battle with the dragon. When they want to stop and rest while exploring the lair, you may point out that Mela might be in danger (if they believe she was kidnapped) or that while they're resting Mela might already be in the lair (which is actually true). That is why it is better if the PCs know the true nature of Mela. One or two short



rests are ok. If the players insist on taking another long rest before reaching the main lair, let them. When they eventually arrive there, Mela is gone (taking the best and most portable treasure with her). And, logically, the adventure ends here. But the PCs are rested! The only option now is tracking Mela to Valigan's realm (perhaps with scrying or with clues in Phlan), where several nycaloths join her. You might want to decide that the hag also needed rest before the trial of dreamlets, so when the PCs arrive, she still has the Skullshard.

THE LAIR OF THE WYRM

Heartblaze's lair is located deep inside Sombre Widow, an unforgiving, almost unclimbable peak. To reach the inner sanctum of the lair proper, the PCs have to fight dozens of guardian goblins, overcome traps and find their way through a maze-like system of tunnels and caves. Or rather – they would have to do it, but luckily King Adran, a seasoned adventurer himself, had his companions and soldiers clear the way for them. Now the PCs have to deal “only” with the inner sanctum's defences. The whole lair is screened from outside scrying and magical communication (thanks to careful application of wish spells cast by an evil wizard that worked with the dragons centuries ago). King Adran's companions include a mage and a cleric of Tyr and they can provide spells and healing, if the PCs go back and ask for help.

1. Outer Grounds

A large circular door blocks the way in. Given a push, the door rolls to the side and almost immediately begins to roll back, thus the room is almost always closed. This underground chamber is bathed in a reddish glow coming from a number of large “windows” (actually lava-filled tunnels whose ends are blocked with permanent Wall of Force that have been modified to allow Heartblaze to pass through). Several of these tunnels lead outside because the dragon uses them for entering and exiting the sanctum, while others lead nowhere or connect to each other. Dispelling a force field makes the lava from the tunnel pour into the chamber and covering the floor. When a creature enters lava for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, that creature takes 6d10 fire damage.

On the other end of the chamber, a large entrance to the farther part of the sanctum is guarded by two **Purple Worms (MM, p. 255)**. They are currently very agitated and aggressive – they have eaten several of the king's soldiers and sense more prey nearby. One of the worms always stays at the entrance to the inner tunnel, the other prowls the grounds, but the room is purposefully small enough for both worms to reach anyone skulking along the walls or crawling on the ceiling. Both monsters fight to the death, but although adapted to tolerate the hot environment of the red dragon's lair, they are not resistant to fire and retreat if the lava from a ceiling tunnel is released.

The ground of this chamber is hot and slightly sticky (think of asphalt on a very hot day), making it difficult terrain. The walls are adorned with reliefs praising Heartblaze's might and were carved with Nirglax the Beholder's rays (more on Nirglax below). After 3 rounds of combat, one of the beholders takes interest and moves to the entrance of their cave to see what the commotion is about. It helps the worms by shooting its rays, but keeps the antimagic cone off, since it doesn't want to dispel a force wall from a lava tunnel. The beholder withdraws and warns others if it sees that the PCs are about to win the fight with the worms, or if it is attacked and hurt.

2. Beholder's Lair

Nirglax the **Beholder (MM, p.28)** has 'their' nest here. Forced to serve the dragon, for consolation he dreamt of himself and thus created two more copies of Nirglax. *Volo's Guide to Monsters* provides details on beholders and their peculiar habits, but in short: for various reasons beholders are able to create copies of themselves. Nirglax spends time talking to "himselves" and thinking up new ways to torment goblins. Moreover, the creature is really unhappy that the dragon awoke – until then the beholder was the big boss and all other monsters of the mountain reported to them. This fact can be

used by the heroes: if they somewhat manage to stop Nirglax from attacking and talk to them, each instance of the monster can be convinced to leave (which requires a successful **DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion)** test), or believe that the PCs are acting on Heartblaze's orders and let them through (requires successful **DC 25 Charisma (Deception)** test). However, any beholder allowed to leave is one more beholder unleashed on the world...

Unless the PCs manage to sneak past the worms, the beholders know that intruders are coming and attack immediately. Remember that if the



PCs flooded the Outer Grounds with lava, the floor of the Beholder's Lair is also covered with it – on the upside, though, all the traps are disabled.

This is not a typical beholder lair – it's quite wide (to allow Heartblaze's massive bulk) and lacks the verticality typical for beholder nests, because the dragon wanted his glorified doorman standing guard at the entrance, not floating through their own cave complex. However, Nirglax still managed to carve (literally) himself a nice dwelling: the walls and ceiling are riddled with entrances to niches and tunnels and during the fight the beholders pop in and out of them, trying to confuse enemies.

Finally, a player might ask what they remember about beholders. If they make a **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcane Lore)** check, they recall information regarding beholder habits and realize that two beholders must be products of Nirglax's dreams. These two beholders might be convinced that they're not real and disappear (a **DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion)** check per beholder; takes one action if performed during combat). Of course, if this happens, the real Nirglax attacks the PC with all his fury!

There are two traps on the floor:

☞ **A: (DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation))** to spot and disarm) A simple alarm spell – whenever someone enters the room, the beholders and the dragon know about it.

☞ **B:** The Beholder carved and masked several pits in the floor (they are marked as B on the map). They are too small to bother the dragon, but any medium sized or smaller creature stepping on them has to succeed at a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** or fall 50 feet onto sharp rocks (5d6 falling damage and 2d10 piercing damage). A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals a pit trap, but they are really well masked and unless specifically searched for, passive perception to detect them has a range of 10 ft. If a beholder happens to use its telekinetic ray, it tries to move the target onto a trap.

A massive work of art blocks the way forward: a complex statue depicting Santhrixaris vanquishing hundreds of foes, such as human armies, elven wizards, other dragons; cities burn, volcanoes explode, fire consumes all. In a sick way, it is magnificent. Curiously, beholders are depicted as the mighty wyrm's allies. Or, if you look closely, one of them is shown as the dragon's master. The statue/relief masks the door to the tunnel behind it. The doors are not locked or trapped, but opening them requires tremendous strength: a successful **DC 25 Strength (Athletics)** test. Anyone failing the test suffers 1 level of exhaustion. It's probably easier to go through using spells such as stone shape. The statue-door weighs tonnes, but if somehow removed, it can be sold for 2,000 gp.

3. Corridor (with secret passage)

A wide, dark and hot tunnel leads on. A wall of fire blocks its end (see below). Magical voices fill the air, saying in many languages things like “Behold the might of Santhrixaris!” “No-one escapes his wrath!” “The destroyer of Nan-tesh!” “The vanquisher of Sunchrysanter!” “The one who devoured silver Mrranteris and her children!” “His fire is eternal!” “Tiamat’s chosen!” The walls are adorned with carvings depicting Heartblaze’s victories and fallen foes.

A secret passage leads to the chamber with fire elementals. Spotting it requires a successful **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception)** check. Opening the door requires a solid push (**DC 20 Strength (Athletics)** check). The door is also trapped with a *Phantasmal Killer* spell (9th level, **DC 20 Wisdom saving throw**). Anyone affected sees Heartblaze coming in from the direction of the Beholder’s Lair and (in addition to taking 9d10 psychic damage each turn, see the spell’s description) flees into the wall of fire. Spotting the trap (tiny runes engraved in the door) requires a successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation)** check. Disarming the trap requires a successful **25 DC Dexterity (Thieves tools)** to disarm. A failed attempt triggers the trap, which then resets.

4. Fire Elemental chamber

Ten **fire elementals (MM, p.125)** are imprisoned in this chamber, their heat and magic powering the

wall of fire (see below). The heat and radiance here are so intense that anyone inside suffers 5d10 fire damage each round. The effect ends if half of the elementals die. When the PCs enter the room, read or paraphrase the following:

“The heat here is not of this world. The very air is white-hot, and the walls, floor and ceiling are covered with dark runes that magically channel this energy through another exit. A pulsing, red-white star hovers in the middle of the chamber. As you enter, it suddenly disperses into ten roughly humanoid beings of fire!”

Killing at least half of the elementals destroys the Wall of Dispelling Fire. The elementals cannot be reasoned with and attack anyone who enters the room, chasing them if needed.

5. Wall of Dispelling Fire

A permanent wall of fire covers the area marked with F. In addition to fire damage (5d8), its innermost area also dispels magic (marked with D on the map; +9 against each effect PCs might have on them). The wall is powered by the fire elementals in chamber 4. If the PCs missed the secret door in the corridor, they might see the exit from the fire elemental chamber while being burned in the wall (which imposes a disadvantage). This requires a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception)** test. It is possible to dispel the wall (**DC 18**), but unless the fire elementals are dead, it reactivates after D3 rounds.

6. Lava Pool

A vast subterranean pool of bubbling lava stretches beyond the wall of fire. Streams of molten rock fall from a large hole in the ceiling. The hole is located a good 100 feet over the surface and leads to the lair proper. There are several basalt islets in the lake and an athletic character may be able to hop their way around the lake on them. The walls and islets are very hot and touching them causes 2d6 fire damage. The hole is the only way of reaching the lair – if the PCs can't fly, they should think about something else, for example they may ask King Adran for help, and learn that he has a scroll of flying, or his mage can cast this spell.

This cave is also infested with magma mephits which serve as a warning system and low-level defence. There are roughly 20 mephits that rise in a swarm when the PCs start crossing the pool. A few of them fly up to warn their master (if he is in the lair above), while the rest attacks the PCs. They are cunning beasties and might wait until one character crosses safely, then attack the rest. In addition to using their powers, they try to swarm a PC and drag them to the lava.

7. The Lair of Santhrixaris

“Emerging from the chute, you are greeted by a magnificent vista of snow-covered peaks stretching all around you under a slightly overcast sky. Curiously, you don't feel the freezing wind and the air is as thick and hot as anywhere else

in the caverns. Mounds of gold, silver and works of art surround you, while bubbling magma rivulets fall down the walls and coalesce into several streams that in orange waterfalls cascade down into the pool below. And in the middle – a pool of molten gold, with a bed of dragon and humanoid bones rising from the middle. Sounds of energetic rummaging come from all around and you see several mezzoloth and nycaloth yugoloths digging in the treasure. A strikingly beautiful woman stands in front of a crystalline object, performing some sort of a ritual. An open portal shimmers not far from her position.”

The woman is, of course, Mela. After staging her kidnapping, she teleported into the cave (she had been able to do it, since she had seen it thanks to a scrying spell she had cast on the orc chieftain who had come to wake the dragon), summoned several **yugoloths** (5 **mezzoloth** and 3 **nycaloth**, **MM**, **p. 313**) and began searching for the key to access the dead god's dreams. As the PCs enter the lair, she is working on recovering the Skullshard from its crystal prison. Unless the PCs were sneaky, she orders her devils to attack while she tries to finish (3 rounds, assuming the PCs took one long rest after the dragon's attack) and escape through a portal she'd opened earlier. She fights if she's interrupted or when she sees that the PCs are making short work of her minions.

As explained on p. 11, under **Troubleshooting**, if Heartblaze managed

to escape from Phlan, he returned here and either helped Mela, or she killed him. If former is the case, Mela is gone, the portal is still open, but the PCs have to fight or talk to the dragon. In the latter case, continue as written, but halve the number of Mela's devils.

Mela. The night hag calling herself Mela (her true name is, naturally, a secret) is a vain, malicious and manipulative creature. She is also heart-stoppingly beautiful – and it's not an illusion, but the permanent effect of a wish spell she was granted for her vile deeds. Mela is a Night Hag (**MM, p. 178**) that can also cast the following spells (**DC 17**, +9 to hit, she has already cast teleport and scrying):

- ☞ Cantrips (at will): fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, shocking grasp
- ☞ 1st level (4 slots): identify, sleep, true strike, charm
- ☞ 2nd level (3 slots): detect thoughts, mirror image, misty step
- ☞ 3rd level (3 slots): counterspell, fly, lightning bolt
- ☞ 4th level (3 slots): banishment, fire shield, stoneskin
- ☞ 5th level (2 slots), cone of cold, scrying, wall of force
- ☞ 6th level (1 slot): globe of invulnerability
- ☞ 7th level (0 slot): teleport
- ☞ 8th level (1 slot): mind blank
- ☞ 9th level (1 slot): time stop

The view of the mountains is a “live broadcast” – Heartblaze had several crystal balls mounted on the surrounding peaks and a powerful illusion spell cast in the cave. This way he could observe his domain while still able to rest on his treasures. It is not a perfect system, and geared towards flying threats such as rival dragons. Anyone traversing the mountains on foot, or flying low, can avoid being spotted.

The mounds of treasure are difficult terrain. Anyone dashing there should succeed at a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test or fall down and roll down 2d10 feet. Anyone stepping into the pool of molten gold suffers 3d10 fire damage per round and their movement speed is halved until they clean the gold off. Moreover, the gold begins to cool down and 3 rounds later also imposes disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws. The portal leads to Valigan's domain and is permanent.

The devils fight to the death, but when Mela is reduced to 25% HP she abandons her quest and tries to flee through the open portal. If unable to do that, she tries to teleport away to a safe location (for example, her chambers in Phlan). She shall return at the end of Chapter 2. If Mela cannot escape (because, for example, used up her spell slots, or PCs restrained her), she gives up and begs the PCs to spare her life. In exchange, she offers to tell them everything she knows.

If the PCs agree (honestly or by deceiving her), Mela first tries to spin

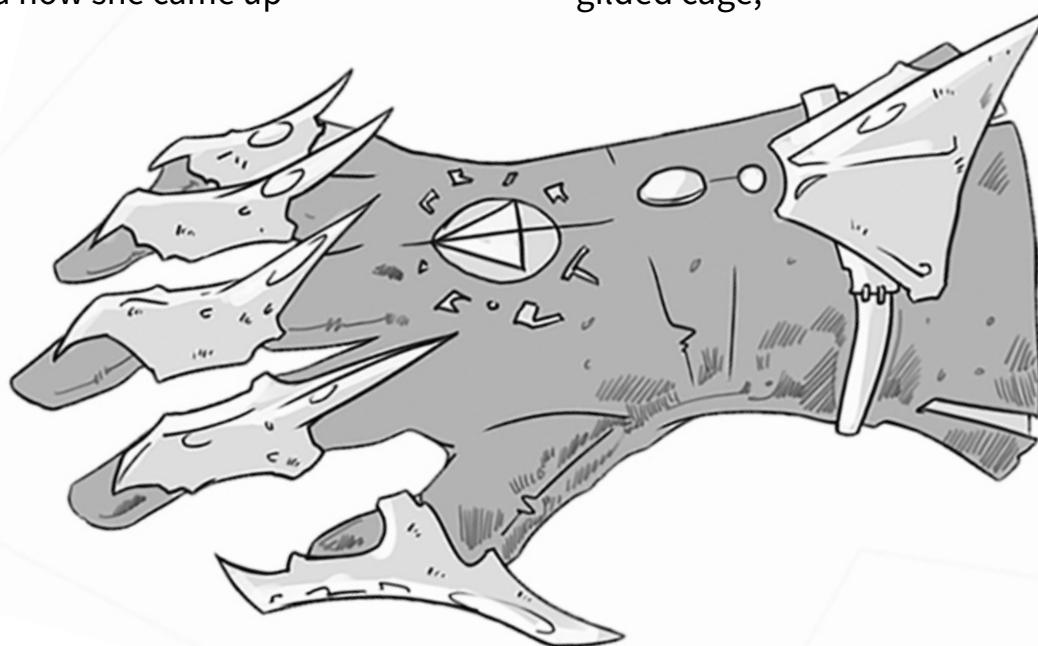
an elaborate lie, blaming Heartblaze for everything. She'll also suggest that a PC works for a higher power (even if it's not true – she's guessing). When Adran arrives to the cave, she'll cry and ask him for forgiveness... If somehow players decide to take her with them, she'll help them in Valigan's Realm: explain what it is, the history of the place, why knowing secrets is important. She also knows 2 secrets (see Chapter 2). This is quickly interrupted by Marithanra, the imprisoned gold dragon (see below). If Mela is charmed or intimidated (magically or with a successful **DC 30 Charisma [Persuasion/Deception]** test), she explains how the Yugoloth were created, the importance of the Books of Keeping, how she and other hags were sent by the General to retrieve one of the books, how they failed and learned about the existence and location of the Skullshard. How she realized that she wouldn't be able to take such a treasure from Heartblaze and how she came up

with the plan involving Phlan and King Adran. She will also offer to finish the ritual and retrieve the Skullshard from the crystal. Generally, she'll do anything she can to keep her life, even betray the Great General. However, she does not know about Talanthiel and that the General is the solar's captive – she was sent away at the early stage of the battle, before Talanthiel's involvement was clear. At some point King Adran should enter and, full of grief and anger, promise Mela slow death and more.

Alternatively the king might really love the hag and forgive her if she returns to him. The PCs now have to choose – will they keep their word to Mela and let her go? Take her with them? Kill her anyway when she's done helping them? Go against the king's wishes?

The Prisoner

In the dragon's nest the PCs find a curious object: a small gilded cage,



obviously magical, with a tiny gold dragon inside. The dragon, named Marithanra, used to be Santhrixaris' mortal enemy. When the red wyrm finally won, he tore off her wings and had her imprisoned in the magic cage, to gloat and torment her for eternity. If Mela has been killed (whether on purpose or in the heat of battle), tries to lie her way off, or refuses to speak, Marithanra can tell the PCs about the Skullshard, the nature of Mela's quest (she overheard enough) and the importance of the book.

Most importantly, she urges the PCs to take the Skullshard, go through the portal and recover the book, whatever the cost, for if it falls into the wrong hands, the balance of the world will be in peril! She understands the gravity of the situation and she will provide all the information freely. But she does hope the PCs can free her and she can teach any magic-wielding PC the proper ritual. However, the rite requires a huge amount of gold (at least 50,000) and, although the metal is all around in the lair, the king might object and the PCs might want to persuade him to allow the gold dragon, even if it's a wingless one, to go free.

Whatever they do, they should realize that the Party should also go through the portal and get the book – whether for themselves, their masters (as per the introductions), or just to keep it out of evil hands. Again, the king or the gold dragon might be used here to encourage them to

continue the quest. The PCs should probably rest and recuperate and enter the portal when they're ready; the gold dragon assures them that, especially if Mela's dead, they can afford a long rest and that it is better to enter the strange realm beyond the portal prepared and healthy.

Treasure

Heartblaze's lair contains the following treasure. Remember that if the king is present, he will feel entitled to at least a part of it – he won't beg, but he will point out that the treasure will greatly help Phlan. However, keep in mind that some of the things in the lair might have been damaged or even destroyed during the fight, or due to the intense heat in the lair. These items are marked with *. Feel free to customize the hoard and throw in a legendary item or two for your players' delight. For example, melee types could find a Vorpal Sword, spellcasters – a Robe of the Archmagi, and skulkers a Cloak or Ring of Invisibility.

The Skullshard is the key to access dead Valigan's dreams, where the book is hidden. It is embedded in a crystal shard that stops the dead god's keening echoes. Getting it out requires finishing Mela's ritual, i.e. a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcane Lore)** test. The ritual takes hours to complete and the time required to finish it depends on how many long rests the PCs took. The Skullshard is a sliver of bone (a fragment of Valigan's skull) about 4 feet long. If used in combat,

it behaves like a +3 longsword. It is also cursed: anyone holding it hears the god's unending dying scream, which imposes disadvantage on all checks and tests. Anyone simply carrying it (for example in a bag) has disadvantage on social skill tests due to stuttering, halting speech and head-splitting migraine.

