

The Lurker Beneath Red Larch

M.T. Black



INTRODUCTION

The Lurker Beneath Red Larch is a Dungeons & Dragons adventure designed to be completed in about 4-6 hours of play. The combat encounters have been calculated to present a tough challenge to four 3rd level characters. They will present a less difficult, though still enjoyable, challenge to higher level characters or larger parties.

Not every loose end is tied up in the following text, nor every possible reaction accounted for. Be ready to improvise, and do so with confidence!

Unless stated otherwise, assume any NPCs are human and have the stats of a **commoner**.

THE CAST

Following are the key characters in this adventure.

Aleena Ironsky

Aleena is the newly appointed Constable of Red Larch. She is just 21 years old, with fierce green eyes, shaggy blonde hair and a lithe build. She has struggled to assert her authority with the villagers, who don't take her seriously because of her age.

Grindol Farmoor

Grindol is a carpenter who has lived in Red Larch for about a year, having moved there from Triboar. He is 30 years old with large blue eyes, close cropped dark hair and a thin face. He is a private man and has no real friends in the village.

Kali Brightsong

Kali is a popular street performer in Red Larch. She sings, juggles and tells jokes and stories. She supplements her income with a bit of sewing and gardening on the side. Kali is about 50, with short grey hair, smiling eyes and a wrinkled face.

A MURDER

Our heroes are in Red Larch and have just entered the *Helm at Highsun* tavern. Read the following –

Ribbons of blood dance through the air, tracing wide crimson arcs before splintering apart into thousands upon thousands of bright red droplets. The cheerful tavern atmosphere evaporates in a moment, rent apart by screams and cries.

A woman with grey hair stands near the bar, grasping at the dagger in her throat with fingers made slippery by blood. She sways and collapses. More screams.

A man stands before her. He is holding the hilt of the dagger, but lets it slip from a gory hand as the woman falls. He freezes for a moment, then spins and sprints away, knocking aside people as he goes.

A young, flaxen-haired woman stands up at the back of the room and cries out, "Stop him! Stop him!" as he approaches the entrance – the entrance where you and your comrades are standing.

What do you do?

The running man is **Grindol Farmoor**. He is unarmed, so the PCs should be able to easily grapple him to the ground if they choose.

Deputies

A moment later the flaxen-haired woman, **Aleena Ironsky**, runs out of the tavern. If the PCs subdued Grindol, Aleena will thank them, and then ask them to help her take Grindol to the lockup.

If the PCs let Grindol through, then Aleena will tackle him just a few yards from the tavern. She will look at the PCs, identify herself as the constable, and demand that they help her take

Grindol in. If the PCs still refuse, the adventure is over.

If the PCs help Aleena, she will lead them to the “lockup”, which is actually just a small garden shed behind the butcher’s shop, with a barred window and a padlock on the door. There, Grindol will be safely locked away. He seems stunned and says nothing, even if questioned closely.

After that, Aleena will formally deputize the PCs. This murder is the biggest matter she has dealt with while deputy, and she needs some assistance. If the PCs won’t willingly help, she will inform them that village ordinances mean they are obliged to assist her. She can’t really force them, however, and if they persist in refusing then the adventure is over.

If they ask about payment, she looks glum – she has barely enough money to live on herself. However, she believes one of the village patrons may be willing to offer a reward – she will look into it. Unless reminded, Aleena will forget about this request.

Why does Aleena trust them?

For this adventure to work Aleena needs to put a fair bit of trust in the PCs. You need to find a good reason for this trust to exist. Here are some suggestions –

- News of their last adventure reached her ears, and convinced her that they were honorable people
- One of the PCs grew up in Red Larch, and has a good reputation with the locals
- The party did Aleena a small favour of some kind when they first came to the village
- Aleena and one of the PCs grew up in the same city, and vaguely knew one another

Another good way to handle this is to get the PCs to participate in the narrative development. Pick someone and ask them to explain how their character knows Aleena and why she trusts them.

Just the Facts

Aleena takes the PCs back to the *Helm* to do some preliminary investigation. The murdered woman (whose body is still there) is **Kali Brightsong**, a popular local street performer.

