

BASILICA OF THE LEPER MESSIAH

WRITTEN/DRAWN BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT—CONCEPT BY ANDY ACTION—EDITED BY ANDREW YOUNG

THE SITUATION

For centuries, Owlshade has dealt with the walking plague by confining its victims to a high-walled enclave. At its center is the Basilica of the Leper Messiah, ruled over by a lich, **Husmanna**.

The enclave survives because it takes in afflicted nobility. **Husmanna's** tinctures stave off death, allowing the afflicted to continue directing family affairs. In this way, the enclave remains a powerful political force in the city.

with **blue tongues** will be allowed back out into the city. Roll on the **Enclave Visitors** table to see who is using the platform.

THE APPROACH

The Basilica is tall, a study in harsh vertical lines.

PREFEX

Six huge, gray pillars dominate the room, but a moment's inspection reveals that they do not support the ceiling.

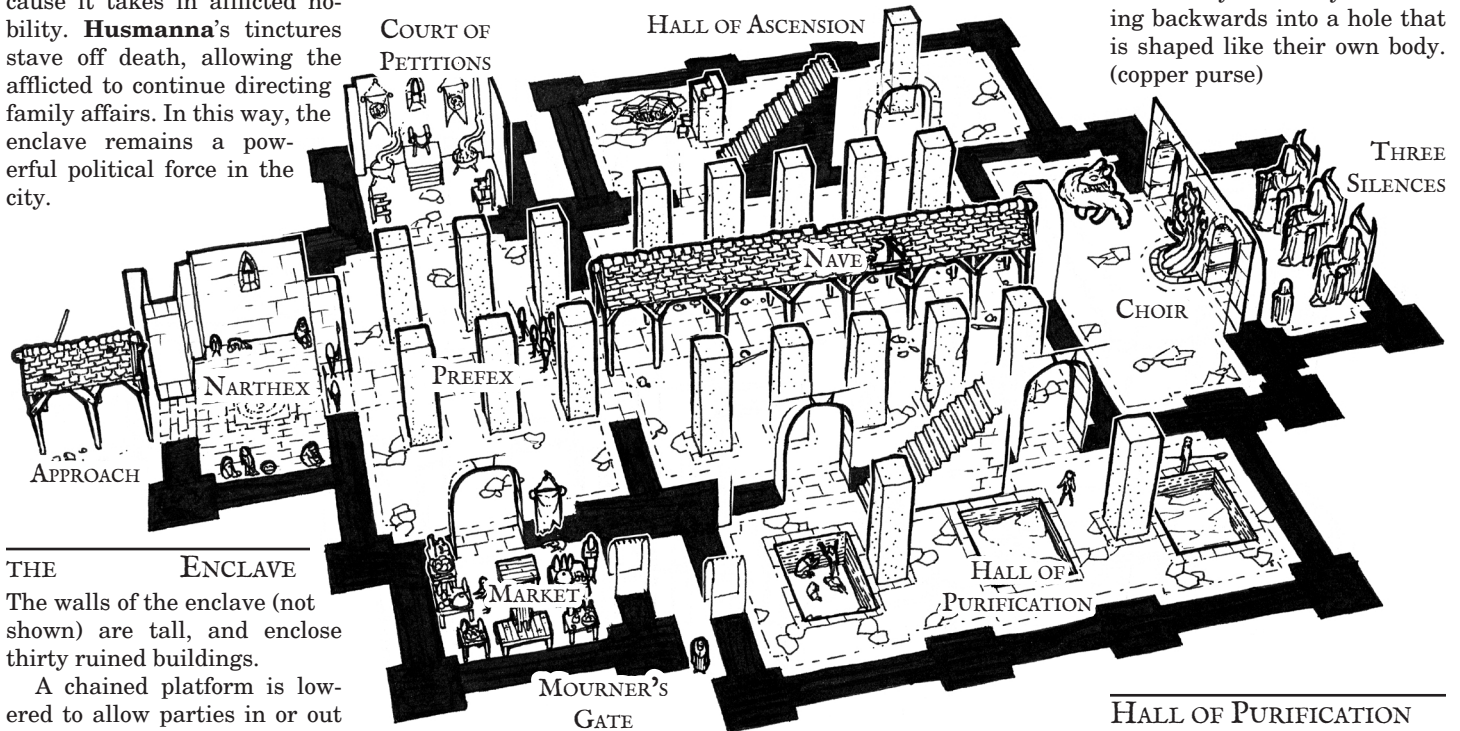
They are **gray monoliths**, made from compressed ash of cremated lepers.

