

# THE TASK OF ZEICHUS

An adventure location by Michael Prescott & Michael Atlin

## THE SITUATION

Rather than endure the humiliation of her empire's long decline, the Queen of the Martoi chose to preserve the zenith of her rule, sealing her private apartments from the ravages of time. Located in a cliffside or chasm, perhaps above a long-ruined city.

## FRESCOES OF ZEICHUS

Many rooms are painted with magically lifelike frescoes, which depict the earth as it was during the rule of the Martoi. So convincing are they that painted rooms initially seem to be outside spaces, and the effect builds the longer observers stay, and is soon completely convincing: the effect is conjuration, not illusion.

After a few minutes, observers will feel wind, weather, and the time of day will advance. Animals can be heard, and may emerge. The day/night schedule is five hours ahead of the outside world.

## HALL OF SUPPLICANTS

The entrance hall is filled with leaves and debris, though the structure is sound. Every surface is etched with intricate, repeating patterns. The small chamber was once a guard post.

The great doors to the interior are sturdy and magically barred.

## HOSTEL

The lower room was a hostel for supplicants. Low relief carvings depict petitioners waiting for an audience. Runes instruct visitors to elect a requisitioner for food from the kitchens. A fountain still trickles: like all the water in the halls, it has mildly healing properties.

The tiny corridor leads to a long drop: both privy and garbage tip, and is home to a giant rock spider and numerous dessicated birds. Etched graffiti reads, "Golchak woz h-".

## QUEEN'S CHAMBER

Outside, a fizzing, spring-fed pool. Inside, a massive bed of exotic furs. Windows (frescoes) look down onto the six lost domains of the Martoi.

A strongbox contains three crowns, in diamonds, emeralds, or sapphires. A lock of hair from the queen's daughter.

## THE GRAND HALL

Here the Queen presides over a neverending gala, emitting magnanimity, but her secret joy is her absolute control here.

A score of nobles dancies madly while a trio of minstrels plays nasal woodwinds at dizzying speed. Servants offer wine and cooked delights to others lounging on embroidered cushions. Some buttoned and quilted neck to toe, others glistening and nearly naked. A curtain barely conceals an orgy a half-dozen strong. Chained mastiffs snarl at newcomers.

All in red, Sir Ume defends the queen's honor by challenging the strongest of any party of visitors. He is secretly terrified of an eternity of imprisonment.

## RANDOM ENCOUNTERS IN THE HALLS

1. A small animal (bird, rodent, fox) escaped from a fresco
2. Morose servants walking 1-3 of Sir Ume's mastiffs
3. Sir Ume, looking for a victim as balm against his fear
- 4-5. d4+1 Revelers conspiring, laughing, chasing, flirting, having sex, duelling, drunk and sleeping or quietly bleeding out.
6. Zeichus, master architect of the halls and the magic that sustains them, wandering and looking lost. Immortality was act of love for his Queen, but he has come to regret his hubris. He is now quite senile.

## THE VAMPIRE

Zeichus' notes revealed that drinking the life blood of an outsider will allow survival beyond the halls' magic. One of the nobles secretly wishes to defy the Queen and escape. The magic of the chime will not restore injures of this sort.

## THE KITCHENS

A whorl of activity; delicious clouds of steam, roaring ovens, hissed orders; servants coming and going by both entrances. The pantry is stuffed with fresh fruit, preserves and small game.

## SERVANTS' QUARTERS

d6 off-duty servants are here, squatting among filth and brittle furniture. Away from the nobles, the servants grow brazen, their eyes bright and hungry. Woe to he who ventures here alone.

## KENNELS

Sir Ume's hounds, mastiffs with eyes and teeth of jet. If they are enraged, they may be able to force their cages.

