

OVER THE NEXT HILL STONEWATCH LIGHTHOUSE

OVER THE NEXT HILL IS A multi-author series focusing on small settlements that can be dropped into a campaign with minimal preparation. Each article in the series presents several detailed NPCs, points of interest, and loose plot hooks that can be developed during play. This installment of the series details Stonewatch, an enchanted lighthouse engulfed in shadowy mists by the spirits of an ancient foe. In this mini-adventure location suited for characters of 4th–5th level, the characters may encounter a disguised necromancer, a loyal knight, and a dark secret.



WRITING TIM CAMPBELL
COLOR ART C. F. SØRENSEN
MAPS MIK HOLMES
EDITING JAMES J. HAECK
LAYOUT ERIC LIFE-PUTNAM

OVERVIEW

The valley around Stonewatch has been cursed and enshrouded in permanent gloom. Only a few hardy souls remain, led by the sentinel knight, Ser Kaplan—trying to ascertain the true nature of the fog and how to remove it.

Unknown to them, the mist appeared because of a growing rift between the physical and spirit worlds. Although this opening has been safely sealed for over a hundred years, a powerful necromancer recently succeeded in reopening it by infiltrating the lighthouse and corrupting its sacred flame. Everyone near Stonewatch is now in imminent danger, as the necromancer is on the verge of bringing a flood of vengeful spirits back into the mortal realm.

GEOGRAPHY

Stonewatch rises up from a rocky bluff at the mouth of Sova Valley, holding its flame aloft as a warning to all who see it. With each passing day, the mist around its base grows thicker and more oppressive. The aging lighthouse is the only structure tall enough to still reach above the rising mist and its flames continue to shine clearly for miles in any direction.

SIGNIFICANT NPCs

ADISS LOSCH (A.K.A. DAEVIN)

Adiss Losch is a plump and cheerful human **mage** whose appearance belies his obsession with necromancy. Losch takes great pains to conceal his work and his allegiances. His congenial demeanor

has been carefully rehearsed to deflect unwanted scrutiny.

Dedicated to the renewal of his sect, the Herex Eye, Losch has come to Stonewatch in the guise of a scholar named Daevin and plays the part enthusiastically. Despite “Daevin’s” mild demeanor, Losch is committed to his plan with deadly earnest.

Adventure Thread

Each night, Losch secretly descends into the burial chamber beneath Stonewatch to perform sacrilegious rites and harvest a corrupting, necromantic residue. He then feeds this ooze into the lighthouse’s flames each night, where it slowly poisons the tower’s protective wards and strengthens the spirits that stir outside.

SER KAPLAN

Ser Kaplan is a human **knight** and a lifelong servant of the Order of the Living Light—the knighthood that originally built Stonewatch over a century ago. He has already given his best years to his order but remains willing to serve and now stands vigil over the lighthouse and its sacred flame.

Adventure Hook

Ser Kaplan accepted Daevin into Stonewatch a few months ago, just before the mists appeared. The scholar presented a formal Writ of Appointment authorizing his stay the lighthouse. Ser Kaplan firmly believes Daevin’s orders to be authentic, but if the Writ of Appointment could be proven false, it would expose the scholar as both a fraud and infiltrator.

GROUNDSCKEEPER OGGON

This hobbled half-orc **commoner** is the hardworking groundskeeper for Stonewatch. He lost his left foot at a young age, but has adapted to the loss and moves quite confidently with a false boot and slight limp.