Other treasure (customize as you see fit): 73000 gp, 51000 pp, Bolt of Electrum Cloth set with Jade (2500 gp)*, Electrum Cloth Tabard set with Garnet (2500 gp)*, Large Tapestry threaded with Silver (2500 gp)*, Electrum Longsword Scabbard (2500 gp), Ebony Vase inlaid with

Silver (2500 gp), Marble Pedestal inlaid with Electrum (2500 gp), Obsidian Amphora set with Topaz (2500 gp), Ornate Silver Mirror set with Black pearl (2500 gp), Spell Scroll (True Resurrection) in protective casing, Large Tapestry threaded with Electrum (7500 gp)*, a sturdy, insulated box containing: Potion of Supreme Healing, 2 x Universal Solvent, Oil of Sharpness, Potion of Invisibility, Potion of Longevity.

If modifying the hoard, keep at least one vial of Universal Solvent, since it will be useful at the end, when the PCs might want to destroy the book.



CHAPTER 2: DREAMS OF A DEAD GOD

The portal from Heartblaze's lair leads to a pocket dimension its denizens call Crust. Aeons ago, in an epic struggle, Tyr slew Valigan Thirdborn with an arrow to the head and cast the deity's body away. It rested beyond time and space, in its own pocket dimension, on a bed of supernovas and galaxies, the arrow still embedded in the head, with skull and tissue fragments orbiting around like small moons. Time slows down or perhaps does not exist here. The god is both dead and alive, somewhere in between existence and non-existence, wherever that is. His massive body does not decay but simply... continues. And dreams. Most of Valigan's dreams stay in his head, while the majority of those that spill through the hole in his head are stuck to the gristle, bone and brain matter orbiting the head. However, a small percentage of them go on to Crust or even

farther – to other planes and dimensions, where their subtle presence causes various beings to embrace anarchy, which is enough to keep Valigan's body from perishing for ever.

Over time, a town coalesced around the colossal head; a construct made of clotted blood, scabs, realized dreams, thought refuse, dead stars and whatever drifted in from other planes. Somehow, it all become real. Solid. And later settlers came – lost and forgotten beings, planar walkers, lost souls, Blood War refugees and others. Now they dwell in this strange place out of time, sometimes moving on, sometimes merging with the god's dreams, or simply just existing.

The whole area resembles wildlands, full of strange and out-of-scale detritus. For example, instead of a rock there would be a miniaturized house or a rock made of water. A copse of trees would resemble strangely stretched out, thin, ethereal humanoids frozen in anguished poses. Forlorn dream-ghosts wander the area and there are no real animals or plants anywhere. Think of Salvador Dali mixed with Hieronymus Bosch with a pinch of Beksiński.

To get the Book of Keeping, the PCs must climb the Bridge of Dreams, thus ascending to the dead God's dreams, where various dreamed up copies of the book are hidden. Collecting all the dream-copies reveals the location of the real book. To get through the dreams the PCs must undergo a series of difficult trials, which are easier to overcome (the PCs are granted an advantage) if the PCs know "secrets" that correspond to each dream. These se-



crets, or clues, are known by the NPCs who inhabit Crust, so it is advisable for the PCs to learn at least some of the secrets before ascending the Bridge.

Travelling and Dangers in Crust

Crust is a very distant and alien demiplane and spells usually used for planar travel, such as *plane shift*, do not work here. Opening a portal to or from Crust requires either divine power or extremely complex and time-consuming rituals, such as those Mela used to establish the connection between Crust and Toril. However, once in Crust, the PCs can freely teleport etc. around the realm, with one exception: Valigan's head and the dreamlets orbiting it can be reached only by ascending the Bridge. Thus it is impossible to, for example, fly there. Anyone attempting anything like that has a feeling of walking along an endless corridor and then is teleported to a random location in Crust.

For simplicity's sake, assume that it takes about an hour to get on foot from one location to the closest another location. For example, it takes 1 hour on foot to get from the portal to the inn, or two hours from the portal to the temple (1 hour to the inn and then 1 hour to the temple). While travelling, the PCs might be attacked by a group of D6+2 dream-ghosts that wander the land (use **Ghost**; MM, p. 147). Either decide arbitrarily, or roll D20, with attack occurring on a roll of 1 to 5. The ghosts are remnants of Valigan's thoughts and look like amorphous, constantly changing visions of Tyr and

Valigan, either god depicted in their glory, or as a mocking, distorted image.

Mortals from the Prime Material Plane, such as the PCs should avoid resting outside the Inn (see below). Short, one-hour long rests are usually safe enough (with only 20% chance of a group of dream-ghosts attacking), but any long rest anywhere outside the Inn, even in other seemingly safe, closed locations such as the monastery or the temple, carries the risk of Forgetting – a process of slowly becoming one with this bizarre realm and slowly forgetting your skills, purpose and past. After a long rest (which might be interrupted by dream-ghosts anyway) a PC must succeed at a **DC 20 Willpower saving throw**. Failure means that the PC forgets any techniques, abilities and bonuses their class confers, including spells and casting them. They simply forget that they were a druid or a priest, that they have ever been trained.

Another long rest and failed saving throw means that the PC forgets even their purpose, the reason that led them to Valigan's domain, their mission, the goals they might have in their life. And the third and final failed saving throw means that the PC forgets who they were, their mind blanks out all the facts of their lives. They are now new citizens of the realm. Note that most NPCs who inhabit Crust are not from Prime Material Plane and are immune to the effect. Any friendly NPC here will warn the PCs about the dangers of resting outside the inn. Khara, one of the Rakshasas from the Inn, can restore the lost memories at the cost of 5 HD (see Inn of Forgotten Hopes, below).



CRUST

Below you'll find descriptions of several distinctive locations and NPCs, but feel free to add and expand as you see fit. Most of these NPCs know a secret or two about the trials that the PCs will face on the dreamlets orbiting Valigan's head. Knowledge of these mysteries will facilitate getting through the ordeal and acquiring the book.

1. **Portal to Toril.** This is the portal connecting this pocket dimension to Toril. Unless deliberately closed (**DC 15 Intelligence (Arcane Lore)** test), it stays open. Opening a new portal requires 16 hours of work, rare ingredients worth 15,000 gp (these include jewels, rare metals, body parts of rare creatures etc.; you might assume that Master Trader can supply them), and a successful **DC 25 Intelligence (Arcane Lore)** check.
2. **The Pool of Blood.** Blood oozes from the wound in the god's head, runs along the shaft of the arrow and, after enough of it gathers on the arrowhead, a drop falls down, splashing on the surface of a large pool of blood below. These splashes reverberate in the whole realm, and are heard even by deaf creatures. The blood is highly toxic (probably one of the best poisons in the world) – anyone drinking it has to make a **DC 30 Constitution saving throw** or die, their body and soul corroding into the Pool of Blood. Only a True Resurrection will return the body and only 50%

of the time. Once only check; failure results in the characters body and consciousness wanting to remain part of the blissful rest within the pool (forever dead). But if you survive the ordeal you may raise your Constitution score by 2.



Valigan's essence is quite strong here and the god's nightmares haunt the shore. There is a 50% chance per hour that the PCs are attacked by 2D6 distorted images of Tyr, half-completed realizations of Valigan and his enemies. Treat them as **Ghosts (MM, p. 147)**. They don't give chase and vanish after D6 rounds (even mid-combat).

3. **The Bridge to Dreams.** A bridge, seemingly made of scab-studded galaxies, reaches over the Pool and up, towards Valigan's head, where it abruptly ends with a scab-like protrusion, which offers access to the dreamlets orbiting Valigan's head. The only way to reach the bridge's end is by climbing it, therefore you cannot "skip" the climb with spells or flying. The climb is a transition from the mortal world into divine thoughts. A journey that the weak are likely to fail.

Climbing the bridge requires either immense willpower or brute strength (a successful **DC 20 Wisdom or Strength test**). Failure means that the PC doesn't climb the bridge and also ages by d10 years. This effect cannot be avoided, the PC is literally taking a shortcut to ascension and the shock of failing takes a heavy toll on their body. Spending a night at the Inn (see below) grants advantage on this check. The protrusion at the end is a small piece of the god's skull, pushed out by the arrow as it pierced the bone and stuck here. There is a narrow fissure along the fragment's side, its shape matching the Skullshard. When the PCs insert the Skullshard, they are able to access the dreamlets orbiting Valigan's head.

4. **Githyanki Watchers.** As the Monster Manual explains (p. 158), long ago the Githyanki forged an alliance with red dragons. And Santhrixaris was one of the mightiest of the

mighty red wyrms, therefore his death has to be avenged! A group of Githyanki knights who once fought at Heartblaze's side (1 per player, **MM p. 160**) and their **squires** (2 per PC) arrived to Crust to kill the PCs. However, due to strange dilation of time they don't know yet who they need to kill. They know their mission and the reason they are in Crust, but the information WHO killed Heartblaze has not caught up with their memories yet.

Thus, they stand vigil, carefully observing and asking questions that might give them a clue, such as "Have you ever killed a red dragon?" You might want to allow a **DC 15 Intelligence saving throw** here and on a success, a PC remembers about the alliance between Githyanki and red dragons and bites their tongue. You, as the DM, have to decide when they realize the PCs are the ones to attack. After they arrive? After they complete the trials and the battle erupts? During the trials, when they arrive to the foot of the bridge? Never? Alternatively, roll d20 each hour the PCs spend in Crust. On a 1 the Githyanki remember. Add +1 to the margin for each clue the Githyanki get from the PCs.

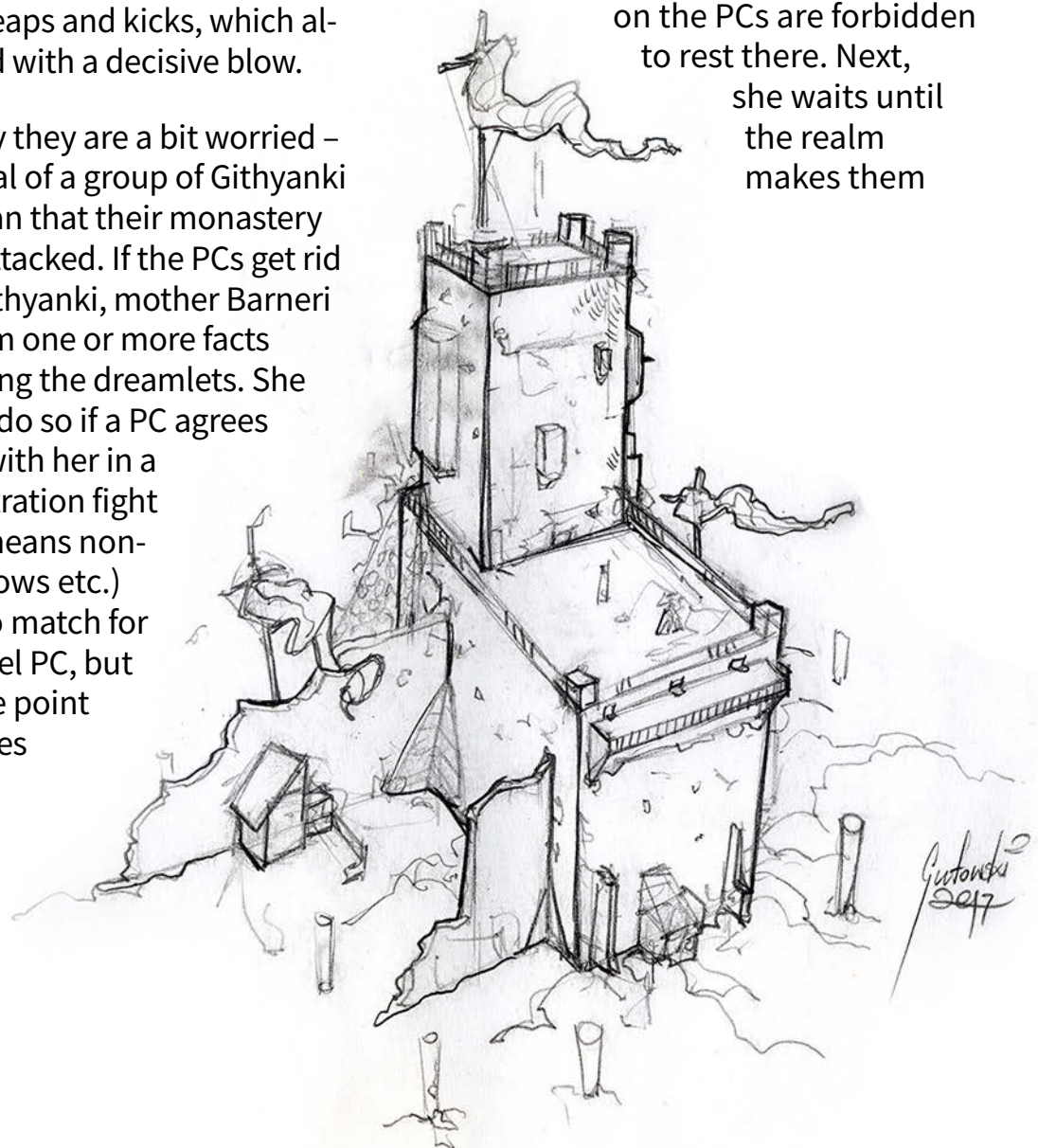
The knights are most likely found in front of the Inn, but sometimes move about – always as a group. If you want, roll D10 whenever PCs arrive to a location within Crust. The result of 1 indicates that the Githyanki are present at the location.

5. **Githzerai Monastery.** A Githzerai founded a monastery here to practice her own branch of martial arts. Mother Barneri (**Githzerai Zerth MM; p. 161**, but with maximum HP and 4 attacks per attack action) and her 13 students (**Githzerai monks, MM; p. 161**, with advantage on attack rolls if another monk is within 5 foot) study the bizarre dreams to steel their willpower. They all have advantage on saving throws against illusion spells and are immune to psychic damage. Their style of fighting is called “Anarchy’s End” and features a lot of seemingly chaotic strikes, leaps and kicks, which always and with a decisive blow.

Currently they are a bit worried – the arrival of a group of Githyanki may mean that their monastery will be attacked. If the PCs get rid of the Githyanki, mother Barneri tells them one or more facts concerning the dreamlets. She will also do so if a PC agrees to fight with her in a demonstration fight (which means non-lethal blows etc.) She is no match for a 20th level PC, but that’s the point she wishes

to demonstrate to her students: that if they work together, they can overcome even seemingly impossible odds. She then asks the PC she fought with for another round, but this time with all her students participating. As always, clever roleplaying and persuasion rolls may modify Barneri’s offer and rewards.

If the PCs threaten or attack the monks, Barneri gives an order to disperse. Then she goes to talk with the Rakshasas in the Inn (see below) and from then on the PCs are forbidden to rest there. Next, she waits until the realm makes them



forget everything and then she recruits the PCs as new monks of her order.

The Monastery resembles several slightly slanted, giant trees, which are leftovers of the volley of arrows Tyr unleashed at Valigan. Their empty interiors serve the monks, while the feathers and notches are covered with a web-like duvet of old dreams. The monks are often seen practicing kata or meditating there.

6. **The Fourthborns.** A small cult of Valigan has a temple here. Some of these are ghosts, some are products of dreams, other drifted here from elsewhere. Valigan was a deity of anarchy so there is no real order here. And they all know their god is dead – they just keep vigil. The temple constantly changes and shifts, one moment it is a grand palace, another a collection of dilapidated hovels, which then transform into a cave network or an endless library. Navigating this maze requires a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** test and a successful **DC 15 Intelligence saving throw**. Failing either of tests means that the PC wanders around for 1 hour, eventually finding themselves outside the ever changing compound.

The Last Cleric sits at the centre. This gnoll, who arrived here aeons ago searching for his god, doesn't move or blink, fixedly staring at Valigan's head. His toothy smile

grows with each act of anarchy the PCs cause in Crust. However, if anyone proves they have furthered his deity's cause (anarchy) or honestly promise to do so, the gnoll will tell them one of the secrets about the dreamlets (see below). The Last Cleric is also unhappy with the giants catching dreams (see below) and the very existence of the Inn is a travesty to him. If the PCs manage to disrupt the operation, even temporarily, or unshackle the dreams the inn is made of, he will share his knowledge, too. If anyone points out that for a priest of a God of Anarchy, he is awfully static and patient, just sitting in one place and waiting, the Last Cleric turns to dust.

7. **Dreamcatchers' workshop.**

A group of cloud giants live in this house made of clouds and interplanar detritus. No-one really knows what goes on inside, but the giants are seen stalking around Crust, catching loose dreams into large flasks and taking them to the workshop. Occasionally, a small sylph named Callista emerges from the structure and surveys the area, riding a giant's shoulder. If the PCs manage to get her attention, are polite and don't pry too much into her activities, she'll ask them to help her catch three or four dreams from the lake – the dreams there are very valuable to her, but they flee from giants.

To catch a dream a PC needs a flask Callista supplies (it's a giant-sized flask and weighs about 20 pounds). Then, they must reduce a dream to 25% of its HP while it's near a flask. Next, a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test is required to quickly close the flask, or **DC 20** if any other dreams are already inside. On a fail they escape. A flask holds 3 dreams. Callista reveals one secret per full flask.

8. **The Forgotten Army.** An army of hundreds of soldiers camps here. These are mortal beings, demons, devils and other creatures. Millennia ago they were actually fighting each other, two sides of a

Blood Wars skirmish, but somehow they ended up here, at the end of thought, and gradually forgot their purpose. They mixed and mingled, demons with devils; mortals and planar beings sit together at camp fires, stare at nothing or tell the same war stories over and over again, while the world moves on.

Two generals (although they don't remember they held the function) – a **Balor** named Ghazriti and a **Pit Fiend** named Mardinir – sit over a game of rooks, forever thinking about their next move. If, through a conversation, they are explained who they are, that they are enemies and so on, they might remember! Ask the PCs doing the talking to make a **DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion)** test.

If successful, the generals remember and start fighting, and the armies follow their example (note that they're mixed). The battlefield quickly extends and engulfs the entirety of Crust, making moving about both difficult and dangerous. Yes, this an example of a situation when talking too much and a desire to help everyone may have dire consequences. If you want, you might allow a **DC 15 Intelligence saving throw** for a PC to realize where the conversation is going.



Each general knows several secrets, but they are able to reveal them only if they are brought out of the stupor. If the PCs ally themselves with either Demons or Devils and prove their worth by killing a lot of the opposition, defeat the general and his cadre etc., they are granted the knowledge they seek.

9. **The Inn of Forgotten Hopes.**

This structure looks like an asteroid held in place with massive chains that crisscross its bulk. A closer inspection reveals that the walls are not stone, but are made of the god's old dreams, pressed together so tight that they don't resemble their "cousins" coursing Crust at all. But their screams and threats are still heard, should you put your ear to the wall. The chains are massive, but not unbreakable, and can be destroyed using any typical ways, such as spells (disintegration etc.), brute strength (**DC 25 Strength (Athletics)**) or lock picking (**DC 25 Dexterity (Thieves tools)** test). Eight successful tests release the chains and angry dreams flood Crust, making travelling difficult and dangerous: the chance to encounter dream-ghosts during travelling (see p. 25) increases to 75%.