Many people from the village have gathered at the *Helm* by the time the PCs and Aleena arrive. They are angry and some want to hang Grindol immediately.

A large number of people saw Grindol plunge the knife into Kali’s throat. Aleena listens to their stories and takes the murder weapon, wrapping it in a cloth. She then calms the mob down by telling them she will be going to fetch the magistrate the next day.

As the crowd disperses, **Imdarr Relvaundar**, the local priest of Tempus, says he will take care of the body. Aleena asks the PCs to come and see her at the lockup the next morning. You may assume the PCs are staying at the *Swinging Sword* overnight.

On Your Own

The next morning, Aleena hands the PCs the key to the lockup. She has to go and get the magistrate, **Harburk Tuthmarillar** - who also happens to be the former constable. Harburk now has a turnip farm and lives some distance out of Red Larch. Aleena will not be back until the afternoon of the following day.

The lockup does not need to be watched during the day as the butcher’s family keep an eye on it, and also feed the prisoner (a hunk of bread through the barred window). But Aleena would like at least one of the PCs stay in the small room she rents from the butcher overnight, just in case there is some kind of trouble in the dark hours.

Aleena says the PCs are free to investigate the case further, though she believes it is a straight-forward matter and Grindol will hang in a few days. Just before she leaves she says, “When the magistrate comes, make sure you say nice things about Red Larch. He is very parochial.”

INVESTIGATION

The PCs may choose to do nothing until Aleena returns, in which case skip to the conclusion. But it's more likely they will do some investigation.

Talking to Grindol

Grindol will be in a much more talkative mood this morning. He is very upset and will insist that he didn't want to hurt Kali, and that he can't understand why he stabbed her.

In conversation, he will tell the PCs the following information –

- He left Triboar a year ago after his wife died of an illness. He came to Red Larch to start a new life
- He is a carpenter by trade, and has been doing odd-jobs around the village
- He has struggled to make friends here
- He started having nightmares some time ago, of a cloaked figure whispering violent suggestions to him
- About two months ago he moved into Nightwall Cottage. It was abandoned, so he decided to take possession and renovate it
- If asked whether the nightmares started *after* he moved into the cottage, he will pause a moment, then say "yes"

More Red Larch

Red Larch is a village of about 600 people that lies on the Long Road, roughly midway between Waterdeep and Triboar. If you would like more detail about Red Larch, the D&D adventure **Princes of the Apocalypse** contains a map of the village and several pages detailing a large number of the inhabitants and buildings.

Talking to the Villagers

The PCs may decide to make some general enquiries around the village. One obvious place to go would be back to the tavern. Meals are served throughout the day, so there are

always a few people there. The PCs might also want to visit the village crossroads where there is usually a bit of traffic, or they might randomly enter a shop and begin talking to the proprietor or customers.

The sidebar box titled **The People of Red Larch** gives details about some of the NPCs the party might encounter around the village.

The following information should emerge from conversations with these NPCs. If your players are inexperienced, you might have one helpful NPC give them all of the information with only a bit of prompting. If your players are more experienced, you will probably want to split the information between NPCs, and make the PCs work harder to obtain it.

Here is the information -

- Kali has lived in the village for many years and is very popular
- Kali has no family in the village, but many friends
- Grindol has only been in Red Larch for about a year. He is seen as an outsider and not much liked
- No-one knows why Grindol would kill Kali
- Grindol is a good carpenter, and has done work for a number of villagers
- Grindol recently moved into a rundown house called Nightwall Cottage on the eastern side of the village. He was repairing it
- Nightwall Cottage has a bad reputation - people don't stay there long, and some have even disappeared
- Nightwall Cottage had been abandoned for about five years when Grindol moved in
- The cottage was built by Randall Nightwall, who was a creepy hermit and very unpopular with the rest of the villagers. He was run out of Red Larch twenty years ago after he was discovered interfering with corpses
- When the PCs meet the magistrate, they should say nice things about Red Larch as he is very parochial.