A unit of six **Quietus** blocks

to 24 hours earlier (gold purse, or a blue token)

Graydream—a bitter tincture that brings on pleasant (but non-magical) dreams of deceased relatives (silver purse)

Hole—a mild hallucinogen that relieves feelings of grief; 1 in 3 people react badly. For d6 hours they feel they are falling backwards into a hole that is shaped like their own body. (copper purse)



THE ENCLAVE

The walls of the enclave (not shown) are tall, and enclose thirty ruined buildings.

A chained platform is lowered to allow parties in or out of the enclave, but only those

Unseen undead throw bits of stone (they have run out of javelins) from slit-like windows at any who approach. The most dangerous area is directly before the main entrance, but this is protected by a crude loggia made from reclaimed masonry. Brittle tiles explode overhead and rain white dust.

Any who linger will eventually be struck.

NARTHEX

d8 wretches await entry. Afflicted with the walking plague, but too low born to be given **Indigo** status, they will eventually be taken to the **Hall of Purification**.

A pair of halberd-armed **Quietus** guard the inner archway, allowing in only the wealthy- or healthy-looking.

the entrance to the **Nave**—only those with black tokens from the **Court of Petitions** are allowed through.

COURT OF PETITIONS

A red-robed proctor with leprous skin hears petitions from visitors. d3 visitors will be here, waiting, along with 4 **Quietus** guards.

Powerful dignitaries, legendary figures, or generous donors will be given a black token so they might enter deeper to treat directly with **Husmanna**.

Those on Basilica business are given blue tokens.

THE MARKET

A half-dozen plague-bearers operate a market. They sell: **Bluetongue**—dyes the tongue blue for a day, and inoculates against the plague exposure up

HALL OF PURIFICATION

Here, d8 **Indigo** tend unfortunate plague-bearers insufficiently wealthy or connected to be spared. d2 poor visitors from the **Mourners' Gate** will be here speaking with them in the first pit.

When they (or **Indigo**) die, their bodies are cremated in the second, central pit. The ashes are refined and ground in the third pit, before being taken to the **Hall of Ascension** to be made into bricks.

The stairs lead to a mezzanine crowded with unseen undead. Any disturbance here draws thrown masonry.

NAVE

A crude loggia protects visitors from the thrown stones of the unseen undead in the mezzanine. Any who leave the loggia without an **Indigo** escort are attacked.

d6	Enclave Visitors
1	d3 bailiffs bringing a debtor or petty criminal to the enclave as punishment.
2	Shorn relative coming to use the Mourners' Gate .
3	Noble house lawyer bringing documents for review (real estate, final wills).
4	Noble in mourning, secretly bringing the ashes of a deceased relative to be bound into a monolith .
5-6	Liveried noble house factor, escorted by d3-1 armed youths. 1 in 3 chance of carrying a sack of gold to deposit in the enclave.

HALL OF ASCENSION

Three **Indigo** toil here, making ash bricks and assembling the Basilica's 20th **monolith**.

A cavernous hole in the ground is used by **Ormina** to enter the sewers below the city.

MOURNER'S GATE

Mulpitus, a round-bodied husk of a monk with deeply set eyes, lives in this reeking alley and guards the second way into the Basilica.

His long tenure grants him the right to allow three deserving mourners into the **Hall of Purification** each day. He gives a blue token to those he admits, for use in the market.

Each morning, d20 mourners will be lined up at the gate, hoping to be selected. Some have been coming for months.

QUIETUS

Chain-armored skeletons with razor-sharp halberds act as guards. They sense without seeing, so their helmets completely enclose their skulls and shoulders in a smooth ovoid of polished steel. Quietus are dry and brittle—they break easily, but fight until smashed.

THE INDIGO

Indigo robes signify a wealthy plague-afflicted who remains here as a servant, their life extended by **Husmanna**. Their eyes, noses, and mouths are stained with refined *bluetongue* paste to keep them alive. The newest are feisty or sad, retain their names, and advocate for their house. The longest-lived have had their affairs assigned to the proctor and are barely more animate than the Quietus.

CHOIR

A statue made of curved clay pipes emerges from the floor. Air hisses through them; in its susurrus can be heard the unspoken wishes of everyone in the city. **Ormina** sleeps at its base, listening.