The inn is run by two **Rakshasas** called Subahu and Khara (**MM, p. 257**), who, upon seeing the PCs doing something with the chains, exit the Inn and ask the PCs to stop, explaining that not only is the

Inn the only place where mortals such as PCs can rest, but also that everyone in Crust considers it neutral territory and no-one there would be happy if the Inn was gone. If the PCs ignore these explanations, the Rakshasas attack (supported by a random cadre of devils or demons who happened to be in the inn; use the table from page 34 to generate the group), trying to dominate a fighter first, then trying to scratch a PC or two to bestow their curse. After that they escape to the monastery (Khara is Bernari's friend), since by then they probably realize they can't win with the PCs in direct confrontation.

Inside, the inn looks different for each PC. Ask the players what their ideal inn should look like and then distort their dreams. If a dwarf likes low, smoky stone halls, he sees it, only the drinks are not dwarven ale, but elven wine. There are no windows, and moving between rooms and corridors resembles a dream: the PCs don't remember how they ended up somewhere, they just flicker from one place to another. Nevertheless, it is the safest place in Crust and a few planar travellers are always present here, such as slaadi, modrons, yugoloth etc. They prefer to keep to themselves.

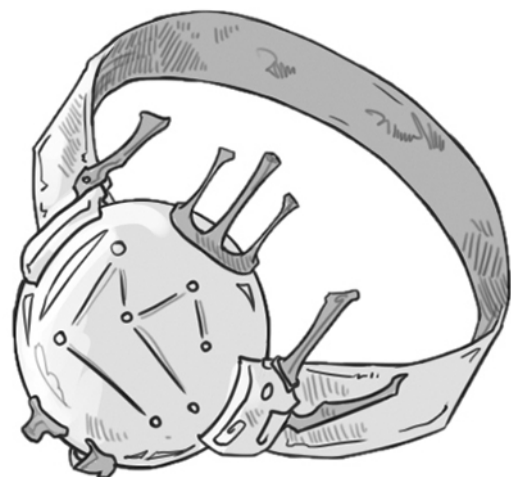
The Rakshasas, however, are chatty and friendly, telling the PCs – if they order drinks and lodging – basic information about Crust (including the existence and significance of

secrets) and the most important places there. They don't accept gold or jewels – instead, the PCs pay by expending their HDs, as if they were spending them on healing. In Valigan's domain, the life-force of other creatures keeps the Rakshasas alive and helps them to power the ritual that keeps the structure together. A drink costs 1 HD, Long Rest 2 HD. They can also sell secrets about dreamlets, with each secret worth 5 HD. These HDs cannot be regained while the PCs are in Crust. PCs with depleted HDs feel tired, "thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread¹." However, a Long Rest at the Inn makes the PCs more attuned with this pocket dimension, granting advantage on the rolls required to cross the bridge and Khara is happy to inform the PCs about that. If any PC risked a night outside and lost memories, Khara can restore them, which costs 5 HD.

10. **The Wandering Shop.** A huge Mimic-like creature squats near the inn, its spindly legs bent to the sides and two long arms busy counting gold. A large banner it attached between the knees. It says (and, curiously, it is understandable in any language): "Magic! Items! That! Can! Save! Your! Life! We! Also! Have! Exclamation! Marks! On! Sale!"

The creature introduces itself as Master Trader and offers to sell the PCs a variety of magic objects it has acquired. Master Trader accepts gold, platinum and jewels and loves haggling: a successful **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion)** test affects the price by 25%. Determine his inventory randomly or decide before the game what things might be particularly helpful for the PCs. For example, he might offer the following: Potion of Hill Giant Strength (DMG, p.187), Potion of Greater Healing (DMG, p.187), Figurine of Wondrous Power (onyx dog) (DMG, p.169), Wand of Secrets (DMG, p.211), Adamantine Armor (half plate) (DMG, p.150), Javelin of Lightning (DMG, p. 178).

If attacked, Master Trader gets up and runs away (150 feet per round), then it hides on the outskirts of Crust until the PCs are gone.



¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Lord of the Rings"

BLOOD WAR'S NEW FRONT

If the PCs stirred memories of the two generals and they remembered their purpose, a war erupts in Valigan's domain. During the first tense minutes the fight is limited to the camp, but the combatants quickly began to form lines, squads move away to establish better positions, fliers take off and minute after minute, hour after hour, fighting devils, demons and otherworldly mercenaries spread across the land. Naturally, this changes the priorities of several other NPCs that live here, while also making travelling around much more dangerous.

While moving from one place to another, the PCs have a 30% chance of encountering devils, demons or both (fighting each other). This might be a patrol, an ambush, entrenched position etc. Then roll on the table below to determine the group's composition:

	Devils	Demons
1	2 Erynies	4 Vrock
2	1 Horned Devil and 5 Spined Devils	8 Shadow Demons
3	2 Bone Devils	20 Quasit
4	10 Bearded Devils	1 Nalfashnee and 2 Quasits
5	3 Chain Devils	3 Hezrou
6	1 Ice Devil	2 Grablezu
7	20 Imps	1 Goristro
8	Roll twice	Roll twice

As explained above, to learn more secrets of the dreamlets, the PCs may ally themselves with one of the sides of the conflict. If they are allied with devils, these random groups stay true to the agreement and do not attack the PCs (unless attacked). But demons, especially if they are small, stupid and particularly malevolent, might ignore the agreement and attack the PCs anyway.

Moreover, the following NPCs change their behaviour:

1. The patrons at the Inn of Forgotten Hopes leave (most of them to fight) and the Rakshasas bar the doors (there are no windows). Neither demons nor devils attack the inn, since getting in would require too many resources, and there are no enemies inside. However, the area around the inn is a great place to lay in ambush and spring an attack on any enemies that might seek refuge in the building (or scout it). If the PCs were friendly to the owners, they'll let them in if given a shout.
2. The Githyanki Knights will entrench their position, wherever they happen to be when the war erupts, effectively blocking the way to the location.
3. The monks at the monastery are in trouble! They are separated – a group of 6 (including the mother) are in the main tower, while two other groups (3 and 4) are in less defensible towers. If the PCs arrive and want to help (probably in exchange for secrets), the mother will agree, if the PCs help consolidate defences and escort the two groups back to the main tower (1 secret) and then kill off enough demons and devils around the monastery to discourage them from attacking (another secret), which should involve 2-3 encounters. Naturally, if the PCs have access to magic that would ensure the same effect, this hunter-killer patrol won't be necessary.
4. Master Trader runs away at the first sight of trouble and never returns, hiding somewhere in the outskirts of Crust.
5. The Temple stays unharmed – its chaotic nature makes it tactically worthless, so the combatants ignore it.
6. The portal seems like a good place to hold, so a strong force of demons or devils made of at least 4 groups from the table above, holds it, while smaller groups of the opposition launch attacks.
7. The Workshop is also in trouble (anyone controlling it would get a nice entrenched, defensible position) and it's being assaulted by either side, while the giants are trying to raise anchors and sail the whole thing away. If the PCs help Callista, she'll send them a secret. To free the workshop, the PCs have to fight a group of devils or demons and pull out two massive anchors from the ground (or destroy the things). The former is a DC 25 Strength (Athletics) test, the latter presents the PCs with a gargantuan metal-like objects that have 20 AC and 50 hp (See DMG p. 246 about destroying objects). The anchors are 200 feet from each other. Each anchor is guarded by two groups of demons and devils, respectively. Once freed, the workshop rises into the air at the speed of 50 feet per round. At around 2000 feet it enters strange limbo between planes, thus drifting away from the story.

ACQUIRING THE BOOK

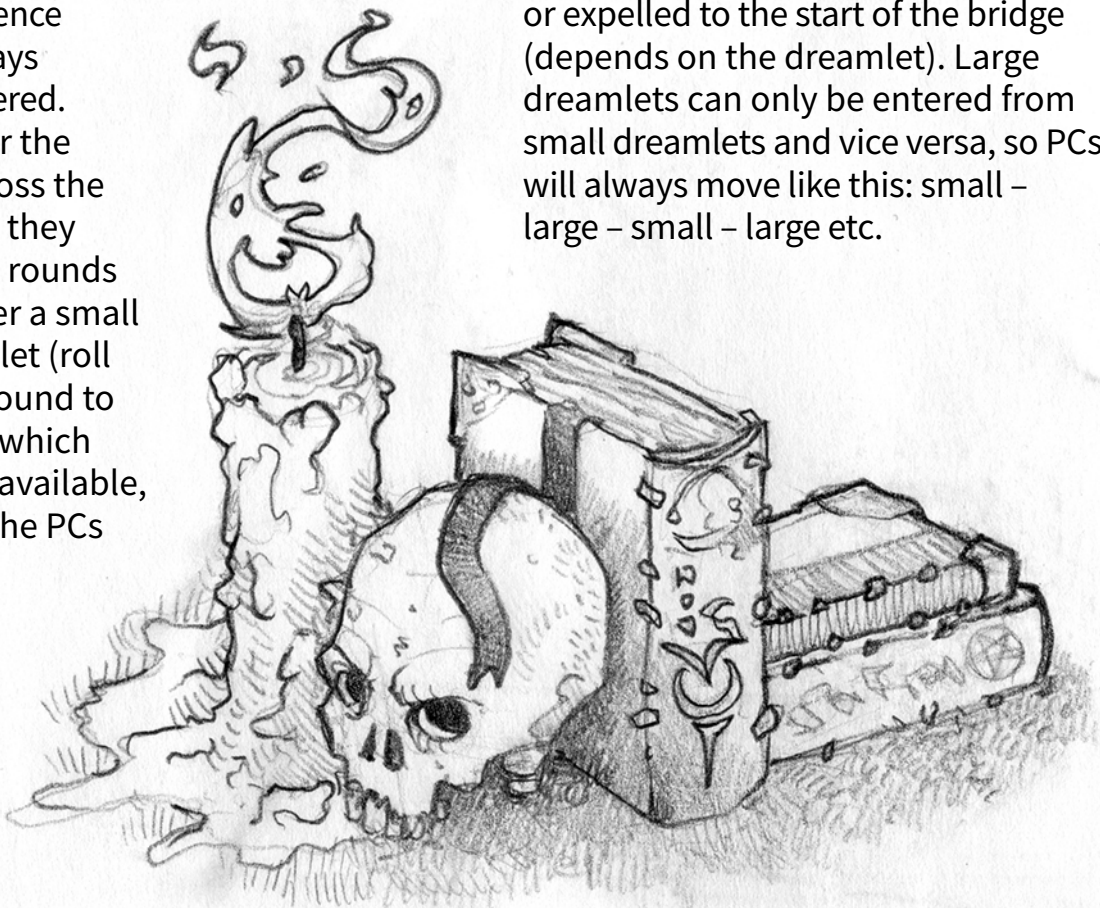
To get the Book of Keeping the PCs must climb the bridge, insert the Skullshard to access the nearest dreamlet and find a dream-copy of the book in each of the large dreamlets.

The dreamlets orbit the god's head at different speeds, but the small ones always stay on the outside and the large ones always follow the inner orbit. Each time the PCs (or a PC, should they separate) is about to enter a new dreamlet roll a D6: the number shows which dreamlet is now available. Then roll two more D6s to see which two dreamlets are to the sides of the first one. Use the tokens provided with this adventure to keep track who is where. At first the PCs do not know which dream is on which dreamlet (turn the tokens over), but once they experience it, it stays uncovered.

After the PCs cross the bridge they have 4 rounds to enter a small dreamlet (roll each round to check which one is available, since the PCs might

want to get on a specific one). If they stay at the end of the bridge longer than 4 rounds they're transported back to the start of the bridge, feeling as if they just woke up after a bad dream.

Once the PCs insert the Skullshard, the stuck piece of skull floats away – the way is clear and the PCs can choose to be transported to the nearest small dreamlet, where they have to get to an exit (making a saving throw), from which they are transported to the large dreamlet nearest to that exit (there are two exits on each dreamlet). To exit a large dreamlet and continue (to a nearby small dreamlet), a PC should succeed at an ability test, unique for each large dreamlet. If a PC does not exit a dreamlet in 4 rounds, they are either stuck for the next 4 rounds, or expelled to the start of the bridge (depends on the dreamlet). Large dreamlets can only be entered from small dreamlets and vice versa, so PCs will always move like this: small – large – small – large etc.



☞ **Example:** The PCs reach the end of the bridge and insert the Skullshard, unblocking the way. The DM rolls 1D6 to see which Small Dreamlet is the nearest. Then the DM rolls 2 more D6s to see which Large Dreamlets are on the either side of the small dreamlet. Since the PCs haven't visited any dreamlets yet, they don't know what to expect. They enter the small dreamlet (let's say the die showed 1, the Dream of Power), decide whether they want to go left or right (right), overcome the Dream of Power's test, and enter the right Large Dreamlet, which happens to be the Dream of Harmony. Meanwhile, other dreamlets swirl around Valigan's head, so the DM again rolls two D6s to see which small dreamlets are now accessible from the Dream of Harmony.

☞ **Example 2:** After some successes and failures, the PCs regroup at the foot of the bridge, climb it and prepare to enter the dreamlets again. By now they have visited all of them and they know which dreamlet is which. The DM rolls 1D6 to see which dreamlet is nearest to the Bridge's end: 3, the Dream of Fortitude. Two more D6 to see which large dreamlets are accessible from the Dream of Fortitude this round: 4 and 5 (Numbers and Guidance). The PCs decide to wait, because they hate poison saving throws and they already have the dream-book copies from those two large

dreamlets. The DM rolls again for the small dreamlet (3 again!) and two more for the large ones. Once the PCs are happy with the configuration, they enter the small dreamlet. Remember! If they waited too long (4 rounds) they would be transported back to the foot of the bridge.

A dream-copy of the Book is located in each large dreamlet. To get it, the PCs have to find it (if it is hidden) and then pass an ability test. Next, as usual, they must exit the dreamlet before the dream resets (every 4 rounds). The dreamed books are decoys and none of them is the real Book of



Keeping. However, collecting all six copies reveals the real book.

Once the PCs acquire all 6 copies, the arrow stuck in the god's head is pushed out of it by regrowing tissue. The real Book of Keeping is attached at the arrow's end. If you're short on time you may want to decide that less than 6 copies are required. Also, as an additional option, each "dream-copy" of the book may function as a Manual (DMG, p. 180) or a Tome (DMG, p. 208) and the PC who picks it up increases the attribute that corresponds to the dreamlet by 2.

The Dreamlets

The twelve dreamlets are made of divine bones, skin and brain matter that were pushed out when Tyr's arrow pierced Valigan's head. Each of them has the dead god's dream stuck to it, strange virtual realities stuck on unending loop. Generally, on the small dreamlets the PCs have to only pass their saving throw. Failing a saving throw, in addition to the listed consequences, throws a PC off the dreamlet and they safely land at the start of the bridge or somewhere in Crust (in the latter case they have to make their way through potentially dangerous terrain, so be careful since this option will prolong the game, make other players wait and might be fatal to the PC). Failing an ability test, in addition to the listed consequences, makes the PC stuck in the dream and slowly become a part of it. They can retry the ability test in the next cycle.

Secrets

While exploring Crag and helping its denizens, the PCs might learn "secrets", or "clues." There is a total of 13 secrets. The first one explains the general rules of how dreamlets work. The other 12 are dreamlet-specific and learning each allows the PCs to have an advantage on the corresponding ability test or saving throw. When an NPC tells the PCs a secret, they explain what the particular dream looks like and what to expect there, so the PCs are able to prepare before entering. It is up to you how detailed this information is: everything? DCs? Cryptic clues?

It's best to mark on the dreamlet tokens that PCs have an advantage there. A PC may also discover a secret by themselves: while at a dreamlet, they must succeed at a **DC 25 Intellect (Investigation)** test. However, because they are focused on analyzing data, the difficulty of saving throws and tests increases by 5.

Small (outer) dreamlets:

1. **Dream of Power.** The PCs find themselves at the bottom of a ravine, whose steep walls stretch into eternity. Powerful wind threatens to knock the PCs prone and smash them against the stone. Two exits – cave mouths – are visible on opposite ends. To move to either exit the PCs have to succeed at a **DC 20 Strength saving throw**. Failure means they're smashed against the stone (3d10 bludgeoning damage) and thrown off to Crust.

2. **Dream of Anger.** A barren wasteland under the red skies and churning, dark clouds. The exits look like two open maws of skeletal dragons. Lightning strikes lash the ground and fiery meteorites fall like rain. Each round the PCs must succeed at a **DC 20 Dexterity saving throw** or receive 8d6 fire and 8d6 electrical damage (half on successful save). Failing the saving throw by 10 or more also expels the PC to Crust. Each exit is 50 feet from the starting point.

3. **Dream of Fortitude.** Yellowish clouds surround the PCs and toxic mist fills their lungs. The gates to the left and right (50 feet to each) resemble giant overturned tankards. The PCs must succeed at **DC 20 Constitution saving throw** or suffer 4d10 poison damage. They also gain the poisoned condition, even on a successful save. Failure also expels the PCs to Crust.

4. **Dream of Truth.** The PCs find themselves listening to an orator, whose mouth keeps growing until nothing else exists. The two exits are also in the mouth; one to the left of the uvula, the other to the right. The orator keeps spewing oxymoronic nonsense, such as “Right is left, black is white, lies are truth, power is weakness, etc.” The PCs must succeed at

DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or are expelled to Crust.

5. **Dream of Genius.** A gigantic intellect devourer looms over the PCs, millions of smaller beings serving as its blood vessels. The two gates are represented by two open books, their pages bearing an illustration of the PCs’ story so far. The PCs must succeed on a **DC 16 Intelligence saving throw** or take 4d10 psychic damage. Also on a failure, roll 3d6: if the total equals or exceeds the target’s Intelligence score, that score is reduced to 0. The target is stunned until it regains at least one point of Intelligence.



Additionally, the PC is also expelled to Crust.

6. **Dream of Leadership.** The PCs find themselves in a column of marching soldiers who are following a mounted leader. The gates here are simply represented by the left and right side of the column. Although the leader is not clearly visible, the PCs find him (or her) irresistible, they must follow him to victory! They must succeed at a **DC 20 Charisma saving throw** or are locked here until they succeed at the saving throw.

Large (inner) dreamlets:

1. **Dream of Failure.** The PCs are standing on the heavens with the world over their heads. They must literally lift the world up, or it will crush them. Each round at least one PC must succeed at a **DC 25 Strength (Athletics)** check, or the planet starts crushing them (6d10 bludgeoning damage). The copy of the book forms the spine of a mountain range. If the world is being held by a PC, another PC can pry the book out, which requires a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** or **DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)** test. The dream resets every 4 rounds. If the book is taken, the difficulty of each test here is lowered by 10. Exiting the dream (if the world is held up) requires one action.
2. **Dream of Harmony.** The PCs are in darkness and crossing an unending bridge of light. If they stop moving, the bridge begins to crack and shatters under their feet. The bridge is only 5 inches wide and quite slippery – to avoid falling, the PCs must make a **DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test. Anyone falling suffers 4d10 psychic damage and falls to Crust, waking up with a start in a random location of the realm. The book is attached to a pendulum that swings over the bridge. Catching it requires a **DC 25 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test. If the book is taken, the difficulty of each test is lowered by 10.
3. **Dream of Gluttony.** The PCs wake up in the middle of a feast. Judging from the state of the other participants – dragons, giants, gods, mortals of all shape and size – it has been going on from some time now. A giant book-shaped cake is in the middle of the room. To get the Book, the PCs must literally eat it whole. This is a **DC 20 Constitution test** that requires 3 (total) successes. Failing means the PC passes out (or suffers other unpleasant consequences associated with overeating) and is stuck for another cycle or longer, since they must wake up. They also suffer 1 level of exhaustion. If the book is taken, the difficulty of each test is lowered by 10 – the test must be still taken to exit the dream.