The People of Red Larch

Following are some of the people the PCs might encounter about the village -

- **Garlen Harlathel** – the jovial though greedy proprietor of the *Helm at Highsun* tavern. He has sharp brown eyes, coarse blonde hair, a plain face, and a gangly build.
- **Imdarr Relvaundar** – a rather stern priest of Tempus. He has short brown hair, a thin face, and a large build.
- **Helver Tarnlar** – a clothier with a haughty disposition. He has beady grey eyes, greasy brown hair, and a slender build.
- **Jalessa Ornra** – the butcher. She has warm blue eyes, slick red hair, and a lined face. She is a nervous woman, and becomes angry when put under pressure.
- **Ilmeth Waelver** – a sullen and selfish wainwright. He has wide blue eyes, fine black hair, and a craggy face.
- **Kaylessa Irkell** – the sturdy and pleasant proprietor of the *Swinging Sword* inn. She has gentle grey eyes, wooly black hair and a stout build.

Lise Buckthorn

Sometime in the afternoon, the party will be approached by a tiny old woman with sad eyes and wispy white hair. She will introduce herself as **Lise Buckthorn**.

She has heard that the PCs are investigating the death of Kali, and she wanted to talk to them. Ten years ago her husband, **Dale Buckthorn**, was sentenced to hang in Red Larch for stabbing a young man to death. Lise insists that Dale was a gentle old man, and had no reason to commit the murder.

A few months before the murder, Dale and Lise had moved into Nightwall Cottage. They both began having strange and violent nightmares. Lise believes the cottage is cursed, and blames it for her husband's crime.

As it happened, her husband was never executed - he escaped the night before his hanging. Lise swears that she hasn't seen him in the ten years since, and she believes he must be dead.

Lynch Mob

If one or more of the PCs stay in the butchers back room that night, they will be woken in early hours of the morning by the sound of someone clumsily creeping around outside. When they investigate they will find **Ilmeth Waelver** the wainwright, along with a group of four other people. They are trying to force open the door of the lockup. One of them is holding a rope with a noose.

The PCs will need to either intimidate or persuade the small lynch mob to return to their homes and let justice take its natural course.

NIGHTWALL COTTAGE

If the PCs have done even a small amount of investigation, they should conclude that there is something strange going on in Nightwall Cottage. The cottage itself lies on the eastern edge of the village, on the *Cairn Road*. It is rather decrepit looking, though there is evidence of the repairs that Grindol has been undertaking.

See the map on **page 11**. One square = 5'.

1. MAIN ROOM

This room has a broken table, a few chairs, an old iron stove in the corner and a new broom leaning against the wall. Most of the room is quite dusty, though parts of the floor have been recently swept. There is a pile of wood in the corner.

The contains a sack of flour, a bottle of oil and a small barrel of ale, alongside a pair of sausages hanging from the roof. The sausages are covered with flies.

2. BEDROOM

The floor of this room has been swept very clean. An old bed with fresh linen lies against one wall. A spare set of clothes sits on the end of the bed.

On the wall hang a number of tools, including a frame saw, a plane, a mallet and chisel, some dividers, a straight edge and a pouch of nails.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check will find a small purse hidden in the bed frame. It holds **35sp** and a copper locket containing a portrait of a dark haired young lady.

Dark Whispers. Determine which PC has the lowest wisdom score, and *secretly* tell them that they are starting to hear a menacing whisper inside their head. The whisper says destructive and violent things such as –

- You don't belong here
- You are going to die
- I'm coming to hurt you
- These people are not your friends
- Get them before they get you!
- Run or die!

These whispers will continue for as long as the PC is in the house or the caverns beneath. They will vary in intensity, sometimes barely noticeable, and other times filling the PCs head. Every now and again, tell the PC that they can't help but verbally repeat one of the whispers.

If the PC obtains the holy symbol of a good deity, they will no longer be affected by the dark whispers.

3. SPARE ROOM

The door to this room sticks a little and creaks. The room is full of cobwebs and there is thick dust on the floor.

There is an old writing desk and stool on one side of the room and a trapdoor in the southwest corner.

Desk. The desk contains three old and crumbling books. The titles are –

- A Wanderer in the Spirit Lands
- The Signature of All Things
- The Forbidden Rites of Death Magick

A **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana)** check will identify these as necromantic texts.

Trapdoor. The trapdoor has an iron ring and opens with some difficulty. Below it is a set of steep wooden stairs leading down 15' to the basement.

