



THE SERPENT IN THE HENHOUSE



MASTER

First, people vanished. They never made their way home, never returned from wherever it was they went. Then, folks started finding statues in weird places. There, over in that field, there stands a statue of a shepherd who looks a lot like Yon who disappeared a few days back.

A couple of statues, posed as if flee-

ing, stand in a group in a field. They look like bandits. Who would carve statues of bandits?

The disappearances, the statues, and the odd tension in the air have convinced the locals some nasty monster stalks these lands, maybe something from the Weird Wizard himself! People are too afraid to leave their homes. They lock their doors and shutter their windows. What foul things torment these people? In *The Serpent in the Hen House*, the characters discover that a menace indeed has settled into the region, but being turned into stone might just be a better way to die than the one promised by this terrible thing.

This quest is dedicated to the awesome gamers I met at U-Con in 2023. Thanks for such a great weekend!

CREDITS

Writing, Design, Art Direction:

Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations: Yugin Maffioli

Cartography: Matthew Myslinski

Editing and Proofreading: Jay Spight

Graphic Design and Layout: Kara Hamilton

The Serpent in the Henhouse is © 2024 Schwalb Entertainment, LLC. All rights reserved. *The Serpent in the Henhouse*, *Shadow of the Weird Wizard*, Schwalb Entertainment, and their associated logos are trademarks of Schwalb Entertainment, LLC.

SCHWALB ENTERTAINMENT, LLC

PO BOX 12548

Murfreesboro, TN 37129

info@schwalbentertainment.com

www.schwalbentertainment.com

A SERIES OF TROUBLING EVENTS

Monsters, adventurers, or something else drove a basilisk out from its lair and set it loose to slither across the countryside in search of a new home. It found one under the hill that rises from the center of an abandoned town somewhere in the borderlands. The monster's arrival stirred up the cockatrices who took over the community long ago. Remember, basilisks and cockatrices hate each other. Unwilling to stay so close to such a noisome beast, the cockatrices started moving on, looking for safer places to nest. And when they come across someone that they deem a threat, they do what cockatrices always do: Peck them and turn them to stone.

If a big, scary, toxic monster, and panicked petrification chickens were not enough trouble, the hill holds the ruins of an ancient, forgotten temple. When the basilisk moved in, the boneguard death priest regained awareness. The boneguard sees no point in destroying himself fighting the basilisk, but he does see an opportunity to awaken more of his kind in tombs scattered all over the countryside, for nobody's benefit but for the boneguard.

THE QUEST

Someone—a patron, ally, a city official, or someone else—hires the group to look into the story about the petrified people showing up in the countryside. If possible, the employer wants them to put an end to it and discover the cause. Accomplishing this goal earns the group 10 gp per character.

GETTING STARTED

The quest starts sometime after the characters accept employment. The characters know there's a haunted, abandoned town in the vicinity supposedly crawling with monsters. Locals avoid the place for real and invented reasons—cockatrices, undead, a curse, a disease, orcs, or something else. They know most folks who go there never seem to make it back. The characters also know a few dozen people and animals have been petrified so far, all found within a few miles of the ghost town.

When the group heads that way, they find a petrified shepherd along with a few stone sheep in a field. A Folklorist, Naturalist, or anyone who has discovered the Alchemy tradition knows that a cockatrice is the most likely culprit. The man appears bent over with his arm extended. The sheep were frozen while fleeing.

Inspecting the ground reveals prints that look like large turkey or chicken tracks headed away from where the characters know the ruined town to be. While inspecting the statues and tracks, 6 **cockatrices** emerge from the tall grass and attack.

For a bit of fun, you can describe the cockatrices as making emu sounds, which are surprisingly menacing and guttural, as well as their usual squawking and clucking.



THE GHOST TOWN

The people who once lived here ran away after an alchemist's attempt to breed cockatrices for profit went horribly, horribly wrong. The remains of the slow and infirm stand as weathered statues all over the place. The town wraps around the base of a hillock like a skirt.