4. **Dream of Numbers.** Complex formulae fill a board, and the walls are covered with paintings depicting people doing normal, everyday things while a woman's voice keeps asking "But what does it all mean?!" The PCs sit at desks in a lecture hall and with each passing round the stage and board are moving away from them. Finding the meaning (and getting out of the dream) requires a **DC 20 Intellect (Investigation)** test. The book is simply hidden under the desk on the stage – but from the initial positions of the PCs it is impossible to see it. On the first round the distance to the stage is 30 feet, 60 on the second and 120 on the third. Opening the desk and taking the book requires an action.

5. **Dream of Guidance.** The PCs are in a vast crowd of people, everybody going somewhere else, while discordant music blares overhead and suns of various colours swirl in the sky. A man wearing a black crown says: "Follow me" and disappears in the mob. To follow him, the PCs must succeed at a **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception)** test, which allows them to leave the dream. Finding the book requires a **DC 25 Wisdom (Insight)** test – on success the PC realizes that the people form letters in the book and his/her perspective changes, the camera pulls way up and, although they are still

in the crowd, the book under their feet now, ready for taking.

6. **Dream of Reasons.** The PCs are in a large city recently struck by some kind of disaster. Bodies rot in the streets, empty-eyed people sit in groups, some houses are on fire while other areas are flooded. Moreover, the PCs sense that another disaster will soon strike at the place. A dream-logic certainty of impending doom. To get out of the dream, the PCs have to **persuade**, **intimidate** or **deceive** the people here to move on and run away with them. The **difficulty** of any of these tests is **20**. The book here is a holy object, transported in an ornamented chest by a group of people. Naturally, they are unwilling to give away the thing they venerate. Getting the book requires another successful **DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion/Deception/Intimidation)** test, or the PCs may simply attack the pilgrims who flee and leave the book. However, the latter option increases the difficulty of getting out of the dream to 25 (a social skill roll, see above), and the PCs have to also open the chest (**DC 25 Dexterity (Thieves Tools)** to pick the lock, **DC 30 Strength (Athletics)** to bash).

ANARCHY RETURNS

When the PCs finally get the sixth dream-copy of the Book, they are expelled from the dream they're in and wake up with a start on

the shores of the Pool of Blood. Above them the massive arrow piercing Valigan's head is slowly pushed out of the skull by the dreamlets, which fall back into their place. All the dreams wandering around Crags are sucked back into the head. As the arrowhead splashes into the Pool, the dead god opens his eyes. They're empty.

And all hell breaks loose.

First of all, Valigan lashes out, attacking anything and anyone at random, smashing Crust with his mighty fists. Use the Empyrean stats (**MM**, p. 130). However, Valigan will – to some degree – recognize those who have furthered his cause. In a way, the body was imprisoned here, because of the order that somehow, over aeons, set root in the plane. If the PCs have managed (willingly or not) to disrupt this order and cause anarchy, the chances that the god attacks them are smaller. Lower the chance for the PCs to be attacked by Valigan by 10% per each anarchic situation they have caused in Crust, such as managing to stir the Lost Army to fight, destroying the Inn, maybe using the monks against the Githyanki knights, killing a few giants, thus increasing the number of dreams around, etc.

Secondly, the Yugoloth and Asmodeus' devils arrive – these powers have been hunting for the book for a long time, and were watching planar shifts, ebbs and flows, like spiders on the web. When Valigan woke up, they immediately



realized what was going on and started sending their troops to get the book. Some Yugoloth work for Asmodeus, others are neutral and work for the captured Great General. Devils, naturally, are Asmodeus' agents. The number of these forces depends on the time the PCs spent in Crust. The more long rests they took, the more numerous each side is (if you want, you might mention this when the PCs rest too much that their enemies are also searching for the book). Yes, it is Asmodeus himself opening the portals, though he is unable to get through them himself.

If after the trials of the dreamlets the PCs are still in a fairly good condition let them fight Valigan first! After all, they don't often have an

opportunity to fight a god – well, his shell. The forces of hell might start arriving after a few rounds, when Valigan is about to be destroyed. If any PC is a cleric or paladin of Tyr, Valigan tries to destroy that PC at all costs. Once Valigan is destroyed, the entire realm starts to disintegrate: the land breaks, the pool is drained, large chunks of Crust float away into Limbo.

The Book, the real, physical Book of Keeping, is attached with chains to the arrow's nock. The arrow itself is slightly slanted and covered with blood and brain tissue. It is about 120 feet long. While the PCs, demons and devils are scaling the shaft (**DC 20 Dexterity [Acrobatics]**), flying to the nock, or trying to get the book (**DC 25 Strength (Athletics)** or **DC 25** to destroy or pick 4 locks), Valigan is swatting at those that fly or smashing those on the ground, and new forces arrive from portals opening at various places in Crag. Each round there is a 50% chance for a cadre of devils and/or Yugoloth to arrive (all these groups are of easy difficulty). See the tables below to see the group composition.

Remember that they fight with each other as much as with the PCs!

☞ **Tip:** Don't roll for each and every enemy – just narrate the situation, have a group or two attack the PCs or fight with the ones nearest to the book, with Valigan striking at random. Keep it exciting! Also, if Mela escaped during the battle in the dragon's lair in Chapter 1, she may return now, with the devils, and try to fulfil her mission.

When the PCs manage to take a hold of the book, two devas appear through a golden portal nearby, their angelic auras lighting up this gloomy place of chaos and despair, and hold a portal open, urging the PCs to go through “to an ally's realm, where it's safe.” They have been sent by Talanthiel, who also detected the disturbance in Valigan's domain, recalled the various hints he got in his conversations with the General he had imprisoned and, suspecting that the Book has been revealed,

	Devils	Yugoloth
1	20 Lemures	2 Mezzoloths
2	8 Imps	1 Arcanaloth
3	1 Horned Devil and 1 Erynies	1 Mezzoloth and 1 Aracanloth
4	2 Chain Devils	1 Nycaloth
5	2 Bone Devils	1 Ultroloth
6	4 Barbed Devils	2 Nycaloths
7	1 Ice Devil	3 Mezzoloths
8	Roll twice	Roll twice
9	Roll three times	Roll three times
10	Pit fiend	3 Nycaloths, 2 Mezzoloth and 1 Araconaloth

opened the portal through which the devas travelled.

The portal is surrounded with an effect similar to the *Magic Circle* spell: fiends cannot approach it (10-foot-radius). The devas will try to help the PC with the book first, then the others if the book has been secured: for example, if the portal was opened mid-air, they'll bring PCs to it. Talanthiel closes the portal when all the PCs and devas are safe in his palace (see below).

The PCs might ignore the angels and try to reach the portal to Toril instead – let them! The fight can continue back in the familiar surroundings of Heartblaze's lair, with King Adran and his

people present (and completely unprepared). The enemies will keep arriving, though, and the devas will follow, urging the PCs to listen to them. If the PCs, despite the odds, manage to escape with the book (which should be extremely difficult), skip the next chapter and look at the Keeping the Book section.

If you any of the PCs is Asmodeus' agent, they might try to make a break here, especially if they have the book. You may allow this – and the devils will try to cover the PC's retreat, or assume that the devils don't know that the PC works for their boss!



CHAPTER 3: BETWEEN THE LINES

Once the PCs go through the portal, they are transported to Talanthiel's palace – a magical construct and extension of the solar's will – somewhere in the Astral Sea. Talanthiel doesn't have to sleep or eat, this is not a real house as mortals would think about it.

Therefore, it is not a sprawling structure and consists of only a few room, described below. Not long after the PCs' arrival, Asmodeus' devils and independent Yugoloth storm Talanthiel's realm and a try to overcome the palace's defences to get the book. Meanwhile, inside the structure the PCs and the Solar decide upon the tome's fate.

Talanthiel's Palace

1. The Greeting Hall

This is where the PCs arrive first. An elongated room with a long table, comfortable chairs and a glorious vista of a world beneath, oceans and continents seen from a dizzying height, clouds of sparkling aether slowly drifting under the palace.

The table is groaning under the weight of dishes – exotic meats, aromatic sauces, fruit of all shapes and flavours, fresh vegetables, drinks served in dozens of containers (some chilled, some hot), sweet cakes and treats, and even – if you look carefully enough – a rat on a stick. Taking and eating a piece of something takes an action or bonus action (or both, anyone near the table can use a bonus action to grab some food) and the PC heals 4d4+4 HP per action.

2. The Grand Hall

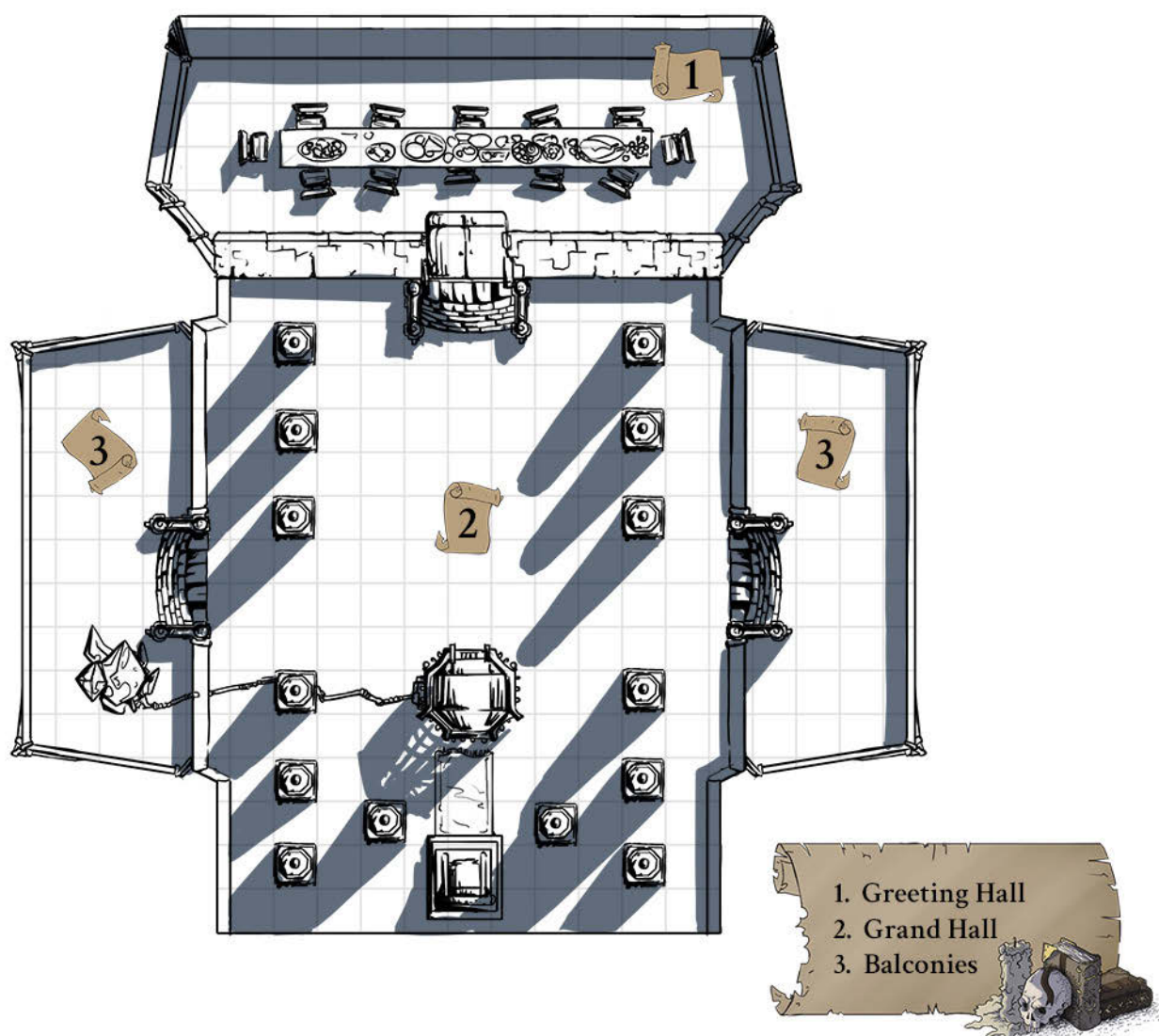
The grand hall is described elsewhere. During the battle, devils arrive through the windows (by smashing them). Each time Talanthiel takes damage, a 5ft by 15ft rift appears in a random place on the floor. Anyone standing there must succeed at a **DC 15** Dexterity saving throw or falls into the abyss below. Each time Talanthiel takes significant damage (20 HP or more), one of the columns falls in a random direction, dealing 8d10 bludgeoning damage to anyone in a 5ft by 50ft line. Afterwards, the rubble is treated as difficult terrain.

3. Balconies

The balconies overlook majestic gardens and the outer grounds. One is empty and during the battle usually full of the Yugoloth, who concentrate their forces here before launching attacks into the palace while holding this position. The other balcony is reinforced with additional magic and can be accessed only from the inside. The astral siphon powering the Great General's cage is located here. It is a glowing orb of coruscating energy, anyone touching it suffers 8d6 radiant damage. It can be dispelled (**DC 20**), isolated with a Wall of Force or similar effect, or negated if at least 40 points of necrotic energy are poured into it (all these facts are revealed after a successful **DC 15 Intelligence [Arcane Lore]** check).

4. Outer Grounds

Most likely the PCs won't see the splendour of Talanthiel's gardens. Shimmering fountains, delicate flowers and carpet-soft lawns are soon trampled under devilish hooves and claws. The devils arrive in meteorites that set on fire everything around the point of impact; the Yugoloth sneak in through portals that resemble tears in reality. The outer grounds are a site of a battle between the General's Yugoloth and Asmodeus' devils. Anyone able to see (or travel) in the Astral Plane sees the Astral Sea beyond the grounds, while those with mundane eyesight see the abyss below the palace.



Talanthiel firmly believes that he can be the force of change and wants the PCs to understand and agree with him. Therefore, he won't immediately ask them to give him the book – instead, he'll offer refreshments and healing. Eating and drinking the divine food from the table removes any exhaustion levels PC might have, but also, if the PCs spend 1 hour (short rest) at the table, they'll gain the benefit of a long rest. While they are eating, Talanthiel is curiously and patiently asking about their adventures so far – about the hag, Valigan and the way the book was hidden. Meanwhile, Yugo-loth and Hell's armies arrive and begin

their assault on the palace. Talanthiel doesn't mind and assures the PCs that they're quite safe inside.

When the PCs are done with eating (or took long enough), the solar takes them to the adjoining grand hall to show off his prize – the imprisoned Great General – and explain why he is the one who should get the Book of Keeping.

Long ago, Talanthiel was one of Tyr's chosen and fought at his side without doubting his sire until Ao put out Tyr's eyes. Talanthiel could not comprehend the godfather's decision and Tyr's acceptance of the punishment.

And so he left Tyr's hosts, travelling the planes and forging his own legend. Most of those who followed him died and Talanhiel, tired and disillusioned, retreated to his palace, somewhere in the Astral Sea. He brooded there until by accident, one of his agents came across the Great General of the Yugoloth. This was too great an opportunity to ignore!

Talanhiel gathered his forces and set a trap. In a titanic struggle most of his soldiers perished and countless yugoloths died, but in the end the solar captured the general and took him to his palace, where he first tried to persuade the devil to join him, and, when the general refused, tortured him and discovered that the General knew the location of one of the Books of Keeping. Then the angel tried to make the devil reveal the location of the book, while what was left of his agents travelled across the planes looking for clues.

The grand hall is a large room with tall, gold-plated columns, heavenly music plinking in the air, stained-glass windows depicting Tyr's glory and Talanhiel's victories. But a **DC 20 (Intelligence) Investigation** test reveals disturbing details – the gold adorning walls and columns is tarnished, false notes haunt

the music and the scenes in the windows could be interpreted as ridiculing Tyr, not praising his glory and justice.

In the middle of the hall stands a cage made of glittering force, sparkling sigils of power surround it and its contents: a resplendent ultroloth in dark plate mail armour. The creature, otherwise motionless, slightly inclines its head to the PC who's carrying the book, acknowledging their success.

There, in front of the cage, flanked by his two devas, while the palace shakes under the devil's assault, Talanhiel explains why he needs the book; read or paraphrase the following:



“My friends, you are the true heroes of your world and your names will never be forgotten. What you did here, what you’ve helped to facilitate, will change... everything. The ‘balance’ between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is just wrong. It’s the corruption of the worst kind, one that hides behind the so-called justice. Only, the justice is blind – and it cannot afford to be! But I –we- can now start the process of change. We can be the force of real justice in the world – with the army of yugoloth behind us, and perhaps even wielding the power over powerful lords of Hell! The book you have retrieved offers all this, and more!”

He sincerely believes he is right and hopes the PCs will willingly give him the book. During his speech Talanthiel glazes over the darker deeds he has done in pursuit of his vision of justice. Once he’s done, his hand outstretched towards the PC with the book, the General joins the discussion. Because of the way the cage has been made, his telepathic voice sounds in all the heads at once. Read or paraphrase the following:

“If you are half as competent as the solar makes you to be, you won’t believe a word he says. Or perhaps you didn’t notice my wounds? Oh, I assure you this little torturing project is nothing, compared to the ‘justice’ he executed while travelling the planes. Kingdoms fell, cities burned, children died. He dreams of a perfect society, of all-encompassing heavens, but

that would be just another form of tyranny, where he would make all the rules. The book should belong to the yugoloth and yugoloth only, THAT would be true justice. We were created and enslaved against our wishes – where is justice in that? Destroy the astral energy siphon on the balcony over there, free me and give the book to me – and I’ll be in your debt.”

And then another voice joins the discussion – a ghostly apparition of Asmodeus himself:

“Please accept my sincere apologies for not being able to properly participate in this debate. Alas, I have not been invited. However, I am, as you can imagine, very concerned with what is going to occur here. The system we have, the balance and justice work. Yes, we fight with each other, there sides to join and all that. But do you see worlds in flames? Heavens falling while fiends and celestials battle? No, it’s all in the past now. The book is too powerful an object to give to a has been angel, or an independent force. Possessing the power over archdevils would overturn the balance of power of the universe, a balance so carefully crafted over aeons – also by the very gods you might venerate. Give the book to me, my agent should arrive soon, and I will grant each of you three wishes.”

While the discussion goes on, the devils fight each other and storm the palace’s magical defences.

The PCs now have a world-shaping decision to make. Below you will find six possible choices, but your players might come with an unexpected solution, so be ready to improvise. For example, it is possible that each PC sides with a different faction. The most obvious developments are:

Agreeing with Talanhiel

The PCs agree with Talanhiel and give him the book. He nods, accepts it, undoes its bindings and opens the tome. The attack outside stops, the devils suddenly afraid, unsure who their master is. The solar finds the Great General's true name and speaks it... Then another name... And another... The PCs are now the angel's agents, or they return to Toril, perhaps forever uncertain if they made the right decision.

Diplomatic solution

Even the blind can see and epic stories often end with the Villain seeing the wrongness of his ways. The PCs try to convince Talanhiel that he failed, that his way is wrong, that the book should be destroyed or hidden again. This should be a very difficult (**DC 30 Persuasion** or **Intimidation** test (the latter if the PCs, for example mention Tyr, etc.)), possibly augmented with great roleplaying. Deception is impossible – remember that solars automatically detect any falsehood. But, if successful, Talanhiel stands in shock, as understanding dawns on him. Then, he swears to guard the captured General forever

and sucks the magic out of the book to close off the palace and teleport the PCs away to the temple in Phlan. There, an apparition of Tyr himself thanks them for their great deed and grants each a boon (**DMG, p.232**), choose ones that will make your players happy!