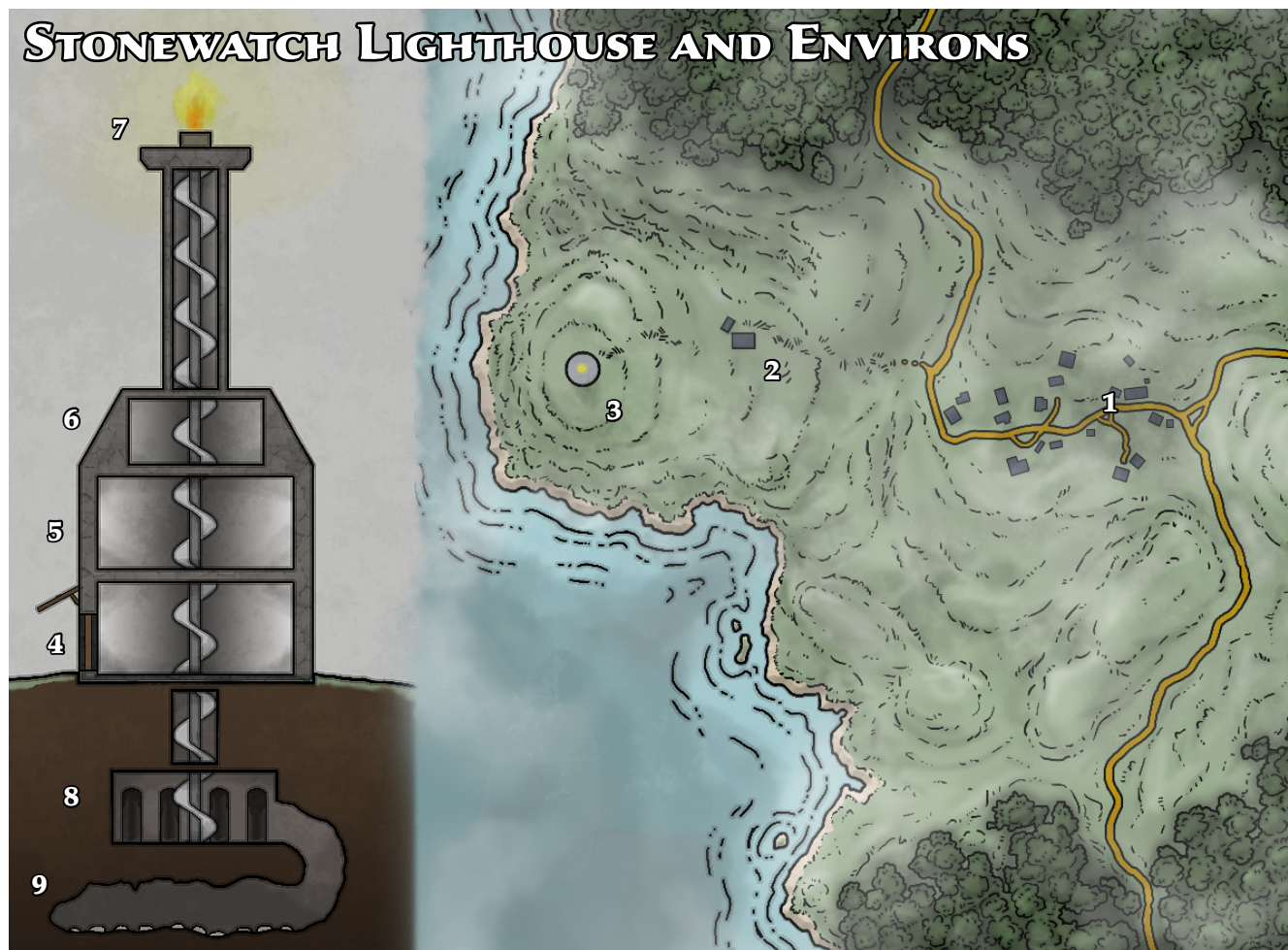
Although Oggon typically performs tasks around the lighthouse, he now spends most of his time worriedly watching the fog.

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STONEWATCH LIGHTHOUSE AND ENVIRONS



Adventure Hook

As the mists continue to thicken, Oggon grows increasingly alarmed. He rambles about experiencing strange events while performing his nighttime duties in the lighthouse, including hearing strange sounds echoing up the stairwell and feeling an unnatural coldness around the lighthouse's pyre.

SIGNIFICANT AREAS

1. Abandoned Village

The small village near the base of Stonewatch has been heavily obscured by a fogbank that seems to writhe and shift as if alive. In stark contrast, the village's buildings are still and dark, without any signs of life.