DECAYING BUILDINGS

Ten wooden buildings and a well fill the hill's approach from the east. Roofs have fallen in, walls collapsed, while brambles, vines, and small trees have threatened to overtake them completely. The **cockatrices** nest in these buildings and of the original flock, just 12 remain, with 1 to 3 in each building. Any loud noises, though, draw them all out to investigate. Proximity to the basilisk makes these monsters aggressive, so they attack when they spot anything unlike themselves.

Searching the buildings turns up 1d6 – 2 (minimum 0) cockatrice eggs. It takes about a minute to find them. Cockatrice eggs have value to alchemists, who will pay 1 gp per egg. The eggs are safe to eat and consuming one egg counts as having consumed a meal. Mmm tasty!

WEATHERED STATUES

All around the village, there stand petrified people. Over half appear quite old, as they were the cockatrices' first victims. The rest seem a bit newer, being the stone remnants of explorers, scavengers, and the occasional adventurer. Erosion reduced the older statues to faceless blobs, but the more recently transformed look much as they did in life. Statues appear to be running, recoiling, fighting, or praying.

THE HILLOCK

Rising 40 yards from the town's center and with an 80-yard diameter base, the hillock appears as anything but a natural feature. Looking around shows no other hill within line of sight. The hill appears old. Grass, rocks, and small trees grow all over it. Step stones form a path all the way to the temple at the top.

HIDDEN ENTRANCE

Examining the backside of the hill reveals a cave at the hill's base. Something poisoned the plants around the entrance. The cave mouth is 6 yards in diameter and extends about 10 yards before sloping down at a steep angle. Investigating the cave reveals pools of noxious slime, a few black scales, and markings that suggest something was dragged inside or slithered through.

The slime and lack of handholds make any descent down this passage difficult without using ropes and pitons or magic. Characters that climb down make Strength rolls with 2 banes. On a success, they can descend safely. On a failure, they lose their grip and slide down, losing 1d6 Health upon coming to a stop at the bottom. The Lair, below, details what the characters find.



THE TEMPLE

A roofless structure of stone blocks caps the hill. Two archways, one to the southwest and the other to the southeast reveal the interior. There, three weathered altars, each a block of granite 1 yard tall, 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide, form a triangle around a plug of stone set in the floor.

Devotees built the temple a thousand years ago. The draconic imagery carved onto the interior walls and altars remains clear and distinct. Any character with professional knowledge related to religion can identify the markings as belonging to an old cult of Draconus. As well, a successful Intellect roll reveals that this place also covers a tomb.

THE STONE PLUG

The stone plug measures 1 yard in diameter. The top of the stone rises 3 inches above the surface in which it is set. Glyphs of a long dead language, chiseled into the stone, name the dead interred in the tomb and dooms anyone who dares disturb their rest.

The plug weighs a lot. A creature with Strength 15 or higher, or characters with a combined Strength score of 40, can lift the stone out of the hole. The stone can also be destroyed; it has Defense 0 and Health 50. The pieces tumble down into the entrance (see Location 1).

If the characters remove the plug, they see a circular shaft descending into darkness. The air carries a whiff of rot almost masked by the scent of funerary spices. The shaft descends 10 yards until it reaches the ceiling 5 yards over the floor of the antechamber.

THE TOMB

A cult of Draconus interred the bodies of dead champions in the tomb, along with valuables that include coins, jewelry, and an ancient relic. A divine curse protects the place. If anything enters the tomb, Draconus's divine will awakens the warriors.

1. ENTRANCE

The room would be rectangular if not for the curved wall to the north. Carvings on this section depict an enormous winged dragon, head shown at the center and serpentine body coiling out and around it to cover the whole of the surface. Here and there, masked humanoid figures appear, captured performing some ceremonial act.

The entrance measures about 10 yards across and 15 yards long. Neat rows of hieroglyphic writing appear on the walls, floor, and ceiling. A long-dead language, translating it reveals myths about the mighty dragon god whose coils form Erth and contain the dread Ancient Ones, held in chains until the end of time.

A pair of bronze doors stand in the center of the southern wall. Metal rods at the top and bottom have been pushed into sockets to prevent them opening. A heavy, bronze chain threads the two pull rings and has been secured with an overlarge padlock.