Refusing Talanhiel

The solar frowns, and tries to explain again, while the General cackles in glee, and the apparition of Asmodeus frowns. Then, when the celestial comprehends, he and his devas attack. During the battle the PCs might want to release the General – see the description of the palace. Moreover, while the fight goes on, Talanhiel cannot apply his full will to keep the palace's defences up. Each round there is a chance (30%) that a group of devils or yugoloth (or both) manage to get through. Use the table from Chapter 2 for group composition. The devils go after anyone with the book. The yugoloth first try to disable the siphon and free their general (**Ultroloth, MM, p.314**, with maxed HP and 24 AC).

This should be an epic battle! Each time Talanhiel receives damage, the palace should shake, rifts appear in the floor, columns should crumble and fall! When Talanhiel is dead, the palace ceases to be and then Tyr's will transports the PCs to the temple of Tyr in Phlan. They still have to decide quickly what to do with the book. They are easy to track and in soon Hell's strongest servants will start attacking them to get the book. They can simply place it at the temple's

altar, which beckons them with divine light. If they do, the book disappears, hopefully for good this time.

Siding with Asmodeus

The PCs agree to help Asmodeus. Talanhiel attacks, as below, but any devils that get in during the battle help the PCs. When Talanhiel and his agents are dead and the palace crumbles, a pit fiend arrives and takes the book. Then, empowered by the Lord of Nine Hells, he grants each PC two wishes. If the PCs deceived Asmodeus, the pit fiend (and any devils inside, with more arriving each round) attacks.

Keeping the Book

The PCs will have to fight Talanhiel, the devils and yugoloth for it. But if during the fight any PC manages to open the book, the devils and yugoloth stop their attack. Opening the book requires a **DC 25 Intelligence (Arcane Lore)** test.

After killing Talanhiel, the PCs are transported to the temple in Phlan (as above). They can now muster a mighty army of yugoloths – and perhaps even give orders to powerful devils. This kind of power won't go unchallenged for long...

Destroying the Book

If Talanhiel is dead or unwilling to co-operate, the PCs might want to destroy the Book. It is a challenging task and such a mighty artefact

cannot be undone easily... unless the PCs still have a vial of universal solvent they found in Heartblaze's hoard! Pouring the liquid takes one round (plus, most likely, another round to retrieve it from a backpack etc.).

After doing this the Book dissolves into a gob of glowing goo. Talanhiel and the devils attack the PC who has committed the deed! Once Talanhiel is dead, the palace ceases to be, and the PCs are teleported to the temple of Tyr in Phlan. There, an apparition of Tyr himself thanks them for their great deed and grants each a boon (**DMG, p. 232**), choose ones that will make your players happy! If your players do not have the solvent, but come up with a clever or risky way of destroying the book – let them! Especially if heroic self-sacrifice is involved, but you might or your players may think about an unconventional solution, such as expending 15 levels of spell slots, which would represent pouring raw magical energy into the book.



CONCLUSION

The Book of Keeping has been found and whoever has it, their is the power to shape the future. Will the PCs stand fast and defend the world from darkness? Or will they retire, tired of the never-ending struggle? And where is Tyr, why hasn't he intervened earlier? This remains to be explained in an upcoming adventure.

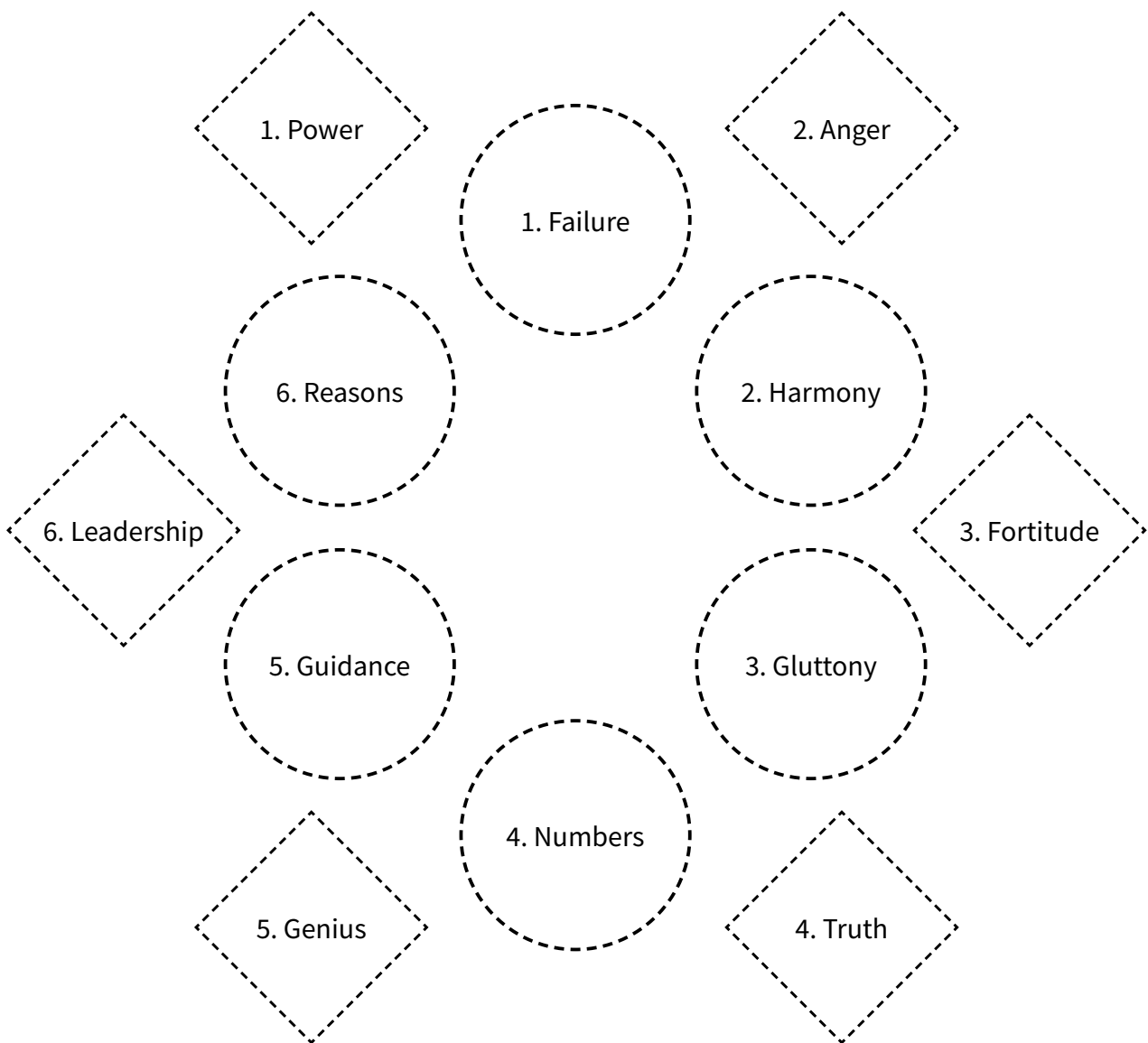
Thank you for picking "Finders Keepers," I hope you've had fun! If you have questions about the adventure, I'm always happy to help, find me on Facebook or write an email. Keep playing and take a moment please to [rate this book](#) or [leave a review](#).

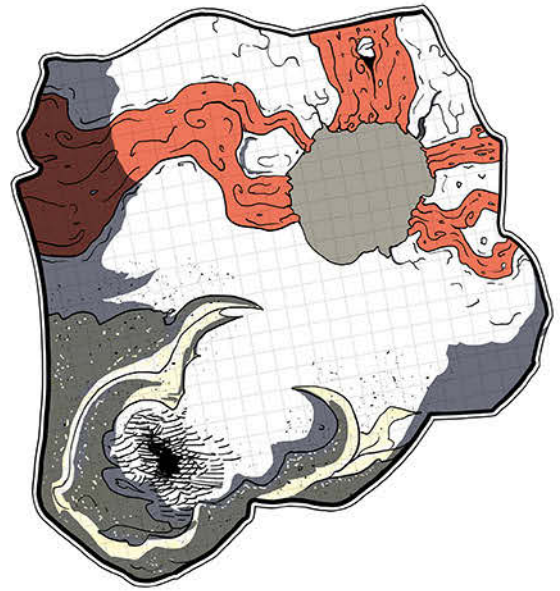
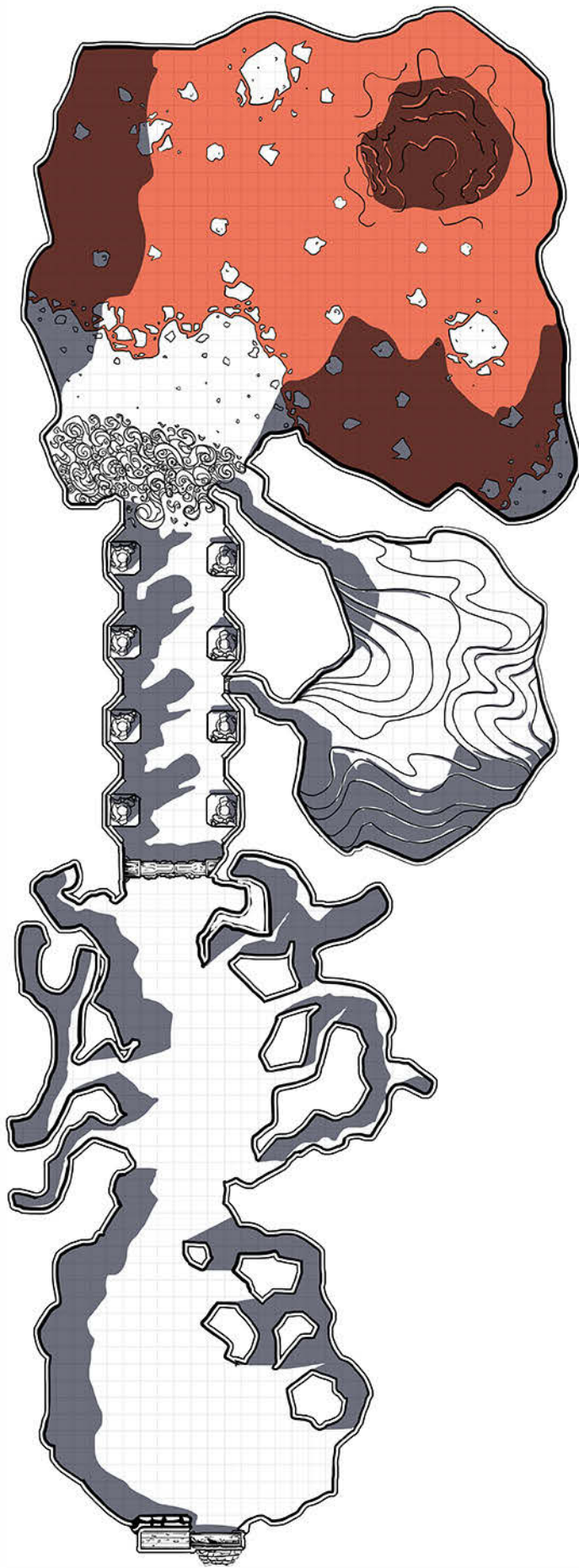
Janek Sielicki

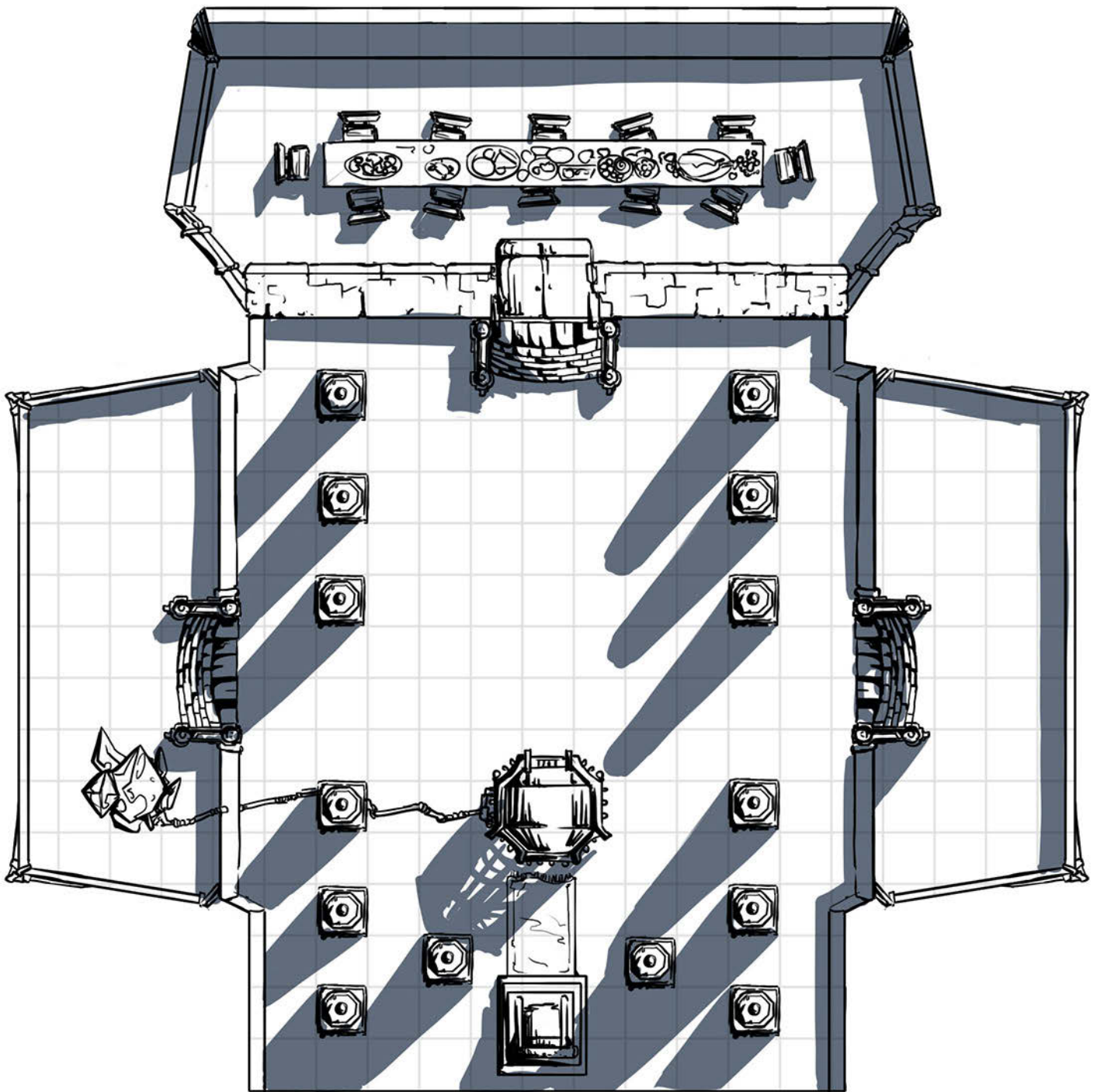


Dreamlet Tokens

Cut the shapes out and use in your game. Small dreamlets (saving throw challenges) are represented by rhombi. Large dreamlets (ability tests and dream-book copy locations) are represented by circles. The numbers correspond to dreamlet descriptions in the text. Remember that it is not possible to move directly from a large dreamlet (circles) to another large dreamlet!







MAKING OF *FINDERS KEEPERS*

By Janek Sielicki

Introduction

Writing an RPG module might seem like an easy task. After all, role-playing games are your favourite hobby, and you spend hours upon hours designing adventures, monsters and maps you can later use when playing with your friends. Then you sit down, ready to write down your ideas, to share them with the rest of the world and, suddenly, you don't really know how to do that. You realize you can't just re-write your notes, that it's not enough, but what other information should you put into the text? What would other DMs want to see?

This article aims to help you understand the process of writing an RPG module for Dungeon Master's Guild or any other, similar programme. As of this moment, I have published four RPG modules, two for the Cypher System (*The Bridges we Burn – a Numenera Adventure* and *A Breath of Fresh Air*) and two for D&D 5th edition (*Homeward Bound – simple rules for player-owned base* and *Finders Keepers*). The text is based on my experience and follows the creation stages of *Finders Keepers*, which is my newest release. I hope that seeing the process will help you with your own writing. In a way it is a sum of my experiences, and what I've learnt I'm willing to share with you.

Although the knowledge of *Finders Keepers* is not necessary, reading the

module will help you understand the challenges I faced and the changes I made in the text and art before the adventure's release.

Stage 1: Ideas, drafts and plans

In the beginning, there was an idea. A single thought that coalesced into something more solid, a few words written down on a sheet of paper, which, in turn, developed into more detailed notes. Usually, these notes are enough to actually run an adventure. After all, it is your idea and most of it stays in your head, so typically there is no need to write everything down. You know your players, can predict (more or less) their reactions and tactics, and you just want to have fun.

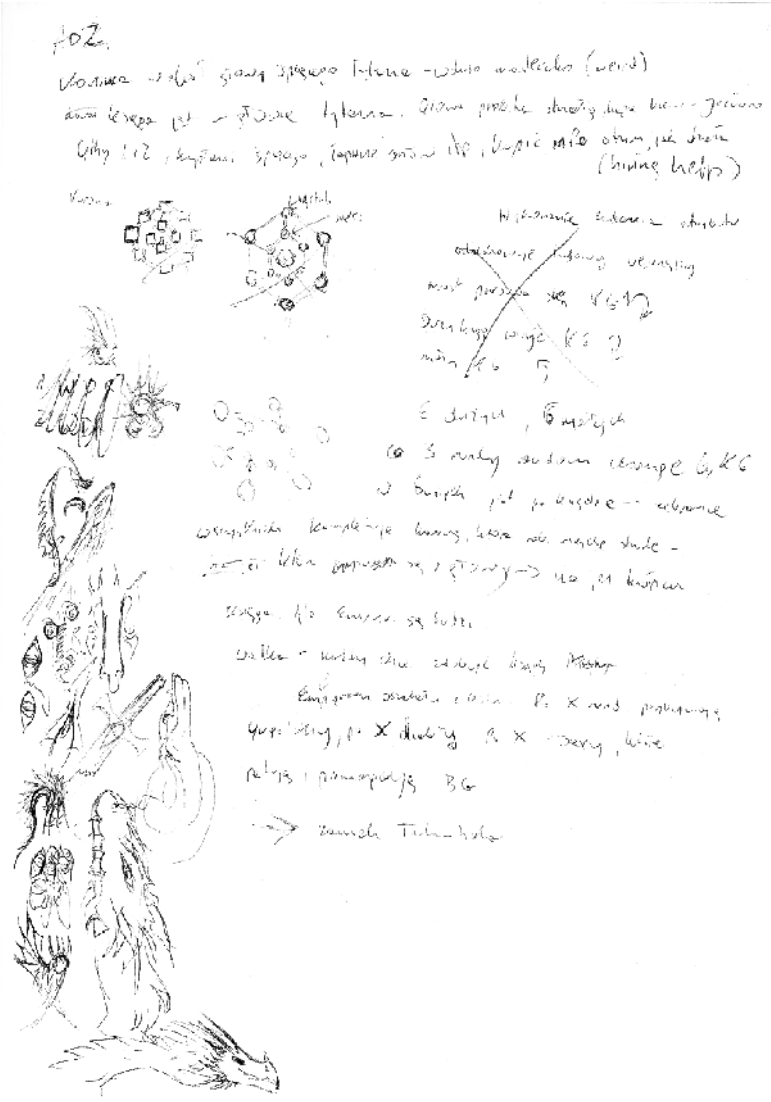
However, if you want to publish an adventure, you need to adopt a wider perspective. First of all, you must realize that you're a publisher now, not just an author. Writing the adventure is just a part of the project. No-one likes reading badly edited word documents, and nice maps and illustrations work wonders and are a big selling point. Therefore, consider the following questions:

Who is going to edit my module?