Although its buildings have been abandoned by fleeing villagers, six shifting **shadows** and one **specter** lurk within the corners and eaves of the

buildings. They remain hidden unless attacked but can be spotted with a DC17 Perception check.

Partially unearthed in the soil beneath the spirits are the remains of a long-dead Herex Eye necromancer, now little more than a few bones. *Pipes of haunting* crafted out of delicate elven finger bones lie among the remains. The pipes blend into the soil and bones but can be located with *detect magic* or a successful DC 15 Perception check.

2. Groundskeeper's Lodge

Oggon, the lighthouse's groundskeeper, lives and works out of this broad, wooden building. He is a gruff and suspicious half-orc, but warms up quickly to visitors who treat him kindly.

Oggon maintains Stonewatch and the surrounding lands. He is a very competent laborer, handyman, craftsman, and jack-of-all-trades, able to perform almost any type of common service required by visitors.

3. Lighthouse Exterior

Stonewatch is an imposing sight, looming high overhead, despite its mold-blackened and weather-worn stones.

At the lighthouse's base are a pair of thick, oaken double doors reinforced by iron bars, each with a heavy metal clapper that can be used to send a thudding knock reverberating throughout the tower. The lock on the doors can be picked by making a successful DC 15 Dexterity check with thieves' tools, or broken down by making a successful DC 18 Strength check, though the noise alerts Ser Kaplan within.

Day or night, Ser Kaplan answers a knock at the door, greeting visitors and urging them to come in and take shelter despite being clearly worried about the mists outside. He shares that Daevin joined the lighthouse just before the mist first appeared, and that he has been hoping for other visitors to arrive and help as well.

4. Lighthouse Interior, Ground Floor

The inside of the lighthouse is much smaller than its walls suggest. Off to one side, several chairs have been arranged around the warm glow of a log fire. The chamber is dominated by a central column with a spiral staircase wrapping around it, leading into darkness both above and below.

This room serves as the basic living quarters for the lighthouse, functioning as a combination of kitchen, eating area, and supply room.

Adventure Hook

Ser Kaplan keeps a few personal effects inside an unlocked chest, including the Writ of Appointment that Daevin presented upon arriving at Stonewatch three months ago. This document is an excellent forgery, but bears the false signature of Ser Jorom—a knight who actually died long ago. Records of this knight's passing exist in the lighthouse's library (area 6) and, if found, reveal Daevin's orders to be fake.

5. Lighthouse Interior, Second Floor (Sleeping Quarters)

The lighthouse's second story is much like its first, with a round, open chamber broken up only by a central stairwell that continues to lead upwards into the tower above. A modest sleeping area has been arranged in the back for the tower's two residents.

Adventure Hook

A small, iron box is concealed within the folds of Daevin's bedding. Its latch has been sealed with an *arcane lock*, and breaking the arcane lock triggers a **poison needle trap**. Inside, a necromantic tome contains step-by-step instructions for Daevin's dark rituals. One of Daevin's illusions disguises it as an innocuous textbook, but this illusion can be detected with detect magic or seen through if a character makes a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check.

6. Lighthouse Interior, Third Floor (Library)

Low roof beams and several rows of shelves give this floor a somewhat cramped atmosphere. Stacked parchment and books are everywhere, filling the shelves and spilling across tables. A pair of lanterns are suspended from chains between the roof beams, brightly illuminating the chamber.

Daevin spends most of his time here, reviewing the writings of Stonewatch's former stewards. Much of this is a pantomime, though, as he has no genuine interest in the writings of the knighthood.

Adventure Hook

Searching the library yields a journal excerpt containing a firsthand account of the historical defeat of Herex Eye necromancers over one hundred years ago. Perceptive readers will note that the author of this excerpt was "Ser Jorom," whom Daevin also spitefully used as the signatory on his recently forged Writ of Appointment.

7. Lighthouse Interior, Fourth Floor (Upper Platform)

The lighthouse's uppermost platform overlooks the entire fog-choked valley.