Opening the doors requires pulling the rods from the sockets, something a character with a Strength 12 or high can do without having to make a Strength roll. Those with lower Strength scores can try by making Strength rolls. A success pulls the rod free; a failure indicates the feat beyond the character's ability to perform.

A character with lockpicks can attempt to open the padlock. The character makes an Intellect roll with 1 bane. On a success, the padlock unlocks. On a failure, the padlock is beyond the character's abilities. The lock has Defense 0 and Health 30 and alerts everyone in the tomb to the presence of intruders.

2. TOMB CHAMBER

The double doors open onto an enormous chamber, 10 yards wide, 60 yards long with the ceiling 10 yards overhead. The chamber has three major sections.

ANTECHAMBER

Two platforms, each 5 yards tall, form a passage that extends 15 yards to the central chamber. Atop the platforms are three columns each that rise all the way to the ceiling. Five **boneguard archers** stand on the platforms and loose arrows at anyone who moves down the central passage. Battling the archers draws reinforcements from locations 3 and 4 (see below).

A staircase at the southern end of each platform grants access to the top. In the center of the walls behind the platforms stand archways that grant access to the halls leading to locations 3 and 4.

COLUMN RINGS: Each column sports a bronze metal ring fitted around its middle. All rings feature three shield-shaped devices spaced equidistant from one another. On each shield there appears a fang, a wing, and a claw. The rings make heavy clicking noises each time a symbol moves to face the pillars on the opposite platform. Turning the rings to different faces causes changes in this room, as follows.

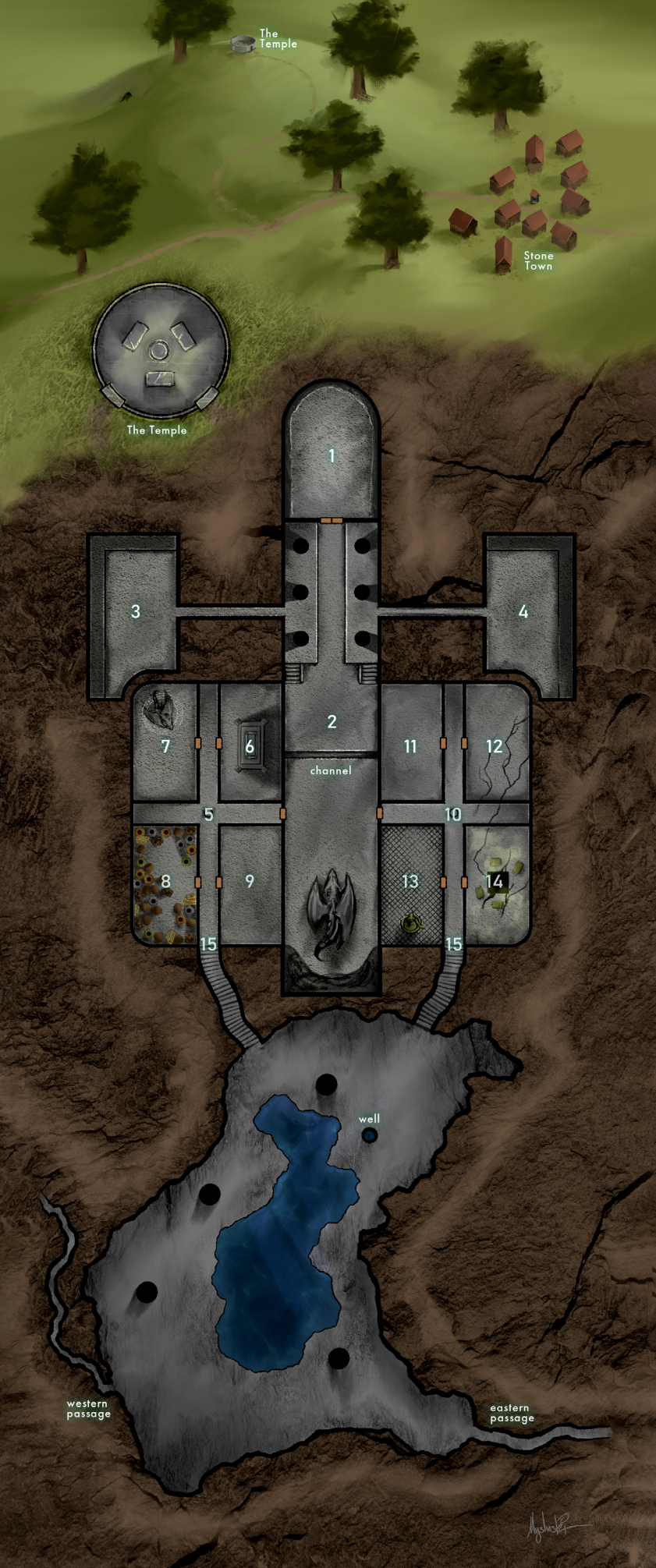
All six rings showing fangs to the opposite platforms causes the door to location 5 to open. It closes if the rings have a different arrangement.