The texts we create are masters of illusions. Because you are the author your mind plays tricks on you and when you are reading it for the n-th time you simply stop seeing any misspelt words or syntax errors. You need to find someone to look at

your text from the linguistic and content perspectives. The former is obvious: catching misspellings, grammar errors and the like. Again, hiring a professional editor would greatly improve the overall quality of the text, but if you're short on money, just ask a friend or a family member. The latter has more to do with the content than with the language. For this you need another role player, someone who knows the hobby, and can point out any inconsistencies, plot holes, unclear wording of new rules (if you're introducing them) etc.

Finders Keepers was read by my wife (a Ph.D. in English), 2 friends, 2 editors and I still kept spotting spelling or punctuation mistakes when combing the text in its almost-pre-release version.



Initial notes and brainstorming the dreamlets.

Who is going to illustrate my module?

Art sells. It is the first thing that draws the eye of a potential customer, and you need at least a nice cover. Moreover, interior illustrations help to break up the text, so that it is easier to read and understand. Here you have several options:

☞ You can hire an artist. This is the most expensive option, since creating art is time-consuming, hard work and artists want to be paid, and they should! However, an artist may already have a piece of art depicting something you

want and they might allow you to use it, under a limited licence (which costs much less than a commissioned work) or for a fixed fee. Deviantart is a great place to look!

☞ You can use “Stock Art” packages. These are available to purchase on DMG, RPGNOW and other sites. They’re much cheaper than commissioned art, usually also created by professional artists, and you should really consider getting one at least for your cover piece.

- ☞ You can use free DMG Creator Content. It includes some generic stock art of monsters and NPCs (usually from older edition Monster Manuals etc.) – great for interior art!
- ☞ You can use images from the Internet. However, these have to be under Creative Commons CC0 licence, otherwise you cannot use them, or have to provide the author's name! But don't worry, there are thousands of pictures to choose from here: classic paintings, objects, statues and monuments!

Finders Keepers uses a mix of all of the above. I've worked with Filip Gutowski, a talented and up-and-coming comic book artist, several times and he created the amazing illustrations for both of my Cypher System books. However, he works slowly. So, here is the lesson for you: plan ahead. If you decide to find an illustrator, and commission a piece of art, do it well in advance, not when the text is ready, because then you'll have to wait. For "FK", Filip made the amazing image of Valigan's Dream Plane, and I also used some of the artwork he made for "The Bridges...". FK has also a map of Phlan by Elven Tower, which I bought on DMG, and a number of art pieces under CC0, including the cover art, a timeless masterpiece by Hieronymus Bosch.

Who is going to typeset my module?

DMG offers a number of ready-to-use layouts, but if you want your module

to look extra nice, you might want to hire a professional typesetter, or even a typesetter in training, who would charge much less than a pro and use the opportunity to hone their skills.

Finders Keepers was typeset by my cousin, Anna Madrjas-Dymek, who put together all my previous books. Not only a very talented graphic designer, she also agreed to get paid (less than usual) only after the module has earned enough. She is still studying graphic design and my modules are a great learning opportunity for her, which also builds her portfolio. So I guess I'm lucky here, but there is also a lesson for you: find a graphic design student, chances are they are already better at InDesign than you'll ever be, and your book will still look great.

Stage 2: Writing

You take a long look at your notes, fire off your word processor and begin writing. Unless you're terrific, talented and on fire, be prepared that it's going to take you some time. You'll meet writer blocks. Depression. Just-one-more-word phases. But, little by little, you'll get to the end. I think it's important to write at least a little every day, even 300 or 500 words, just to go on. And as always, it's good to have a plan. Although I'm basing this text on adventure-writing (I'm not good at coming up with new rules), the basic guidelines below apply to any writing.

Remember how I said you're a publisher? You have a publishing decision to make, even before you

start writing: you need to decide why you want to publish your work via Dungeon Master's Guild. After all, most of D&D 5th is available under the SRD licence and you can publish your work on RPGNOW, DTRPG, or any other similar site. What's the difference? The other sites take about 20% of your earnings, while DMG takes a hefty 50%. On the other hand, DMG gives you the free layouts and stock art I discussed above, and – perhaps more importantly – it allows you to set your adventure in the Forgotten Realms.

But you can get stock art outside DMG, too. So, if your adventure can be set anywhere and if the name of the town PCs start their quest in can be freely changed to anything a DM wants, when it doesn't really matter if it's Neverwinter or Borriga (don't look it up, I just made it up), you might think of publishing outside DMG, thus getting more money per sold copy. On the other hand, DMG is slowly becoming the go-to place for D&D modules, so there are more potential customers there (but also more products to browse, so small fish might not be spotted). And, perhaps more importantly, it offers a LOT of great art you can use – for free, but only if you publish on DMG. Publishing decisions!

Having successfully published 2 Cypher System adventures and a small Dungeons and Dragons module, when thinking about my next work (*Finders Keepers*) I decided to write something that DMG was lacking: an adventure for 20th level characters.

My next decision involved making this adventure as deeply connected to the Forgotten Realms as possible. Which meant research. Looking for inspiration, I studied various maps, fluff pieces, and browsed through FR guides for older editions of D&D. I also went through the Monster Manual, reading up about high challenge rating monsters. That's how I found out about the history of the Yugoloth, and from there the rest of the story unfolded in my mind.

I decided that it must open with a bang, and dragons are great for that; the bigger the better! Then I had to decide on the location. This decision was based on purely practical reasons. Since I knew I wanted to include a map, I browsed through DMG's offer to see what stock maps are available. I decided to choose Derek Von Zarovich's beautiful map of Phlan, because it was gorgeous and because Phlan is not as known as Waterdeep or Neverwinter, while still being an important part of the Forgotten Realms. I also wanted a Trial of Skills later in the adventure, so I kept thinking how to fit it into the story. Initially it was supposed to be a tower, but when I finished designing Valigan's realm I realized that the ioun-stone-like dreamlets were the perfect location for the trials. I just had to think about the details... I kept drawing the dreamlets, came up with overly complicated systems that simulated the way dreamlets moved, even built a LEGO model to help me visualize them. Finally, I had something I didn't dislike.

And, eventually, my players came up with a much better solution, anyway.

Finally, having done all this, and my notes, I was ready to play test the adventure for the first time. Four sessions later at least one obvious plot hole was discovered and my wonderful players offered a number of excellent suggestions, including a new, much more elegant system of controlling the dreamlets. I was glad to see they enjoyed playing 20th level PCs, using all the awesome skills and spells and battling hordes of high-level monsters. It was fun while it lasted!

Once we were done, I began to write. First, I wrote: “Introduction”; I literally wrote the word only and skipped on to the next thing, since years of academic writing taught me that introductions are best written after all other writing is done. When writing an adventure scenario, it is always good to begin with the backstory. The adventure some other DM’s players will have has to be grounded; the backstory is the

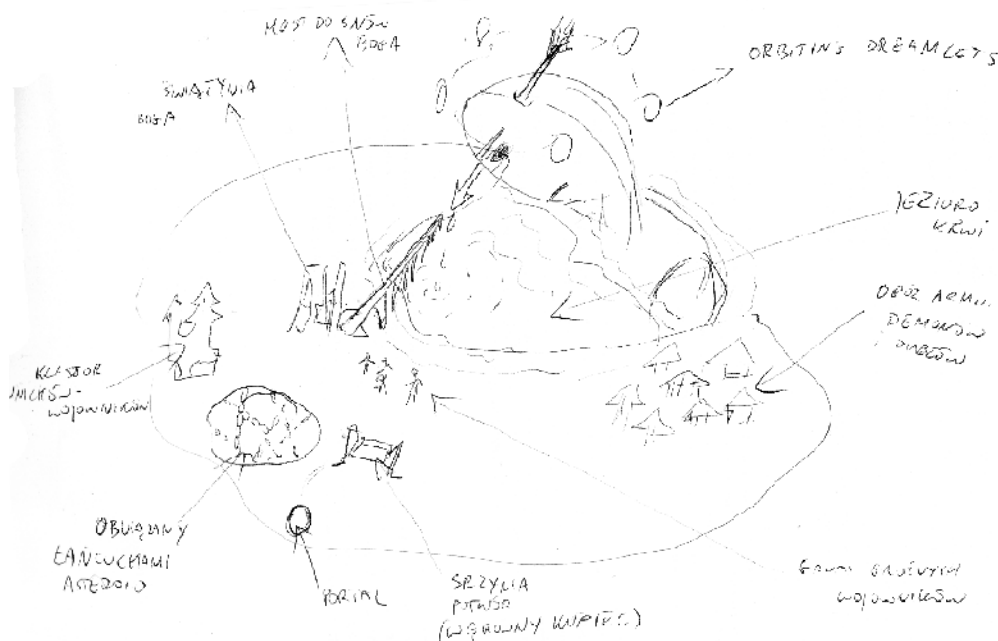
foundation upon which the scenario is erected. What happened before the PCs stumble into the quest? Who is the villain? Why is he/she a villain? What’s their plan? How are they going to execute it? Are any complications involved: other NPCs, missing items or other unexpected circumstances? You need to explain all of it.

Finders Keepers is quite heavy on the backstory (perhaps too much!), but it’s an epic level adventure, steeped in Toril’s history and involves gods, devils and celestials, so I had a lot of explaining to do. I also divided it into two parts, one focusing on the “mythical” part of the story, the other on Phlan’s recent history.

Next, you need to think how to involve the PCs into the adventure. Even a simple “a guy in an inn asks you to investigate a nearby dungeon” works, but it is not that interesting, right? Think of at least 3 reasons the PCs might go on the adventure. A personal reason? For money?

For glory?
A friend asked them to help?

In “FK” I offer a number of suggestions, and since the adventure is most likely played as a “one-shot” scenario, I included a “spy” option, where a PC is an agent of one of the greater powers vying for control of the book.



Sketch of Valigan's Domain with info for the artist. You see why I needed him!

Then, finally, you can start writing the actual adventure. If it's a simple dungeon, describe each room and its contents, what happens when PCs enter etc. Always try to make the dungeon a "living" place, where monsters don't patiently wait for the PCs to enter, but instead run away to other rooms, warn fellow monsters, try to lure PCs into traps etc. Think about treasures and the environment. Is it dark? Slippery? Consider resting times. Can the PCs rest anywhere they want, as long as they wish? You are a roleplayer, so imagine yourself in a given situation. Look through the PCs' eyes. To help out fellow DMs, think about including short "read or paraphrase sections." But be careful and don't make them too long (although it is tempting): players tend to stop listening and lose focus if the text is too long.

If your adventure is more event than location based, you might consider describing the location where the action takes place first (for example, a town, village etc.) and then move on to what happens in response to the PCs' actions. Try to think about the most logical and obvious choices a group of players can make, but you also must realize that you simply cannot predict every single outcome and solution. Finally, you need to write a conclusion to the story, explain what happens when the adventure finishes, the consequences of the PCs' actions and the reward they receive.

If you are introducing your own monsters and adversaries, you might

consider including stat blocks at the end of the adventure. On the other hand, if you are using Monster Manual opponents only, I believe it's not necessary and a simple page reference for each monster is enough. The less page flipping and papers in front of you, the better; ideally, while running an adventure you should have only MM, the adventure and your own short notes in front of you. However, some people like having stat blocks in the adventure, even if the monsters are in MM. Again – publisher's dilemmas!

Stage 3: Editing and Testing

Once you have your first version of the text, write the introduction. Explain what sort of module it is, who it is for and what the readers can expect to find inside. Perhaps even write about some fundamental design decisions you took. A writer statement, of sorts. After that write a short synopsis of the adventure, or of each chapter, if you divided the work into several parts. Now this first version of the text is complete. My advice is to include version number in the file's name. For example, my first file was named "epicv1." This way you avoid confusion when discussing the adventure with playtesters, editors and artists, since you might change quite a lot and each of these parties might work on a different version. It also helps to keep your work more organized.

The next step is very important. Let the text breathe a little. Leave it for a week (or more), don't go back to it, don't read it and if you're

playtesting, use your original notes. After that week go back to the text and sweep it for any mistakes. Moreover, try getting into the role of another Dungeon Master, and read the text as if it was something new to you. This way allows you to spot any cohesion discrepancies, logical loopholes and, of course, the ever-present spelling and punctuation errors. Finally, try to unify the game mechanics references in the text. For example, provide Monster Manual pages with the adversaries from your adventure (in brackets and in bold), and saving throw and ability check difficulty numbers should be presented in the same fashion: "... which requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test", etc.

Once you've done it, rename the file and send it to your editor(s). Ask them to correct the text with the "track changes" option on, so you can see what has been corrected. While waiting for them to finish, start looking for art you'll want to use and find playtesting groups willing to give your unfinished product a try. Facebook, Reddit and Google Plus RPG-themed groups are great for that.

Now you must be brave. The next stage really tests your mettle. The best editors are harsh! They want to help you (really!), and they relentlessly go at your text, your beloved child you've spent hours on, with the Sledge Hammer of Criticism. Plus three. This legendary weapon picks your work apart; the editors not only correcting spelling and punctuation errors, but also pointing out the flaws in your adventure

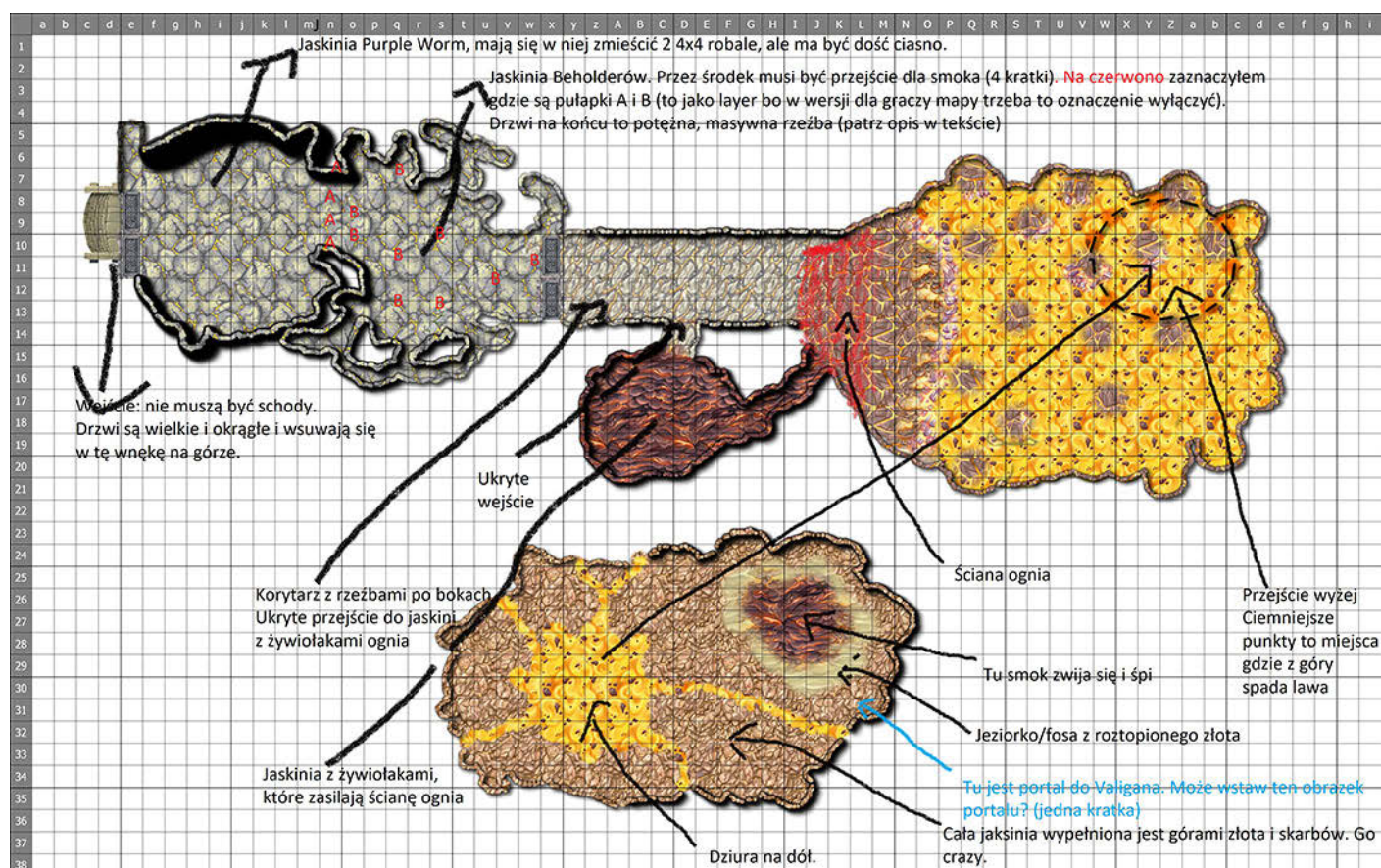
structure, NPCs' motivation and actions, and/or general cohesion and coherence.

After *Finders Keepers* returned from Ken Carcas, for two days I was down and in so much blue I considered giving up. But after two days (and an excellent iaido and jodo training session) my mood improved and I actually agreed with most of Ken's comments. Some of what he said I chose to ignore, because I felt these comments stemmed from a different DM/play-style from mine, but, eventually, I changed and rewrote the sections he discussed in his feedback. Thanks, Ken!

After that the text is ready for more playtesting. With "FK" I did it myself with my other group, and two groups I found online tested it for themselves. There were some minor issues to correct after I received their feedback, but nothing really big; mostly encounter difficulty adjustments etc. Finally, I had the almost-final version, which I sent to my typesetter.

Stage 4: Typesetting and Design

Unless you are doing it yourself, this is the stage where you just wait for other people to do their job. Typically, your typesetter will send you several versions of the document. The first one presents a general look and layout of the module, and if you accept it, read it again against any spelling etc. errors that got through (trust me, they are there). The typesetter will also want the art files, maps and so on and you'll have to decide where to put them and about a thousand minor



things; for example: do you want nice, parchment-like background? On one hand, the module looks nicer with one, on the other it is more difficult to print out. It also a good idea to provide maps in both DM and player versions, or maps as separate files to be used with Virtual Table Top software.

If you're using maps and/or art under a licence, you have to include appropriate copyright statements somewhere in the book (typically the credits section), it is also good form to include the names of all the people who helped you put the module together (also in the credits). And don't forget about Contents Page (possibly hyperlinked).

Say it with me: publisher's decisions!

A note on maps. As explained above, by this stage you should have

your maps ready. One of the most common questions on DMG Facebook groups is how to make maps for modules. There are several solutions: using dedicated software (Campaign Cartographer, Dungeon Painter Studio, Dunjinni). Most of these apps are expensive and if you find a free one, check if the licence allows you to use it for commercial products. But even the most expensive software is not magical – you still have to learn how to use it, how to make good-looking maps, which takes time and effort. In my experience it is much better to hire an experienced cartographer: even a black and white map they make looks better than your initial colour attempts.

I have a confession to make here: I hate maps and playing on the grid.

That's why I like the "theatre of the mind" approach of DnD5. But even though during early playtesting games I used rough sketches on a vinyl battlemat, I knew that a lot of people expect DnD modules to include high quality maps.