4. BASEMENT

The walls of the basement are earthen, but the floor is covered with old wooden planks. It is filthy, covered with stone, dirt and old wood. There is a chest against one wall, with a foul stench coming from it.

Chest. If the PCs approach the chest, it begins shaking, and there is the sound of something rattling inside it. Opening the chest will require a crowbar or a **DC 10 Strength** check. When it is opened, **8 Crawling Claws** will emerge and attack whoever is closest. At the bottom of the chest is a container made from an inverted human skull, and full of gold pieces (**95gp** in total).

Secret Door. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check will locate a secret trapdoor in the middle of the basement floor.

Beneath the trapdoor is a large cavern with walls that glitter dimly in the light. Iron spikes have been driven into the cavern wall next to the trapdoor, and may be used to climb down to the floor 30' below. Each PC must make a **DC 15 Dexterity** saving throw in order to make it down safely. If they fail, they must roll **1d6** and multiply by 5 to determine how many feet off the ground they were when they fell. Normal falling rules then apply.

THE CAVERNS

Features

These large, natural caverns are primarily shaped from limestone. The roof varies in height, but is typically about 20', whilst the floor is highly uneven. Both floor and ceiling are littered with stalagmites, stalactites and limestone columns. The cavern is quite wet in many parts, with puddles of water on the floor and damp moss and lichen clinging to the walls.

The caverns are full of rats, bats, insects and other vermin which live on each other and the lichen on the walls.

See the map on **page 12**. One square = 5'.

Light

The caverns are pitch dark.

Resting

Most of the creatures in the cavern are quite stationary, so the party can rest as needed. If you feel the party is taking too many rests, have **1d4 giant rats** attack them in the middle of a break.

1. GLITTERING CAVERN

The walls of this large cavern are filled with tiny, natural, reflective stones. Any light causes the entire cavern to glitter beautifully. As mentioned above, there are a series of iron spikes driven into the eastern wall, leading up to the trapdoor in Nightwall Cottage.

There is nothing of value here.

2. SULFUROUS SOIL

The north-western corner of this cavern is filled with thick, yellow soil. Anyone examining it will notice that it is quite churned up. There is a sulfurous smell coming from it.

This is actually home to **2 ankhegs**, which burrowed up from the depths of the earth some time ago. Whilst deriving much

nourishment from the sulfurous yellow soil, they leave their lair sometimes to snag the occasional rat or bat. They can detect the party, and will burst forth from the soil **1d4 rounds** after the PCs arrive. If the party dispatch the creatures and decide to dig out their lair (which will require shovels and **1d4 hours** of work), they will find **100pp**, which belonged to an unfortunate dwarf one of the ankhegs devoured in the Underdark.

3. SLIPPERY SLOPE

This 20' stretch of tunnel slopes down sharply; the cavern floor is very uneven and is covered in scree.

There are **10 stirges** nesting on the roof directly above the slope, and they will immediately attack the party if they pass underneath. Each round that a PC is fighting on the slope, they must make a **DC 10 Dexterity** saving throw or else slip and tumble down to the bottom of the slope, taking **1d4 bludgeoning** damage, and also provoking an opportunity attack from any stirges that they were fighting.

If the PCs search the slope, on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check they will find a necklace with a small silver gauntlet attached to it. It is a holy symbol of the god Torm, and belonged to the cleric buried in **location #4**.

4. HEROES END

The floor of the cavern here consists of churned dark soil, and the PCs will spot a partially buried metallic object protruding from the ground. If they dig it out, they will quickly discover it is an old rusty sword, being gripped by a rotting hand.

Moments later, **6 zombies** will rise from their shallow graves and attack the PCs. From the remnants of their rotting equipment and clothing, it will be apparent that they were once an adventuring party.

If the PCs dig amongst the graves after dispatching the zombies, they will find **350cp**,

160sp and **50gp**. They will also find a rotting leather bag containing 10 large green dragon scales, worth **15gp** each.

5. RAT ATTACK

As the PCs pass through this area, they hear loud splashing ahead and a scurrying, scratching noise. **1d4 rounds** later, they will be attacked by **10 giant rats**. These creatures have grown to enormous size living on the other vermin in the caverns. They possess nothing of value.