All six rings showing wings causes the door to location 10 to open. It closes if the rings have a different arrangement.

All six rings showing claws causes the floor at the bottom of the channel (see below) to grind upward until it becomes flush with the floor. It lowers again when the rings show a different arrangement of symbols. Note the channel holds terrible things that are released from the pit when the floor rises.

If both rows of rings each show all three symbols—fang, wing, and claw, in any order—toxic gas leaks from the columns and renders the atmosphere poisonous. Each breathing creature in the antechamber part of the room makes a Strength roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature becomes poisoned for 1 minute. The effect cannot be overcome, though it can be removed by magical means. Once triggered, this trap cannot be triggered again.

When the group first enters this room, the west row shows one fang and two wings, while the east row shows one wing and two claws.



THE CHANNEL

A 5-yard wide, 10-yard-deep pit cuts across the center of the room, blocking progress into the tomb. It has sheer walls, making climbing impossible without tools or magic. The pit's bottom holds 20 **medium animated skeletons**. The skeletons' creators imbued these creations with a drive to kill any creature they sense other than each other. Thus, they attack anyone who descends to the bottom of the pit or anyone in this chamber if the pit floor is raised.

THE TOMB

The chamber's southern end features a sarcophagus carved to resemble a dragon, a bas-relief carving that covers the curving southern wall, and two doors sealed shut.

THE SARCOPHAGUS: A block of green stone looks to be caught in the coils of a serpentine dragon, head raised, maw stretched wide: Topazes serve for its eyes, each worth 10 gp. Anyone familiar with the old gods recognizes the dragon as being Draconus. A character with a Strength 15 can move the lid from the top. Characters with lower Strength scores can move the lid with a Strength roll with 1 bane. If removed, the characters find the desiccated remains of a long-dead human priest, dressed in silks under green scale armor (as superior mail) and an elaborate dragon-mask worth 5 gp. If disturbed, a **specter** and 6 **phantoms** materialize in the air behind the sarcophagus and attack, while sounds of chanting drown out all but shouts until they are defeated or the characters flee.

Inside the sarcophagus are four short, notched rods, each about 4 inches long, 1 inch in diameter, and of a different metal: gold, silver, copper, and iron. The gold rod is worth 5 gp, the silver worth 5 sp, the copper worth 5 cp, and the iron worth 3 cp. The rods open doors in the side chambers behind the sealed doors.

THE CARVED WALL: The bas-relief covering the wall shows a dozen or more monstrous figures struggling in Draconus's coils. Anyone touching the surface makes a Will roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature becomes stunned (luck ends); their minds fill with alarming visions of scales, fangs, claws, and miles of coils. Also, the creature loses 1d6 Health each time they get a failure on a roll to end the stunned affliction. If the reduction to Health results in the creature's death, it does not die. Instead, it instantly and permanently transforms into a hostile **drake** at full Health under your control. The drake attacks nearby creatures, but it takes any opportunity to escape the dungeon that it can find.

SEALED DOORS: Stone slabs close off the doors to locations 5 and 10. As noted above, turning the rings to proper positions causes the slabs to ratchet up into the ceiling and stay there until the rings are turned once more. A door has Defense 0 and Health 50.