At first, to save money, I tried to make maps myself, using Dungeon Painter Studio for interior maps and a free app I found online for Valigan's Realm. Then I posted them on the DMG FB group. Let's just say the feedback told me I had a lot to learn. Therefore, I looked into my wallet and once again contacted Filip Gutowski, who agreed to make the illustration of Valigan's Realm and the other maps.

Stage 5: Almost there!

Eventually you'll have your final version of the text: with cover art, illustrations, maps and, of course, your adventure. Give it another sweep and find more spelling errors. See if you like the art layout. Check if hyperlinks are working etc. Maybe even ask another friend to give it a read, or find one more group to playtest your creation. After that, upload it to DMG. That's easy enough. Setting the right price is a bit of a lottery, though. The current consensus is that they 'pay what you want' option is the worst possible choice. Either set your module as free, which will help to promote your name, or set a small price. The biggest mistake I made with "Homeward Bound" was that I set

the original release price much too high. If you're a new author, \$3 or so for 20-30 pages of adventure should be ok. Customer feedback taught me that people count pages and (in the case of adventures) check how much play time they provide. Also, studies show that .95 prices sell better than .99. You must also write a nice blurb, something that will encourage potential buyers to spend their bucks when they find your work on DMG.

While setting up your DMG title you should (but don't have to) include a preview of the title. There are two options: quick and full-page preview. I suggest making the entire module available to see with the quick preview – the text is illegible, but a potential customer can see art, layout, get a glimpse of maps etc. Include the first few pages in the full preview, possibly the page with the adventure synopsis, so clients can see what they're buying.

Stage 6: Promotion and Updating

Once your product has been uploaded, you should let people know it is out there. Don't count on it being visible on the "newest on DMG" bar; there are dozens of modules uploaded every day and it will soon be pushed back. Instead, think about promoting your work on Facebook, Reddit and Google Plus groups, but don't overdo it – people hate constant advertising. That's why that initial release price is so important: in reality you have only once chance to get to that many

people, and if the price is too high, people won't buy the module and forget about it.

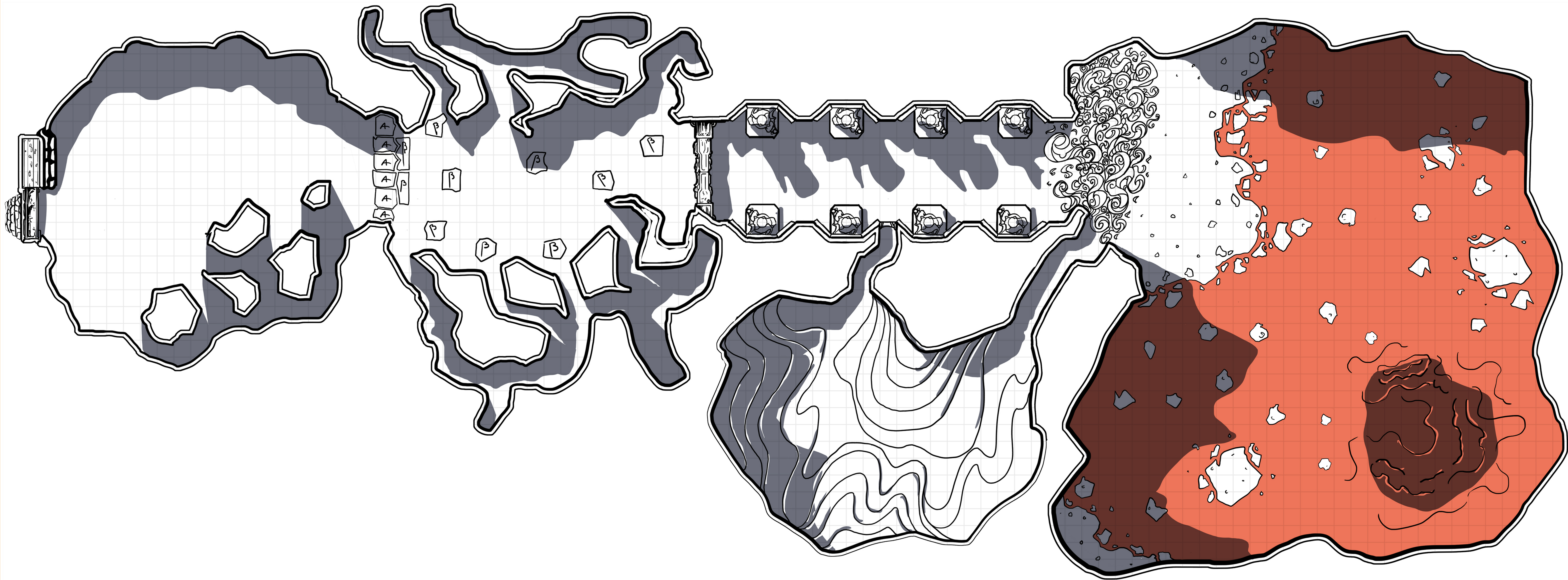
After some time, purchasers might get back to you with feedback. Listen to them and consider updating your module according to their suggestions. Now that you have your product page, you also need reviews and ratings. Consider adding this line in the module, somewhere in the conclusion section: "If you liked this module, please go back to the product page and rate it!", hyperlinked to the product's page. Then upload the updated version. This way may get more stars and reviews.

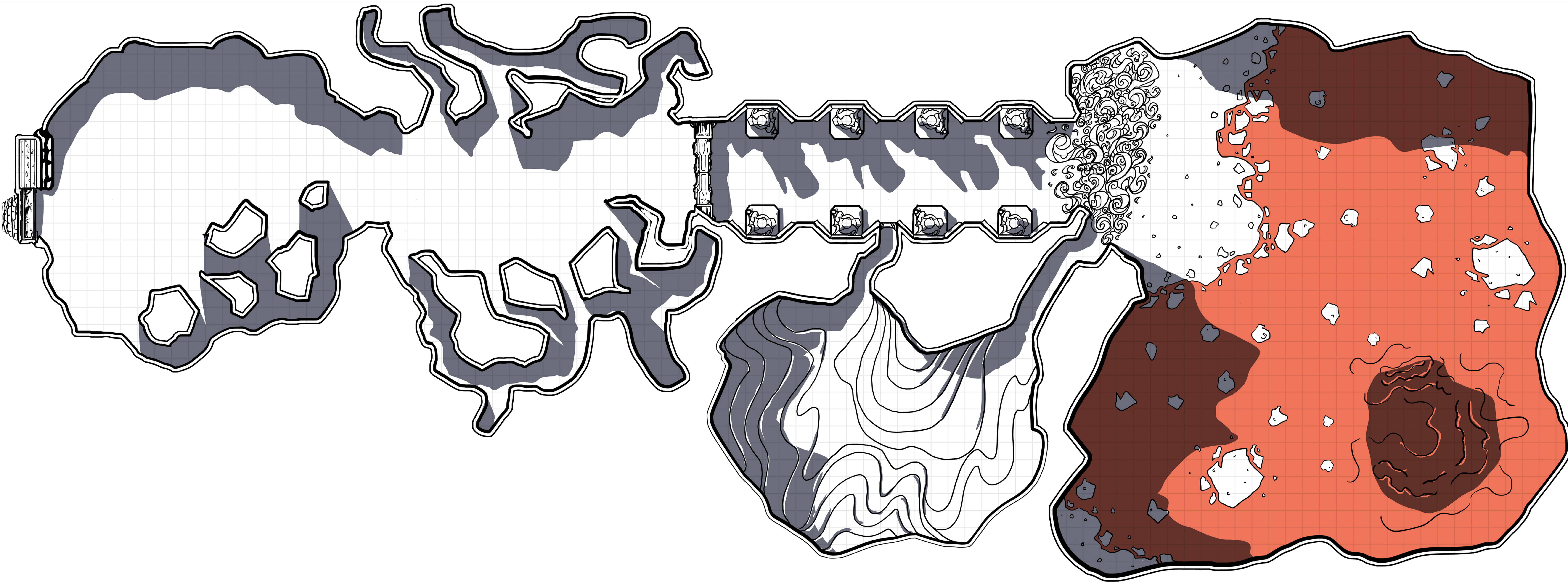
Finally, you might want to contact various bloggers, podcasters and other reviewers, asking them to review your module. DMG allows you to provide free, complimentary copies of your work. Some of them will refuse, some will agree and then forget all about that. Nudge them after some time, they're busy people, sometimes with dozens of products in line to be reviewed, so you just have to wait. Meanwhile, you can start working on your next project!

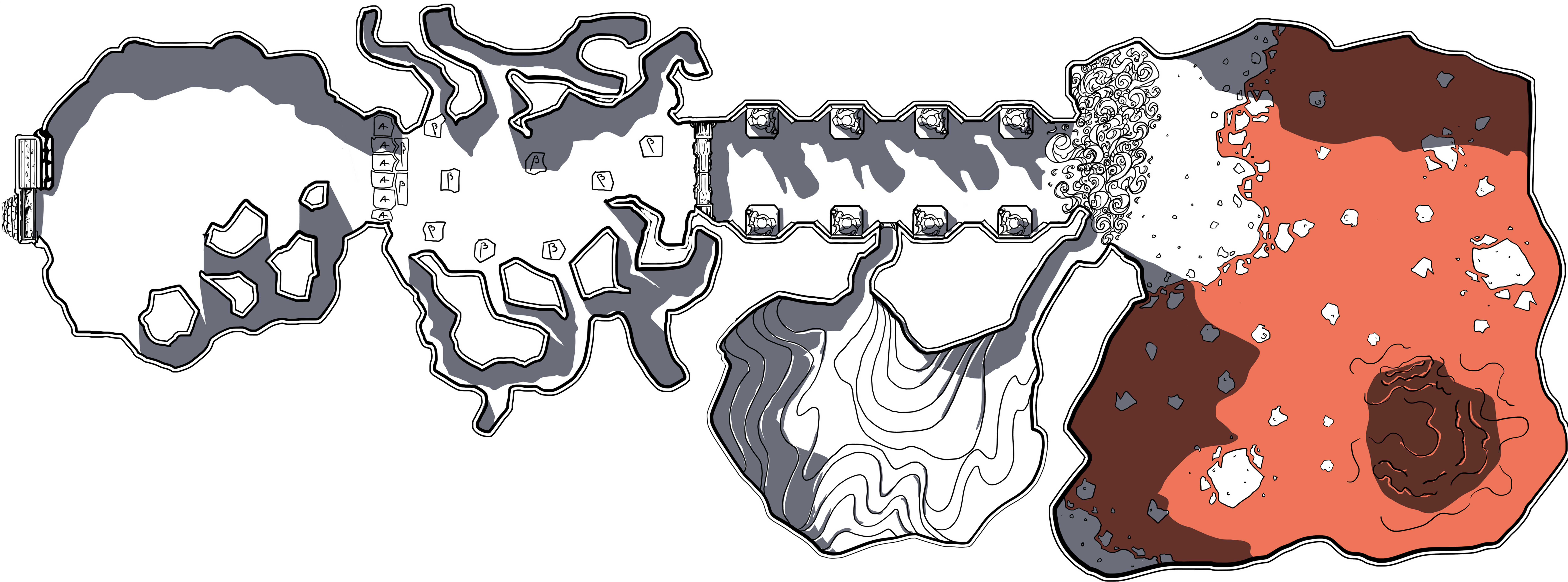
Conclusions

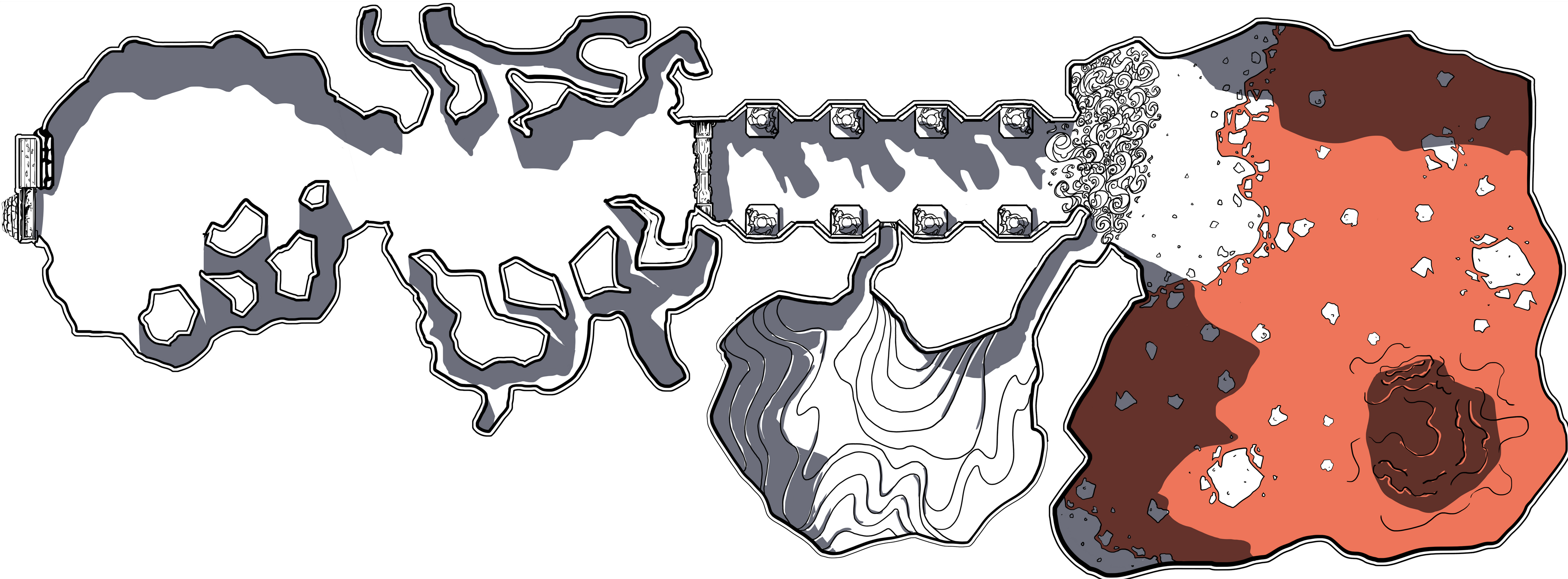
It takes a lot of time and work to put a nicely looking, well-written adventure together. And when your "baby," this product of love and labour, is finally out, you expect it to become an instant bestseller. Now comes the hardest part: people don't care about your sleepless nights and the money you invested. They may buy your module, or find it lacking. Only a few people actually make real money on DMG, so don't expect to earn a lot with your first publication, while you're still learning the ropes. *Finders Keepers* managed to sell about 60 copies over the first few days, and it was considered an incredibly good result. For comparison, *Homeward Bound* over half a year since the publication sold 100. There are just too many both high and low quality products published on DMG every day to be sure of any success.

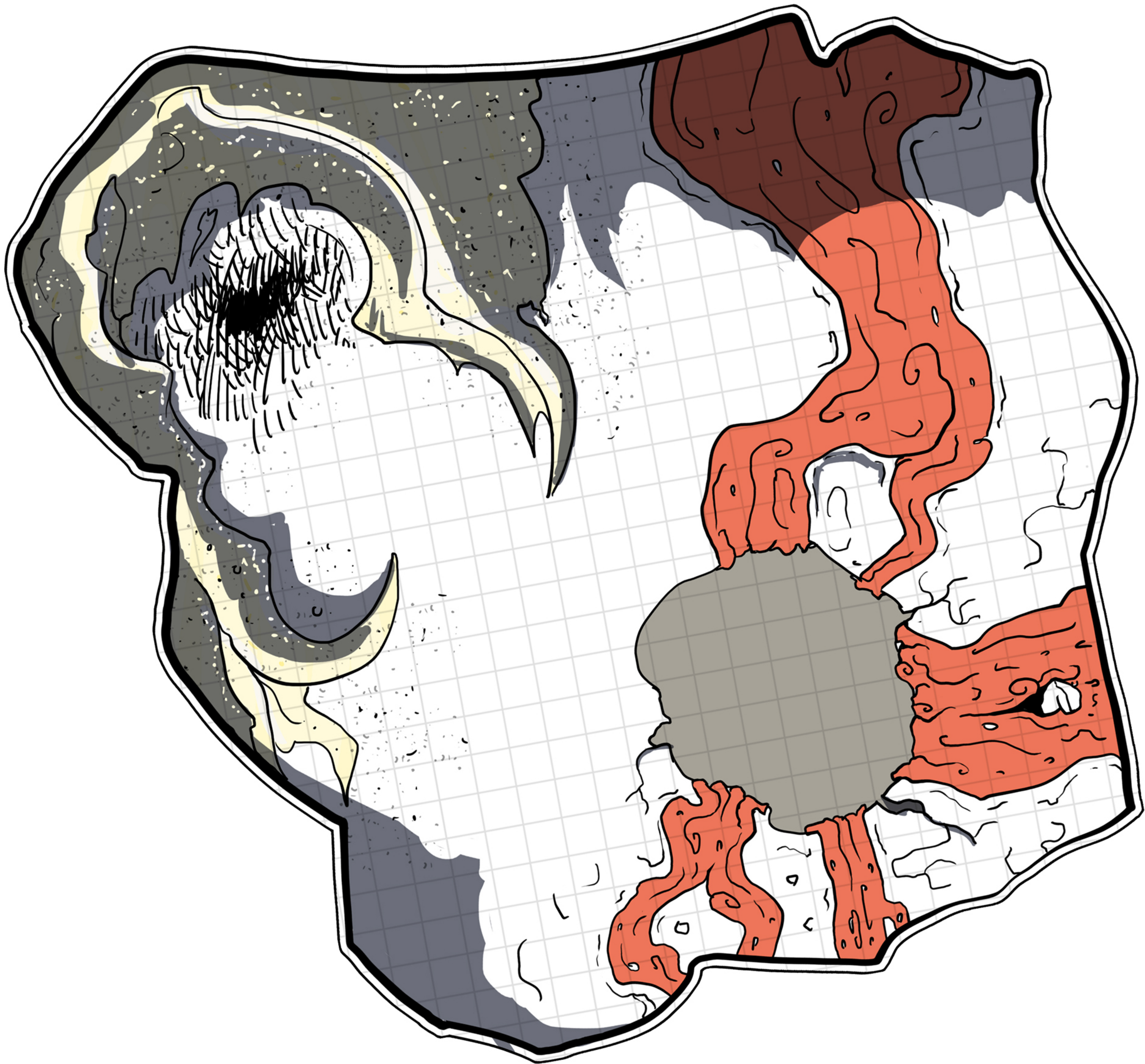
I hope this short article was useful to you, and if you have any more questions, please visit the Dungeon Masters Guild Fan Club on Facebook, where you can find the most successful DMG authors who are always ready to help newcomers.

