

THE FULL-DARK STONE

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

The greatest Seree magics relied on *spell engines*—vast devices built to collect, harness, and broadcast magical energies for sorcerers to use many miles away.

Spell engines were always built in secret vaults to protect them from theft, war, or destruction.

But now, erosion has cracked open the vault of the **full-dark stone**.

Rainwater filtering through the complex has been causing strange magical effects downstream, and skeletal **vault servants** are venturing out.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY PLACES

- Skull-headed knights have been seen gathering herbs along the river.
- Mournful piping has been heard echoing for miles, its source unknown.
- It's said that upriver, the fish fly.
- The river folk sell chips of black stone that stay warm to the touch.

A. ENTRANCE HALL

A massive piece of cliff face has fallen away, leaving this hidden chamber open to the air. Level with the tree-tops, this 30' diameter room is the nesting place for a pair of fierce, gray owls.

The alcove's engravings show visitors presenting gems to a crystal-headed, robed figure.

The center of the room is a shallow sand pit, originally a teleportation target. The sand conceals a pair of ornate gold buckles intermingled with fragments of leather and various, small (foot) bones.

B. THE LOWER HALLS

Remnants of sodden, rotted furniture float in shin-deep water. Scum lines on the walls reveal that the water level can rise as high as 6' (during storms).

Storm seal minnows wriggle through the water, fleeing any light.

The silty muck on the floor hides a few bits and bobs—brass nibs and styli, ink pots, leatherworking tools, waterlogged lamps, and countless rusted nails.

The lowest hall, down a 6' stair, is flooded 7' deep. In a locked, warped chest are 11 silver plates and a gold candelabra.

C. THE SHORN STAIR

A hundred years ago, the observation tower finally fell from the crumbling mountainside. (It lies in a deep ravine, smashed to bits.) A quirk of the mountainside's shape funnels rainwater into the stairway, flooding the lower halls.

During rainstorms, the flow

is enough to make the stairs and the nearest part of the catwalk treacherous, as it sluices off the side and down into the lower halls.

D. THE WORKSHOP

A fire crackles in the forge; a half-eaten meal (fried minnows) sits on a silver plate.

The workshop is large, but crammed with

wooden frames, benches, iron smithy tools, and variously sized sheets of copper.

Two brass **skull collars** sit on the central work table, as well as a huge, crude copy of one, nearly 4' in diameter.

If not yet encountered, there is a 50% chance that **Korm** is here. He will sweep the collars from sight at the first opportunity.

E. THE FULL-DARK STONE

This huge chamber is filled almost completely by a massive, night-black stone, 40' high, 40' wide, and 50' long. It seems featureless, absorbing all light.

If touched, the stone is revealed to be an aggregate of many smaller stones.

Four circular stairs support a limestone catwalk.

capacity long ago. The copper plates, walls, and stairs are all pitted and blackened by sudden discharges of **bolts of magic**.

A swarm of **storm seal** pups flits about.

Atop the stone, at the end of a makeshift walkway of planks, is the massive **Skull of Orlug**, dragged for endless miles and placed here by **Korm** as part of his mad project.

In the back corner of the room is a fish skeleton, dry and dust-covered, 5' long—normal, except its skull is that of a gnome.

F. HALL OF MEDITATION

This chamber is empty save for a raised granite platform and marble alchemical basin. Engravings explain the ritual of **Vitrum Aquae**, but not its purpose.

G. THE SAPPHIRE MINES

These cramped tunnels are scraped clean of all but tiny fragments of sapphire.

In the furthest chamber, **Korm** has stacked all fifteen **jackal skulls** for emergency use, along with a cache of weapon-arm attachments for the **vault servants**.