3. WEST BARRACKS

The builders interred the bones of dead warriors in this room. They remain here still, tucked into the shelves lining the north and west wall. Any violence in location 2 causes the undead here to awaken and slide out and onto the floor. In this room are 4 **boneguard choppers** and 4 **boneguard shield-bearers**. It takes these undead 3 rounds to join the combat if one breaks out in location 2.

4. EAST BARRACKS

Shelves line the north and east walls, each holding the skeletal remains of soldiers cultists interred here to protect the tomb. Conflict in Location 2 awakens the 8 **boneguard soldiers** interred here and they join the fighting in 2 rounds after the combat begins.

5. WESTERN VAULTS

A short passage extends west to a four-way intersection. A stone block stands inside archways on both walls of the north and south passage. A staircase appears at the end of the southern passage.

At the center of the intersection stands a short, squat, flat-topped column that rises 1 yard above the floor. On its flat surface there appears a 1-inch diameter hole. Rods recovered from the sarcophagus cause the four doors to open for as long as the rod remains in the hole. The gold rod opens 6, the silver 7, the copper 8, and the iron 9.

When the key is placed in the socket, the stone block preventing access to the corresponding room rises into the ceiling. It falls to the ground when the key is removed. Anything under the block when it falls loses 6d6 Health.

6. VAULT OF THE PRIEST

Opening the door to this room awakens the **boneguard death priest**. The death master flies out of the room and screeches, before attacking the group.

The room holds an open stone sarcophagus in which the death master passed the years. Paintings on the walls show scenes of a frightful man forcing people to engage in ritual magic, tipping bowls of poison into the mouths of armed soldiers and dealing with monstrous entities.

7. VAULT OF THE DRAGON

This room holds an intact skeleton of a Size 2 dragon. Leather cords bind the bones together, while iron chains suspend the various parts to make the dragon appear to be roaring. A circle of runes surround the skeleton and glow whenever anyone comes to within 1 yard of it. The first character to reach across the circle experiences a terrifying vision that causes them to lose 2d6 Health and make a Will roll. On a failure, the character loses an extra 2d6 Health and becomes stunned (luck ends).

8. VAULT OF RICHES

Bundles of fine silks, paintings, carved wooden statues, sealed vases, bags of salt, peppercorns, saffron, and more crowd this room. The room's contents can sell for 100 gp, but there are over 200 objects worth of goods here. Any character who takes an object out of this room makes a luck roll. On a failure, the character becomes cursed until the quest ends. While cursed in this way, the character also makes rolls to attack with 1 bane.

9. VAULT OF BATTLE

The elite cult soldiers were poisoned and interred in this room where they died dressed in armor and ready for battle. Their awakening has granted them undead status and the patience they need to await release.

In this undecorated chamber stand 1 **boneguard captain** and 6 **boneguard soldiers**. When the door opens, they move as a group out into the hall to slaughter intruders.

10. EASTERN VAULTS

A short passage extends east until it comes to a four-way intersection. A stone block stands inside archways on both walls of the north and south passage. A staircase appears at the end of the southern passage.

At the center of the intersection stands a short, squat, flat-topped column that rises 1 yard above the floor. On its flat surface there appears a 1-inch diameter hole. Rods recovered from the sarcophagus cause the four doors to open for as long as the rod remains in the hole. The gold rod opens 11, the silver 12, the copper 13, and the iron 14.

When the key is placed in the socket, the stone block preventing access to the corresponding room rises into the ceiling. It falls to the ground when the key is removed. Anything under the block when it falls loses 6d6 Health.