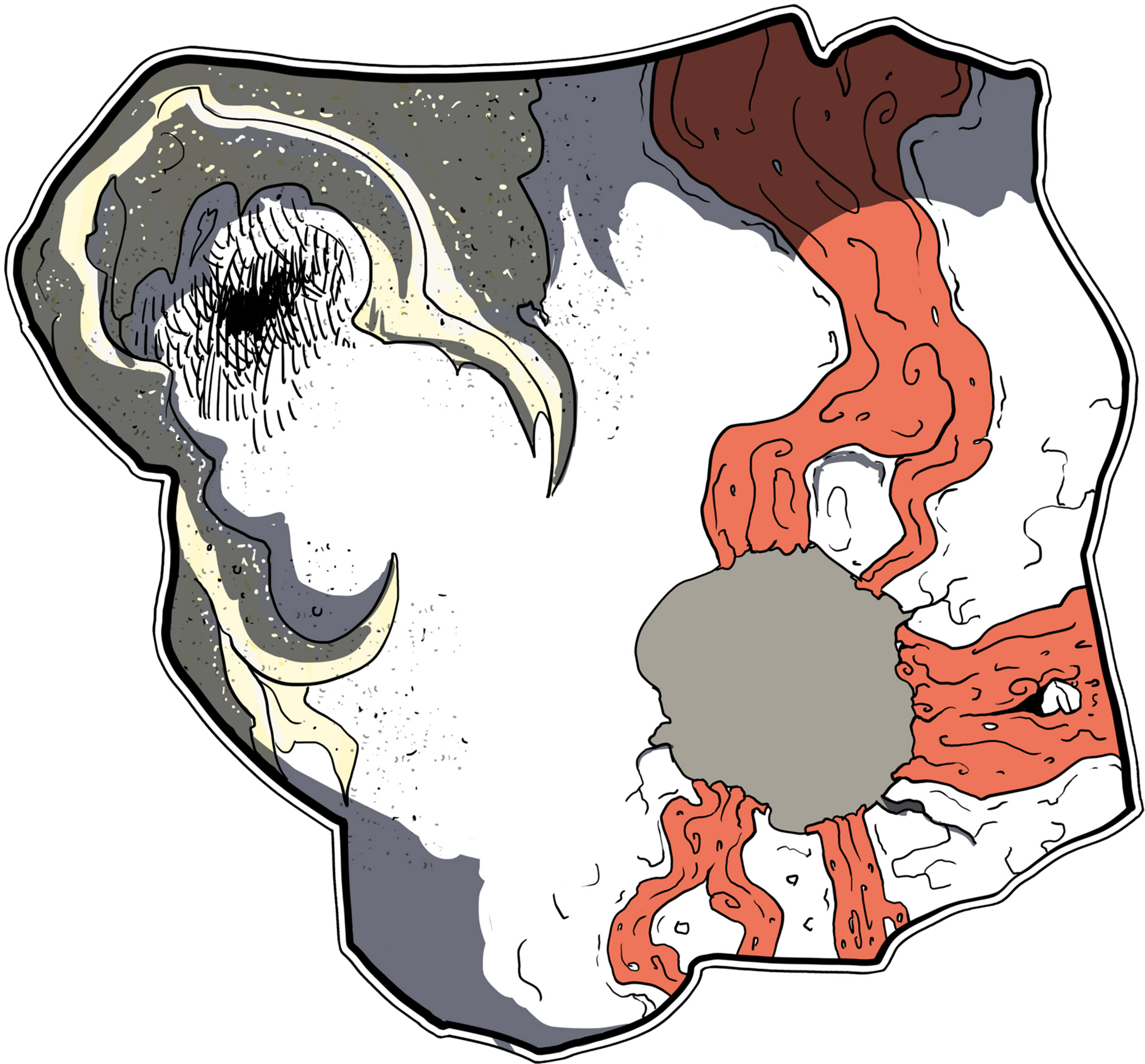


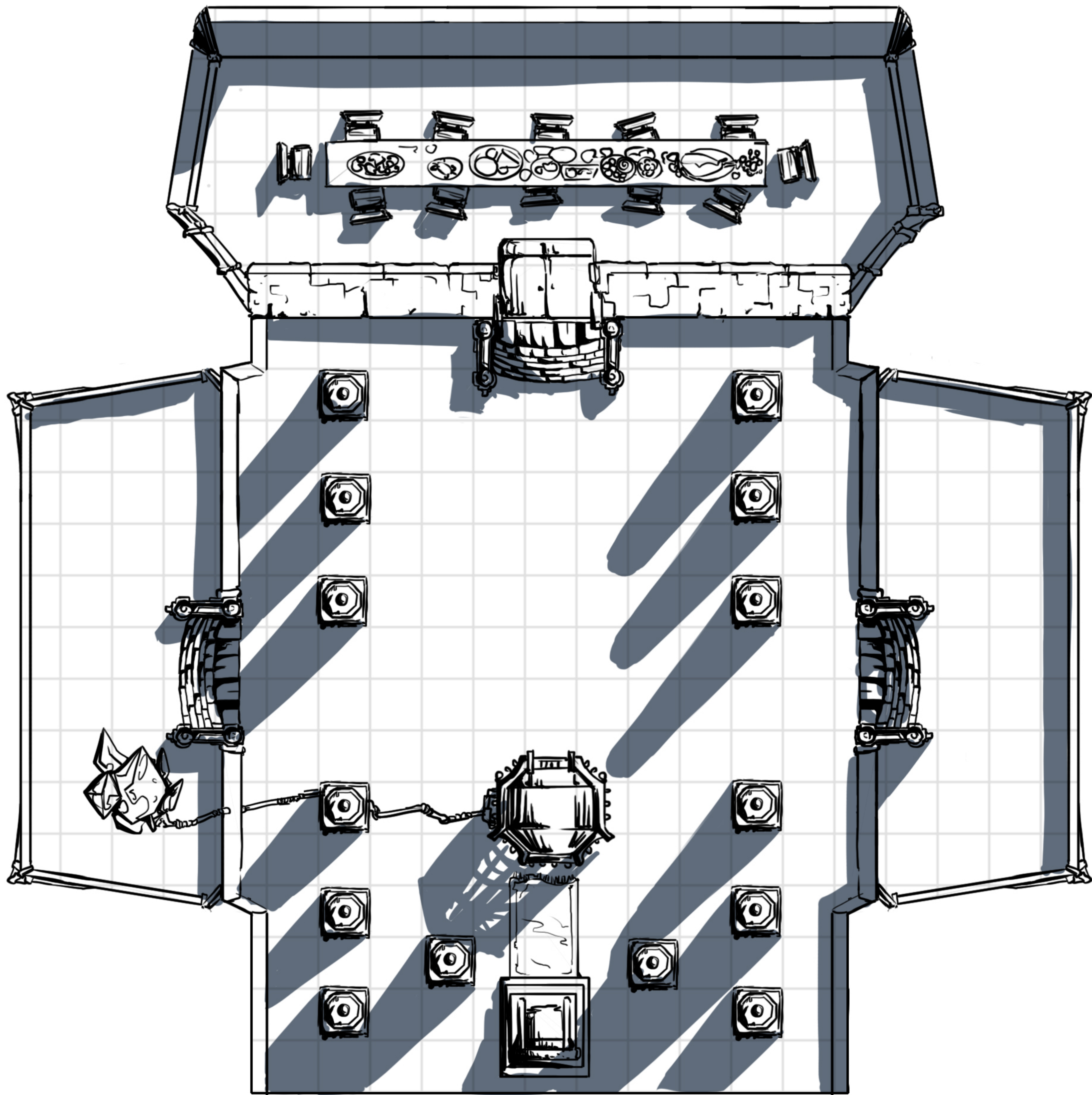


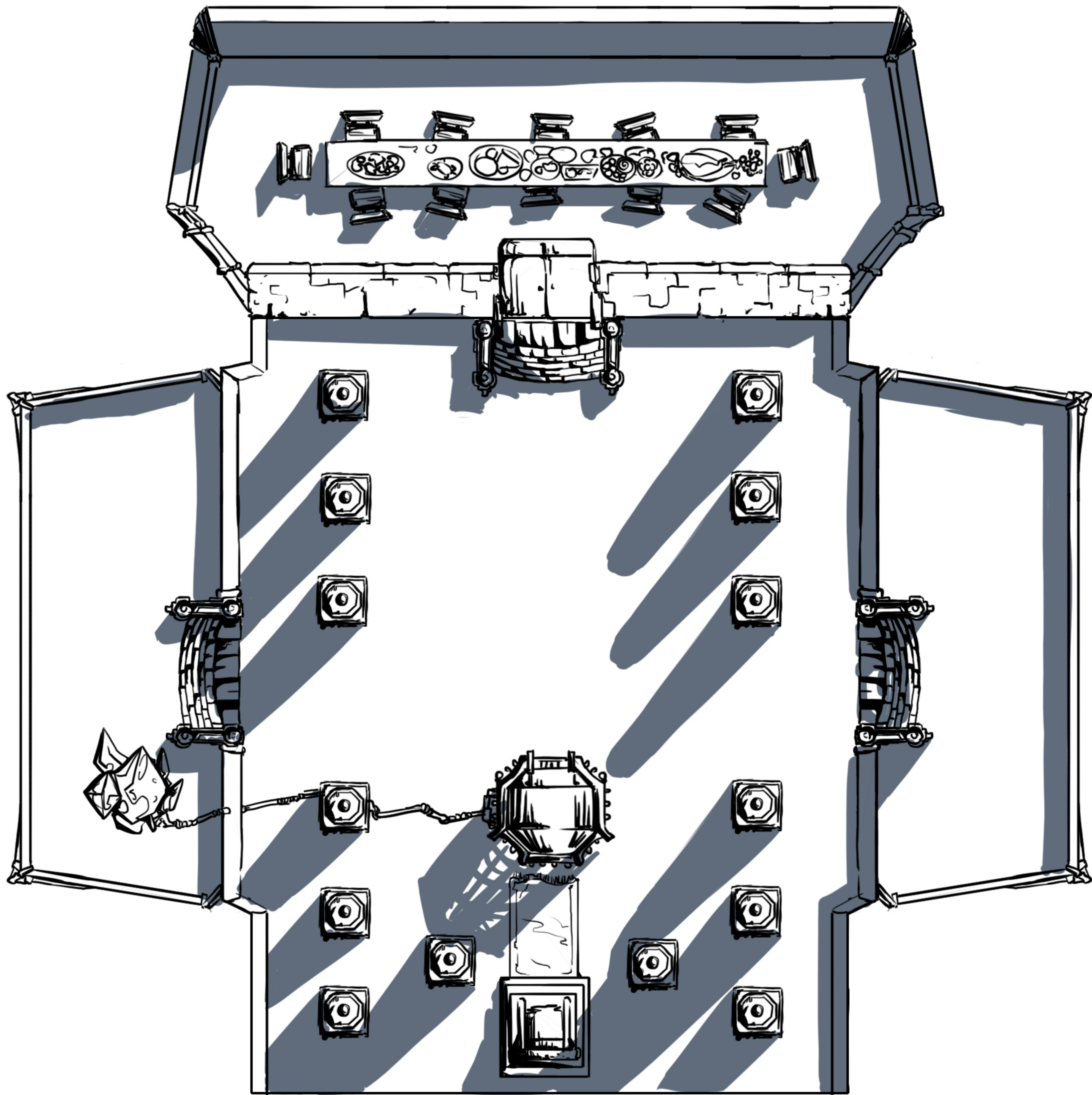


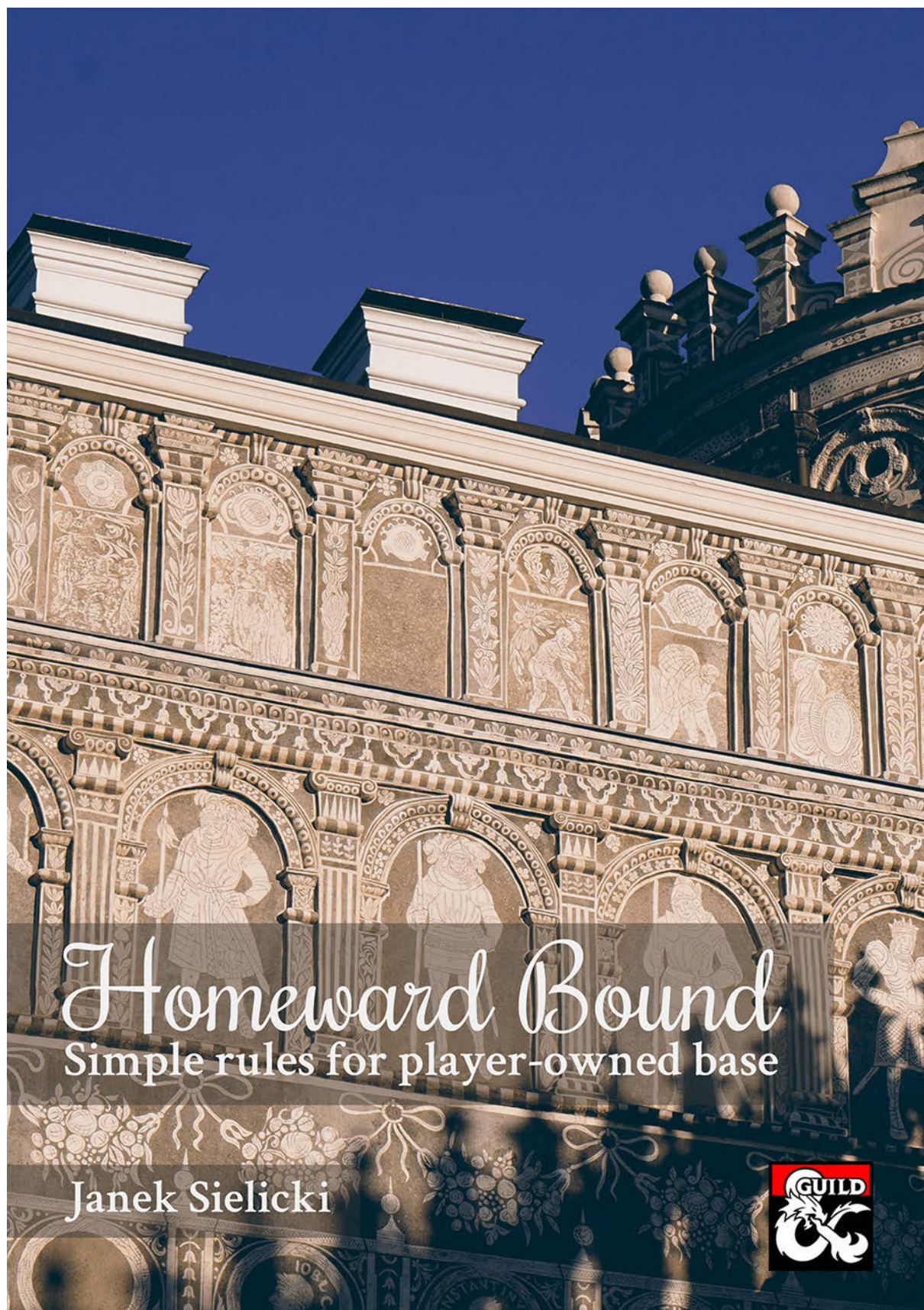












Homeward Bound

Simple rules for player-owned base

Janek Sielicki



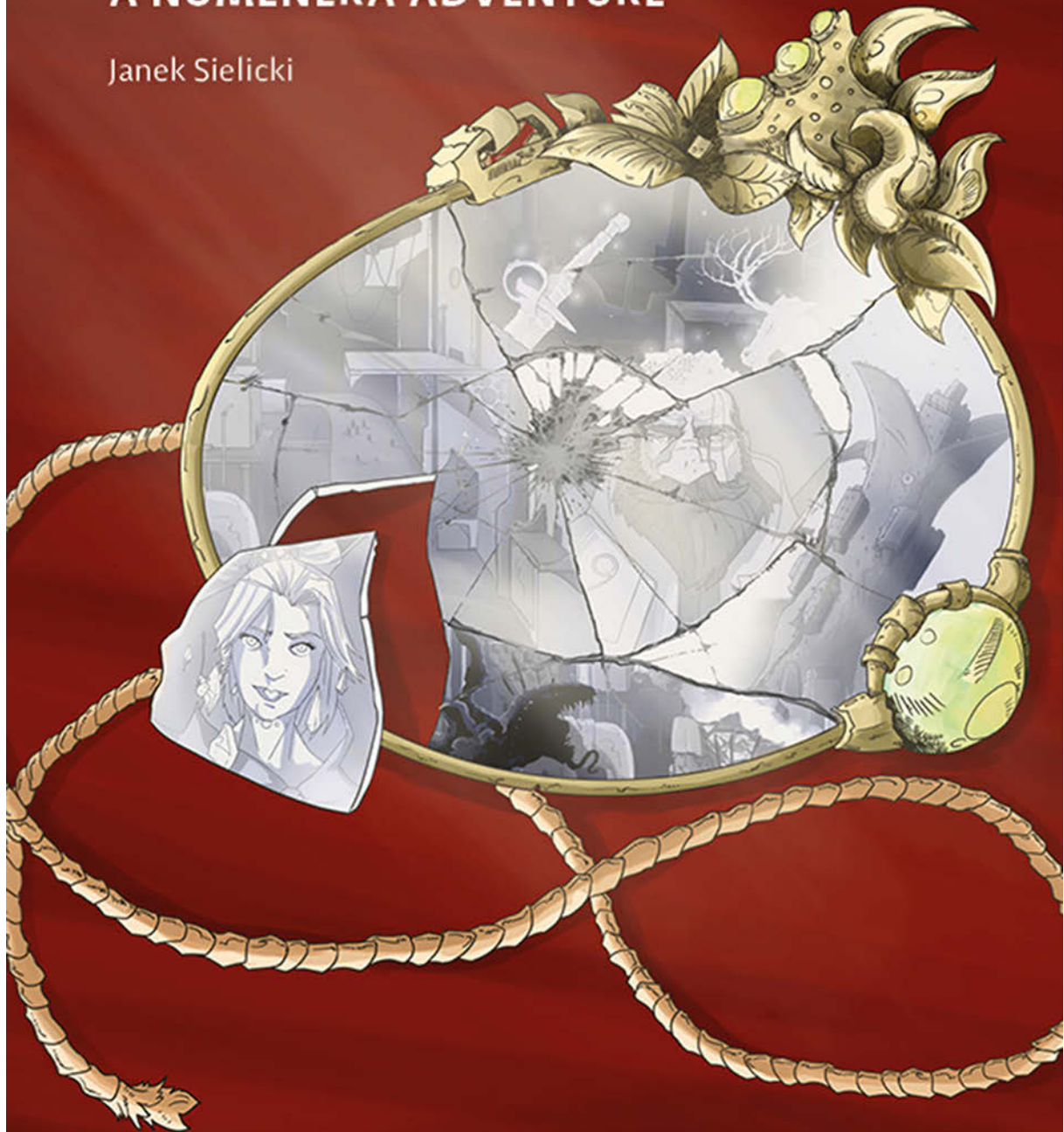
Homeward Bound

A 5ed module that gives your PCs a base they can upgrade and enjoy the bonuses it provides!
Praise for „HB”: TL; DR-Finally a use for money! 94% (throatpunchgames); Overall a nice and well-crafted support for all DMs, with plenty of nice ideas ready to be dropped into about any campaign. It is interesting to wsee how proposals are quite realistic and well-thought: everything makes sense (EnWorld).

The Bridges we Burn

A NUMENERA ADVENTURE

Janek Sielicki



The Bridges we Burn

This epic adventure, although designed for Numenera game, can be easily adapted for any fantasy setting. Or just take a break from DnD and try out weird sci-fi – and “The Bridges we Burn” is a perfect adventure module for that! Praise for “TBWB”: This is by far the best self published Numenera campaign I ever came across and it is better of many official ones. (EnWorld)

A Breath of Fresh Air

Janek Sielicki



Requires the Cypher System Rulebook from Monte Cook Games.
Distributed through the Cypher System Creator™ at DriveThruRPG.

A breath of Fresh Air

Another Cypher System product, **A breath of fresh air** offers a trip into a weird and complex land on the bottom of a mysterius rift. Praise for "ABOFA": Simply put, it was astounding. (EnWorld), This is a great scenario that offers a lot of chances for players to immerse themselves in the Ninth World. It's also an imaginative story which, in the style I'm coming to expect from Janek Sielicki, blends familiar tropes and new details into a compelling narrative. (mephitjamesblog)