KORM THE ADEPT

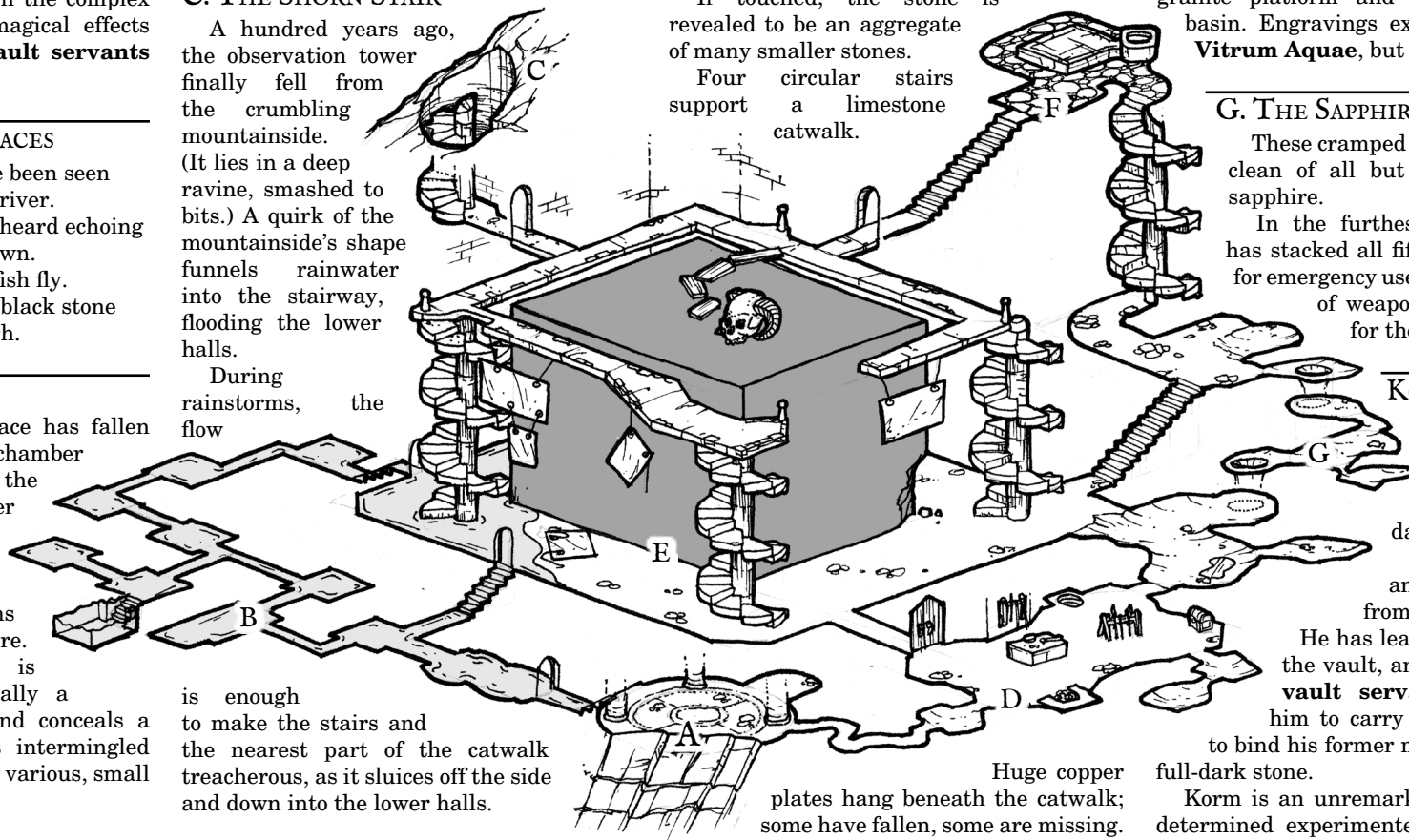
Korm, the last apprentice of the long-dead Orlug Broadstaff, toils day and night.

He is 8' tall, stocky, and ram's horns jut from his massive head.

He has learned the purpose of the vault, and the design of the **vault servants** has inspired him to carry out a mad project:

to bind his former master's skull to the full-dark stone.

Korm is an unremarkable wizard, but a determined experimenter, and wants only peace and quiet to carry out his work. He considers adventurers a major disturbance and will drive them off if he can. Though



Huge copper plates hang beneath the catwalk; some have fallen, some are missing.

At the top of each stair is a metal post bearing a **wizard flower** encased in a solid glass orb. Each radiates calmness.

The stone naturally draws magical energy from the environment, but reached

strong enough to twist off a head, he considers himself neither warrior nor wizard enough to fight if outnumbered, and instead he works subtly to repel intruders.

He hides his talents, claiming that he is here merely as a student to study the “tomb.”

He will do everything he can to play up the mystery of the stone. He marvels aloud that at times it seems alive, and suspects that its “calls” are an attempt to commune with other stones, hidden far away.

He claims that the **storm seals** are a great menace to him, and he begs for help in removing them.

If threatened, he'll make a pathetic, theatrical show of handing over a small quantity of gold, silver, and gem fragments stashed in a small coffer in the workshop.

Whenever he can act unobserved,

however, he will retrieve a few **jackal skulls** from his cache in the mines, bind them to **vault servant** bodies, then set them loose.

Korm is made of stern stuff, and unless he is hacked apart and burned, his enchanted blood will eventually heal him.