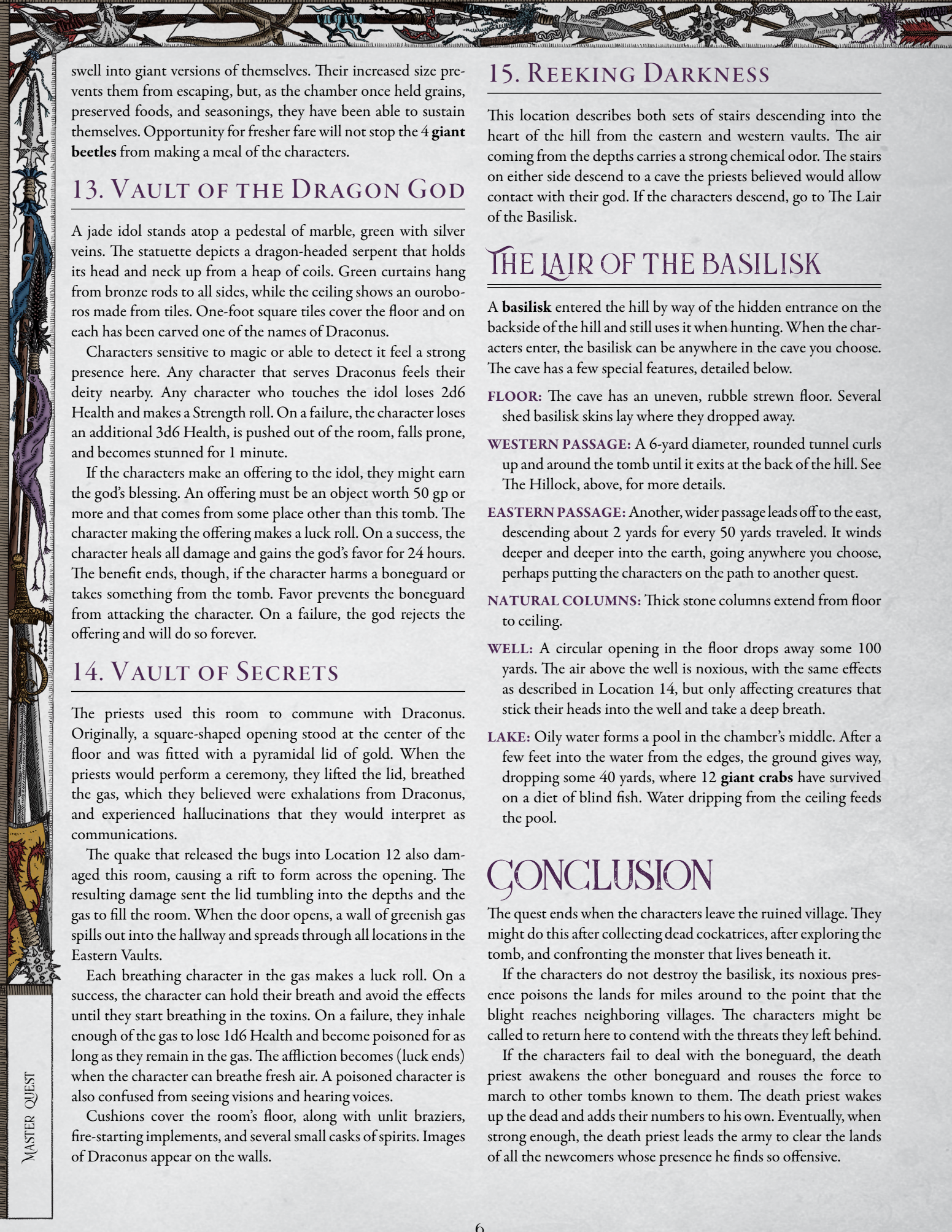
See Location 11 for another potential occupant.

11. VAULT OF THE CHAMPION

Argus Gunt, Fang of the Dragon, devoted his life to serving Draconus, but specifically to serving the cult's high priest, whom he loved. Grief-struck after the priest's death, Argus descended into the tomb, drank the poison, and hoped to reunite with the one stolen from him. The intruders' presence has whipped the Fang (**boneguard champion**) into a frenzy. He hammers at the door with the hilt of his rune blade. If the characters spend 1 hour or more in the tomb before reaching the Eastern Vaults, they find the champion waiting for them.

12. INFESTED VAULT

Quakes in the region caused structural damage to this room. Through the cracks, untold numbers of ordinary insects invaded the room. The magic suffusing the tomb has caused them to



swell into giant versions of themselves. Their increased size prevents them from escaping, but, as the chamber once held grains, preserved foods, and seasonings, they have been able to sustain themselves. Opportunity for fresher fare will not stop the 4 **giant beetles** from making a meal of the characters.