## THOSE WHO ATTEND

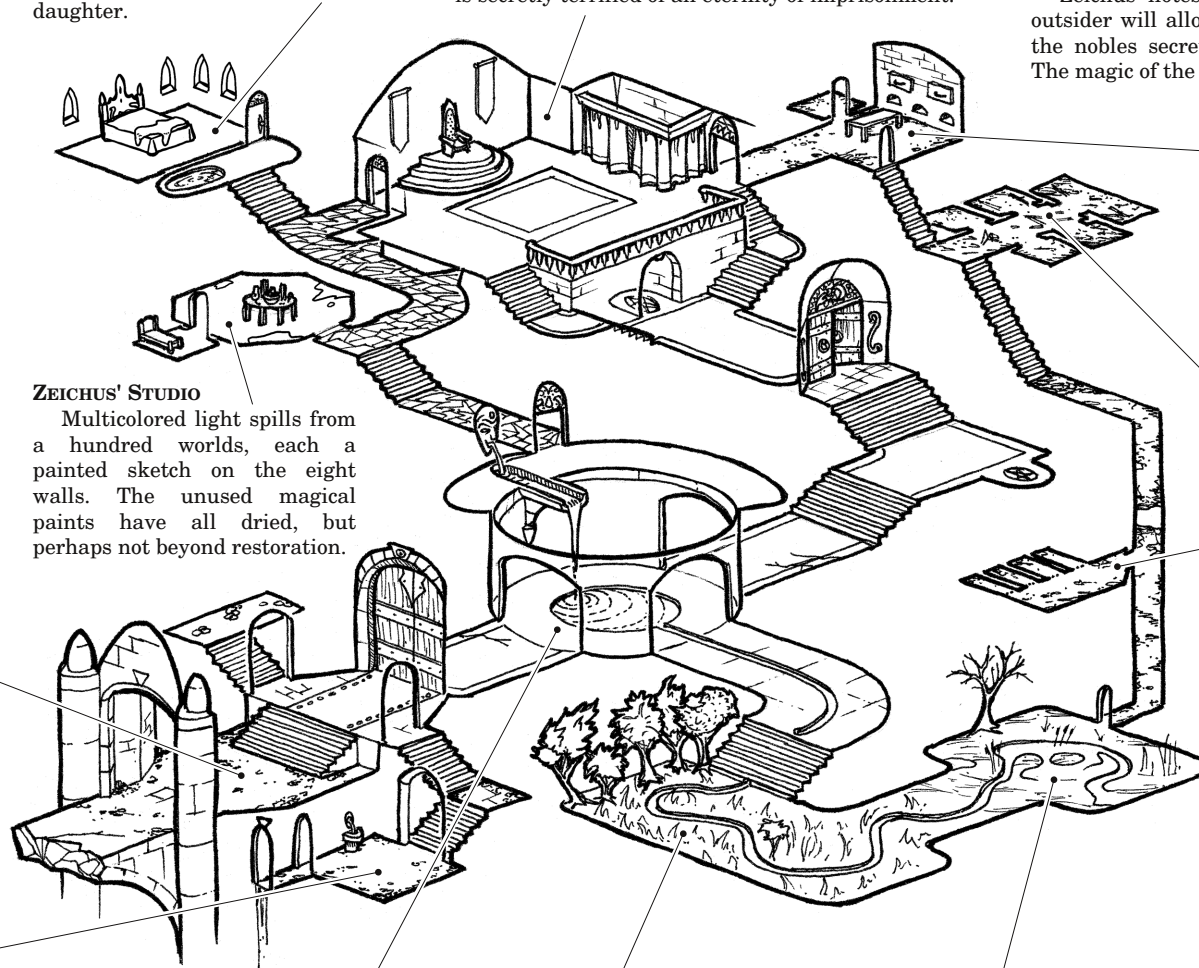
In all, the servants number twelve: two cooks, two gardener-gatherers, a gamesman and six serving maids, all reporting to the butler.

They are deferential to the revelers, and move about silently.

Unfortunately for the servants, they were preserved with less refined magics and suffer constantly, and dream only of revenge. Away from the nobles they grow brazen, and indulge their malice.

## ECHO OF THE MARTOI

Every hour, a muted chime rings throughout the halls, signalling the restoration of the Queen's court. Everyone is rejuvenated, appetites are renewed; even those slain will soon reappear. The festivities have carried on in this manner for thousands of years.



## ZEICHUS' STUDIO

Multicolored light spills from a hundred worlds, each a painted sketch on the eight walls. The unused magical paints have all dried, but perhaps not beyond restoration.

## FOREST GLADE - FRESCOED ROOM

This room appears as a glen in a dense forest, crowded with unfamiliar species of trees. Water splashes from an aquaduct into a stone-lined pool.

## THE BOUNTY OF ARMANET

Frescoes: a lush field near a primordial forest. Ferns and bushes sprout from soft soil underfoot. 0-2 servants gather edible plants or catch butterflies in gauze.

## FRESCOED WETLANDS

Seemingly a swampland valley; crows cawing from bare trees. 0-2 servants are wading in thigh-deep water, catching eels.