Just beyond the encounter area is a shallow pool of fetid water.

6. ABOMINATION CORNER

Hiding in the shadows of the north-western passage is a **gibbering moulder**. This miserable creature is usually rather timid and lives on small vermin, but the PCs present far too tempting a meal to pass up.

The moulder has dwelt in this area for so long that all of the area marked on the map is now *aberrant ground*, as per the description in the Monster Manual.

Tactics. As soon as the PCs get bogged down, the moulder will commence *gibbering* and will also make its *blinding spittle* attack. It should have a good chance of surprising the party. The following round the moulder will move in to bite the nearest PC, and will continue to use *blinding spittle* as often as it recharges.

7. MUD HOLE

There is a large pool of mud in this cavern. Near the center of it is a geyser which blows out a stream of boiling mud every 30 seconds or so. Anyone caught within 10' of the geyser when it blows must make a **DC 15 Dexterity** saving throw or take **3d6 fire** damage. They will take half damage on a successful save.

The mud pool, while not deep, is home to **7 mud mephits** who have migrated here from the depths of the earth. They will wait until the PCs are midway across the pool and then

attempt a surprise attack. If the PCs stop to engage the mephits, they risk getting caught in the geyser (which will blow every 5 rounds). If the PCs push on, they risk opportunity attacks.

If the PCs decide to search the mud pool, it will take them about half an hour. A successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception)** check will see them find a bracelet made of electrum and silver, and worth **120gp**.

8. DEN OF DARK MAGICK

The entrance to this irregularly shaped cavern has been shaped into an arch, and carved with symbols of the deity Bane – an upright hand with the thumb and fingers together in a claw shape.

The cavern itself contains a small statue of Bane opposite the arch, depicting him as a figure in dark and ornate armour with jeweled gloves, one hand held up in a claw shape.

In the north part of the cavern is a small chest, a smashed up cot, and an old table with some surgical implements on it. Toward the southern end of the room is a pile of bones, many with rotting flesh still attached.

Standing before the statue of Bane are **4 skeletons**, each armed with a sword. Hiding behind the pile of bones is a **nothic**. Using its telepathic ability, it has been tracking the party ever since they entered Nightwall Cottage.

The Arch. The inside of the arch is inscribed with a *glyph of warding*, though the glyph is old and not as potent as it once was. The first creature to pass through the arch will trigger the glyph, and all creatures within 20' will take **2d8 lightning** damage. A **DC 15 Dexterity** saving throw will see the affected creatures take half damage.

Tactics. The four skeletons will stay stock still until the PCs close to melee range. At this point, the skeletons will attack, and the nothic will attempt to attack from the rear. The nothic will not engage the party in melee until it is

forced to - it will stay at a distance, using its *rotting gaze* power.

If the party try to take the skeletons out at range, they will retreat to the southern part of the cavern and wait for the PCs to enter.

During combat, if any of the skeletons are destroyed, at the end of the round the eyes of the statue of Bane will blaze briefly, and one new **skeleton** will emerge from the pile of bones. This will happen once per round until there are four functioning skeletons again. If the statue is tipped over or the eyes (which are made of glass) are destroyed, new skeletons will no longer be created.

Once the nothic is destroyed, the *dark whispers* afflicting one of the PCs will stop.

Treasure. The chest is neither locked nor trapped. Inside it the PCs will find –

- 2100 cp
- 1300 sp
- 320 gp
- 2 Citrines (50 gp ea.)
- 4 Moonstones (50 gp ea.)
- A Quartz (50 gp)
- A Sardonyx (50 gp)
- A Hat of Disguise
- The Deed to Nightwall Farm – this 50-acre farm has been occupied by squatters since Randall disappeared. The PCs will be able to sell the Deed in Red Larch for **200gp**.

The statue of Bane is worth nothing – the jeweled gloves were simply colored glass.

Around the neck of one of the skeletons is a small silver pendant with the name *Lise* inscribed on it.

Randall Nightwall's Story

As a young man, Randall inherited a respectable sum of money from his father, a prudent silver merchant from Waterdeep. Randall never learned a trade, and spent his youth on a debauched lifestyle.