13. VAULT OF THE DRAGON GOD

A jade idol stands atop a pedestal of marble, green with silver veins. The statuette depicts a dragon-headed serpent that holds its head and neck up from a heap of coils. Green curtains hang from bronze rods to all sides, while the ceiling shows an ouroboros made from tiles. One-foot square tiles cover the floor and on each has been carved one of the names of Draconus.

Characters sensitive to magic or able to detect it feel a strong presence here. Any character that serves Draconus feels their deity nearby. Any character who touches the idol loses 2d6 Health and makes a Strength roll. On a failure, the character loses an additional 3d6 Health, is pushed out of the room, falls prone, and becomes stunned for 1 minute.

If the characters make an offering to the idol, they might earn the god's blessing. An offering must be an object worth 50 gp or more and that comes from some place other than this tomb. The character making the offering makes a luck roll. On a success, the character heals all damage and gains the god's favor for 24 hours. The benefit ends, though, if the character harms a boneguard or takes something from the tomb. Favor prevents the boneguard from attacking the character. On a failure, the god rejects the offering and will do so forever.

14. VAULT OF SECRETS

The priests used this room to commune with Draconus. Originally, a square-shaped opening stood at the center of the floor and was fitted with a pyramidal lid of gold. When the priests would perform a ceremony, they lifted the lid, breathed the gas, which they believed were exhalations from Draconus, and experienced hallucinations that they would interpret as communications.

The quake that released the bugs into Location 12 also damaged this room, causing a rift to form across the opening. The resulting damage sent the lid tumbling into the depths and the gas to fill the room. When the door opens, a wall of greenish gas spills out into the hallway and spreads through all locations in the Eastern Vaults.

Each breathing character in the gas makes a luck roll. On a success, the character can hold their breath and avoid the effects until they start breathing in the toxins. On a failure, they inhale enough of the gas to lose 1d6 Health and become poisoned for as long as they remain in the gas. The affliction becomes (luck ends) when the character can breathe fresh air. A poisoned character is also confused from seeing visions and hearing voices.

Cushions cover the room's floor, along with unlit braziers, fire-starting implements, and several small casks of spirits. Images of Draconus appear on the walls.

15. REEKING DARKNESS

This location describes both sets of stairs descending into the heart of the hill from the eastern and western vaults. The air coming from the depths carries a strong chemical odor. The stairs on either side descend to a cave the priests believed would allow contact with their god. If the characters descend, go to The Lair of the Basilisk.

THE LAIR OF THE BASILISK

A **basilisk** entered the hill by way of the hidden entrance on the backside of the hill and still uses it when hunting. When the characters enter, the basilisk can be anywhere in the cave you choose. The cave has a few special features, detailed below.

FLOOR: The cave has an uneven, rubble strewn floor. Several shed basilisk skins lay where they dropped away.

WESTERN PASSAGE: A 6-yard diameter, rounded tunnel curls up and around the tomb until it exits at the back of the hill. See The Hillock, above, for more details.

EASTERN PASSAGE: Another, wider passage leads off to the east, descending about 2 yards for every 50 yards traveled. It winds deeper and deeper into the earth, going anywhere you choose, perhaps putting the characters on the path to another quest.

NATURAL COLUMNS: Thick stone columns extend from floor to ceiling.

WELL: A circular opening in the floor drops away some 100 yards. The air above the well is noxious, with the same effects as described in Location 14, but only affecting creatures that stick their heads into the well and take a deep breath.

LAKE: Oily water forms a pool in the chamber's middle. After a few feet into the water from the edges, the ground gives way, dropping some 40 yards, where 12 **giant crabs** have survived on a diet of blind fish. Water dripping from the ceiling feeds the pool.

CONCLUSION

The quest ends when the characters leave the ruined village. They might do this after collecting dead cockatrices, after exploring the tomb, and confronting the monster that lives beneath it.

If the characters do not destroy the basilisk, its noxious presence poisons the lands for miles around to the point that the blight reaches neighboring villages. The characters might be called to return here to contend with the threats they left behind.

If the characters fail to deal with the boneguard, the death priest awakens the other boneguard and rouses the force to march to other tombs known to them. The death priest wakes up the dead and adds their numbers to his own. Eventually, when strong enough, the death priest leads the army to clear the lands of all the newcomers whose presence he finds so offensive.