Dominating the center of the platform is a massive metal furnace, several feet tall and about twice as broad, along with a carefully stacked pile of firewood.

Twice each day, at midday and midnight, Daevin brings up a load of firewood, stacks it next to the furnace, and then quickly applies corrupting ooze to the entire pile. Characters may notice this tampering with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, with a subsequent DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check also revealing that the ooze has been created from defiled corpses.

8. Lighthouse Basement (Living Light Memorial)

The staircase narrows as it descends, before finally ending in this darkened, circular room. Faint vestiges of light from above are the only illumination here, barely revealing the vague outline of the room. At one point, the spiral staircase continued further downward, but passage has since been blocked with a seal of heavy, inscribed stones. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals the markings to be religious symbols typically used to denote sealed burial sites.

If the room is illuminated, it becomes obvious that this chamber is a memorial, with several stone busts and suits of armor displayed in alcoves along the walls. One of the alcoves contains an *animated shield*, an heirloom of the order, but Ser Kaplan will only share the activation word with someone who has proven their devotion. If the memorial or sealed staircase are disturbed in any way, five of the memorial's old suits of armor stir to life as **animated armor** and attempt to stop transgressors.

Adventure Hook

Perceptive players will notice scratch marks near the back of one of the alcoves. If the armor in it

Excerpt: Journal of the First Steward

"Our detachment pursued the Herex Eye necromancers relentlessly, hunting them to the very edge of the distant Sova Valley before we were finally able to corner the death cultists against the rocky coastline. Despite our victory, the battle was only narrowly won, and we paid a high price.

"There, upon the still-bloody field of our victory, our knights built the great lighthouse. We stacked stone upon bloody stone, consecrating Stonewatch as a memorial to the sacred flame before sealing it with powerful wards against the return of the death cultists.

"Our order is now bound to guard Stonewatch, maintaining an uninterrupted vigil over its sacred flame through a succession of sentinels, each replacing the one before at the time of their death. The integrity of this succession is of the utmost importance. I fear that if the flames should ever fade, the spirits of the Herex Eye will slip back into this world once more."

— From the firsthand account of Ser Jorom, Knight of the Living Light, and the First Steward

is moved aside, a loose stone can be jostled loose from the back wall, concealing a crude tunnel that Daevin dug down into the Crypt Memorial (area 9) below.

9. Lighthouse Sub-Basement (Burial Chamber)

The tunnel opens up into an old and dusty tomb. Although larger than the rooms above, this chamber is full of stone burial coverings—many of which have been clearly tampered with.

This chamber serves as the final resting place for the knights who fell in battle against the Herex Eye. Daevin spends each night here, performing necromantic rituals on the crumbling bones of the fallen knights to create a noxious ooze capable of corrupting the Lighthouse's sacred flame. Three **ghasts** and five **ghouls** under his control now guard the area against any intruders.



Refugees flee the encroaching fog that now surrounds Stonewatch Lighthouse

RESOLUTION

Depending on what the player characters do, there are a variety of ways in which the events in Stonewatch might unfold:

- If the PCs do not intervene, Losch's actions continue unimpeded and Stonewatch's sacred flame is extinguished. The mist coalesces, forming a shadowy gateway through which dozens of Herex Eye spirits become reborn as ghosts, flooding through the valley's settlements and claiming their long-awaited vengeance.
- If Losch is confronted about being a necromancer, he immediately drops his "Daevin" act, and either flees or fights, depending on who has the upper hand.

- » In a fight, Losch calls forth any remaining undead within the crypt (area 9) to defend him. Ser Kaplan will fight alongside the PCs.
- » If Losch anticipates the attack, he ascends to the upper platform (area 7) and summons a corrupted **fire elemental** from the furnace.
- » If forced to flee, Losch regroups with other members of the Herex Eye before returning to become a recurring adversary.

Once Losch is defeated, Ser Kaplan scours the surrounding lands to hunt down any remaining Herex Eye and break their curse. Players that help complete this quest are invited to become sworn members of the Order of the Living Light, with Stonewatch offered as a stronghold to use as they see fit. 🐉