ORMINA

A horse-sized ermine with sleek, gray fur. She behaves

like a cat, uncaring and lazy, but she is a demon brought back from beyond the **middle silence**. The construction of the **monoliths** is her project.

She moves backwards, following the tip of her tail like a bizarre, furred snake. Her head comes last, peering over her shoulder with a golden, lidless eye.

Anyone bitten by her is cursed—any attempt at speech comes out as gray smoke.

Occasionally she slips through the sewers into the city, invisible, to bring her plague to someone prominent chosen by **Husmanna**.

THREE SILENCES

The huge statues here represent the silence before creation, the silence after all has ended, and the middle silence: the death that comes for everyone.

Once potent idols, they are inert. Two centuries ago, **Husmanna** completed the ritual that brought **Ormina**, fulfilling the purpose of the silence cult that made them.

HUSMANNA THE LICH

He stands among twelve identically robed skeletons; he uses *ventriloquism* to disguise which is him. The rest of his magic is gone, spent summoning **Ormina**.

Husmanna peddles influence and Indigo status for gold. (Bluetongue is made from sapphire, which is costly.)

He will happily use the influence he commands in exchange for large gold donations.

After two centuries cultivating this empire, he secretly fears the world **Ormina's monoliths** will bring.

THE GRAY MONOLITHS

Assembled from thousands of bricks of compressed funerary ash, the monoliths stand 10 paces tall. The outer surface is a plastered with ash, then painstakingly embossed with rectangular runes.

The spell they form is repetitive, but powerful, apparently binding many spirits into a single being.

Most of the 19 complete monoliths in the Basilica are

dormant, but when adventurers first enter a room containing monoliths, there is a 3-in-6 chance that one of the monoliths has reached **Stage 2**.

THE SLEEPERS AWAKEN

There's a 3-in-6 chance the most alert monolith advances to the next stage whenever any of these things happen:

- A monolith is physically damaged (puffs of white ash and grit) for the first time
- A spell is cast
- An intelligent being is killed
- **Ormina** dies

STAGE 1—DORMANT

The monolith is a riot of terrified, independent souls slowly pairing and combining into greater entities. As a whole, it is not aware of its environment, but it radiates powerful magic. Attempts to commune cause a harmful psychic backlash.

STAGE 2—NEODEUS

The dominant entity emerges and the entire psychic structure crystallizes, remaking itself. This produces an audible pop, and a psychic shockwave.

The monolith is now transcendantly intelligent and can:

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

- Perceive its environment with perfect clarity
- Communicate telepathically with other alert monoliths and undead (e.g., the Basilica's Quietus)
- Launch and sustain psychic attacks (which feel like having a boulder gently lowered onto your self-esteem)

STAGE 3—ASCENDED

Ascended monoliths are demigods. Torn between the temporal reality of the Basilica and their higher destiny, roll randomly for each action they take (see table).

MONOLITH DESTRUCTION

Monoliths smash in minutes with maces or similar weapons.

Doing so sends a psychic shockwave that destroys d2-1 other monoliths in the Basilica.

The shockwave hits the living like an overwhelming identity assault. The players of affected PCs exchange characters (really). This reverts after d10 minutes as long as both PCs are still alive.

d6	Actions of Stage 3 (Ascended) Monoliths
1	Rise two paces up into the air and begin slowly rotating. The monolith emits an ozone smell and a static crackle.
2	Attack the ancestral host of Owlshade. This causes d10+10 ghosts to become briefly visible before being torn apart. Their essence is drawn into the monolith. If this happens 3 times, d2 demons arrive, sensing the weakness of the host.
3	Telekinetically slam into the nearest lower-stage monolith, absorbing its power. Anything caught between is crushed. If a large stone or metal object is in the way, then both monoliths are destroyed.
4	Catalyze a new spell from the void. The entire monolith flashes like lightning. Runes for the spell are flash-burned into all surfaces (including clothes, skin, and eyes) within line of sight. The monolith can now use the spell effect at will.
5	Emit a deafening, nauseating base hum. All distances inside the Basilica (heights, room width) multiply by d6. (In practical terms, it's like the monoliths and living things all shrink.) The effect is permanent, but only inside the Basilica.
6	Teleport to its appointed place in the world, d10x100 leagues away, to begin displacing the regional deity. A portal to the monolith and its new surroundings can be seen (and used) for d20 seconds.