He is badly infested with **dire fleas** (which he picked up years ago), enough for one to hatch every six hours. He apologizes each time anyone else is bitten.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Roll hourly while in or near the vault:

- 1-2: d3 **vault servants**, toiling
- 3: d12 **storm seal** pups (only once)
- 4: d2 adolescent **storm seals** (only once)
- 5: Korm
- 6: the full-dark stone emits a deafening, mournful piping tone for d3 minutes

BOLTS OF MAGIC

Every d12 minutes, the full-dark stone emits a crackle of unfocused magic, lighting the chamber with a blue glow.

Roll d6 to determine what it strikes:

- 1-2: a copper plate, deflecting the bolt back into the stone
- 3-4: a wall or staircase
- 5: a seal pup flying past the stone
- 6: someone with a direct line of sight to the stone

The effect is random, roll d6:

- 1: bolt of lightning
- 2: invisible for d6 minutes
- 3: teleported to the entrance hall
- 4: teleported ten minutes into the future
- 5: polymorph d6 x 10% of target's body into random animal/monstrous form
- 6: mind transferred into a vault guardian for d6 hours

VITRUM AQUAE

The Seree wizards who built this place mastered the ritual of Vitrum Aquae. They would drink alchemically liquified gemstones while meditating on spells in order to crystallize (literally) the impossibly complex thoughts. Once mastered in these controlled conditions, the spell could be drawn on almost instinctively, making difficult spells

easy to cast very rapidly.

This came at the cost of rigid, erratic personalities and mental illness, as flexible brain function was displaced by more and more spells. (To say nothing of the tragedy of failed meditations!)

WIZARD FLOWERS

After death (whether natural or hastened), wizard brains were boiled away by their successors in order to extract the “wizard flower,” the hardened gemstone, now a cauliflower-like structure—a magical thought in physical form, useful for constructing enchanted items of all sorts.

VAULT SERVANTS

Adepts that lacked the talent for powerful magic were still useful for drudgery.

Force-fed low-grade topaz solutions, after death their skulls housed crystal flowers, too, but instead of spells, they stored the habits of endless servitude.

The skulls were preserved with the flowers still inside, labelled according to their habitual duty. With a replacement body they could continue their work, serving their masters eternally.

Arise! Toil! Rejoice!

A BODY OF WOOD AND SINEW

Vault servant bodies are carved from wood and brass. They are 7' tall and strong enough for hard labour.

A skull collar (an enchanted brass sleeve with a central post) affixes the skull to the body, passing on the impulses from the crystal flower.

Vault servants wander the area cleaning, repairing masonry, repairing copper plates in the workshop, or venturing to the river to collect herbs and fish.

Occasionally, life-like secondary habits emerge for a few brief seconds: scratching, nose-picking, stretching, and slouching.

There are thirty servants within the vault, and replacement parts for 5.

JACKAL SKULLS

The Seree also maintained a store of crystal-infused skulls for defensive purposes,

made from starved jackals.

Vault servants topped by jackal skulls hunt in packs of up to 8, sneak carefully, attack from ambush, and stop only when their victims are torn limb from limb.

Korm knows a ward that keeps him safe.

STORM SEALS

These magical creatures normally dwell within thunderclouds, but their young are being drawn here by the stone's charge.

The *minnows* are aquatic, but the mouse-sized *pups* take to the air in wingless, flying swarms, keeping down the gnats and **dire fleas**.

Adolescents are the size of large dogs, and are large enough to hunt. They are cruel, playful, and opportunistic. *Adults* are a full 12' long, large enough to lift a struggling horse up to meet death.

DIRE FLEAS

As big as a locust, dire fleas are parasitic vermin. Their bite is numbing and injects d3 larvae, which burrow deep into the body.

The larvae emerge explosively as full-grown fleas 2d6 days later, leap to a new target, and begin the cycle again.

Anyone caught bringing them into town will most likely be carted off and burnt.

THE SKULL OF ORLUG BROADSTAFF

Centuries ago, Orlug, an ogre-blooded hack-mage, learned the ritual of Vitrum Aquae from Seree tablets he found in the Blightlands. He made himself mad by crystallizing his collection of third-rate spells using impure minerals, then succumbed to dementia.

His 8' tall skull, battered and dirt-stained from its long journey to the vault, contains a massive, 30-lb wizard flower of quartz, agate, and emerald.

If Korm finishes the massive collar and binds the skull to the full-dark stone, skull and stone vanish: the stone's mighty reserve of power becomes Orlug's “body,” propelling his broken, fragmentary mind into godhood.

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