With funds running low he moved from the city to Red Larch. He was contemptuous of the villagers and they disliked him in turn. He became a great recluse, and was increasingly absorbed in the lonely study of necromancy.

He discovered the caverns by chance and spent some of his dwindling funds constructing a new house above them – Nightwall Cottage. These caverns became his workshop, and he began communing with dark powers and performing hideous researches using forbidden magic. The *gibbering moulder* and *zombies* were the results of some early experiments.

He regularly dug up corpses from the graveyard for use in his necromantic study. One night he was discovered and hounded from the village, but he slipped back in and took up residence in the caverns. He still occasionally moved amongst the villagers, using a *hat of disguise* which he had acquired years before.

One night an experiment went hideously wrong, and he found himself transmogrified into the form of a *nothic*. Although he retained a shadowy memory of his previous life, he became an altogether more primal being, focused on food and inflicting misery.

Those who moved into Nightwall Cottage became his special victims. Some he simply devoured, creeping up from the basement at night to steal them from their beds. But he also used his newly acquired telepathic abilities to torture their minds – some fled the cottage screaming, while others (like poor Grindol Farmoor) were driven to acts of madness.

CONCLUSION

Assuming the PCs emerge from the caverns alive, they will soon encounter Aleena Ironsky, returning with the magistrate, Harburk Tuthmarillar. Harburk will wave aside any information the PCs wish to share with him, saying they will need to save it for the trial.

He will then ask them what they think about Red Larch. He won't be satisfied with general answers and will ask them to back up their responses with details. If they are positive about the village he will be very friendly and cordial. If they are at all negative he will be hurt and defensive, and will treat the PCs coolly from then on.

If the PCs happen to see Lise Buckthorn and show her the pendant from the skeleton, she will excitedly tell them that it was her wedding gift to Dale, and will demand to know where they found it. The PCs will then have to decide whether to tell her about Dale's cruel fate.

The Trial

The trial will take place the next morning. It is a bright and clear day, with Harburk sitting beneath a tree behind a small desk, wearing his magisterial chain and looking stern. Grindol stands near the desk with his hands bound behind his back and Aleena firmly holding one arm.

Harburk will call the witnesses one by one, establishing beyond doubt that Grindol did in fact stab poor Kali. Grindol will be unable to offer a satisfactory explanation for his actions.

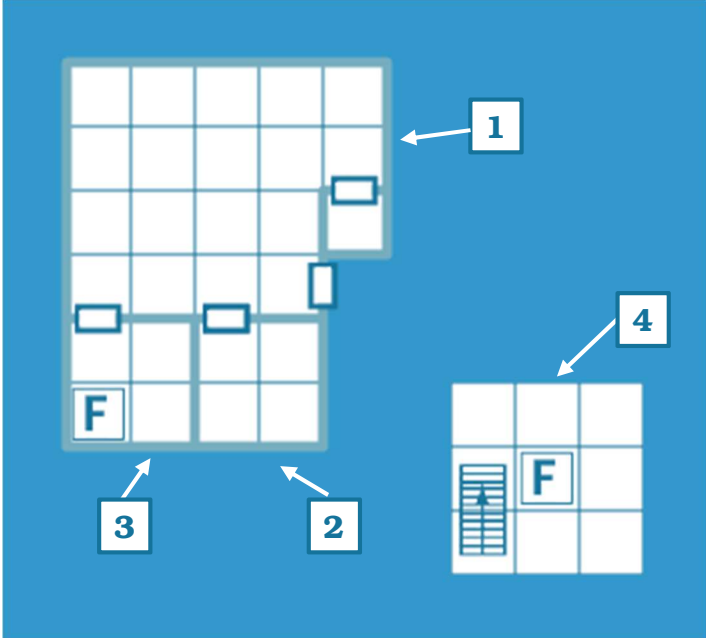
Finally, Harburk will call the PCs and ask them to tell their story. Even as he is cross-examining them, he will be unable to keep his parochialism at bay. For example, if they are talking about the *Helm at Highsun*, he might say, "And tell me, how did you find the ale at the *Helm*? How does it compare to the ale at *Waterdeep*?" And so on.

If the PCs are unable to provide a coherent explanation for Grindol's behavior, then Harburk will gravely find him guilty of murder and sentence him to hang.

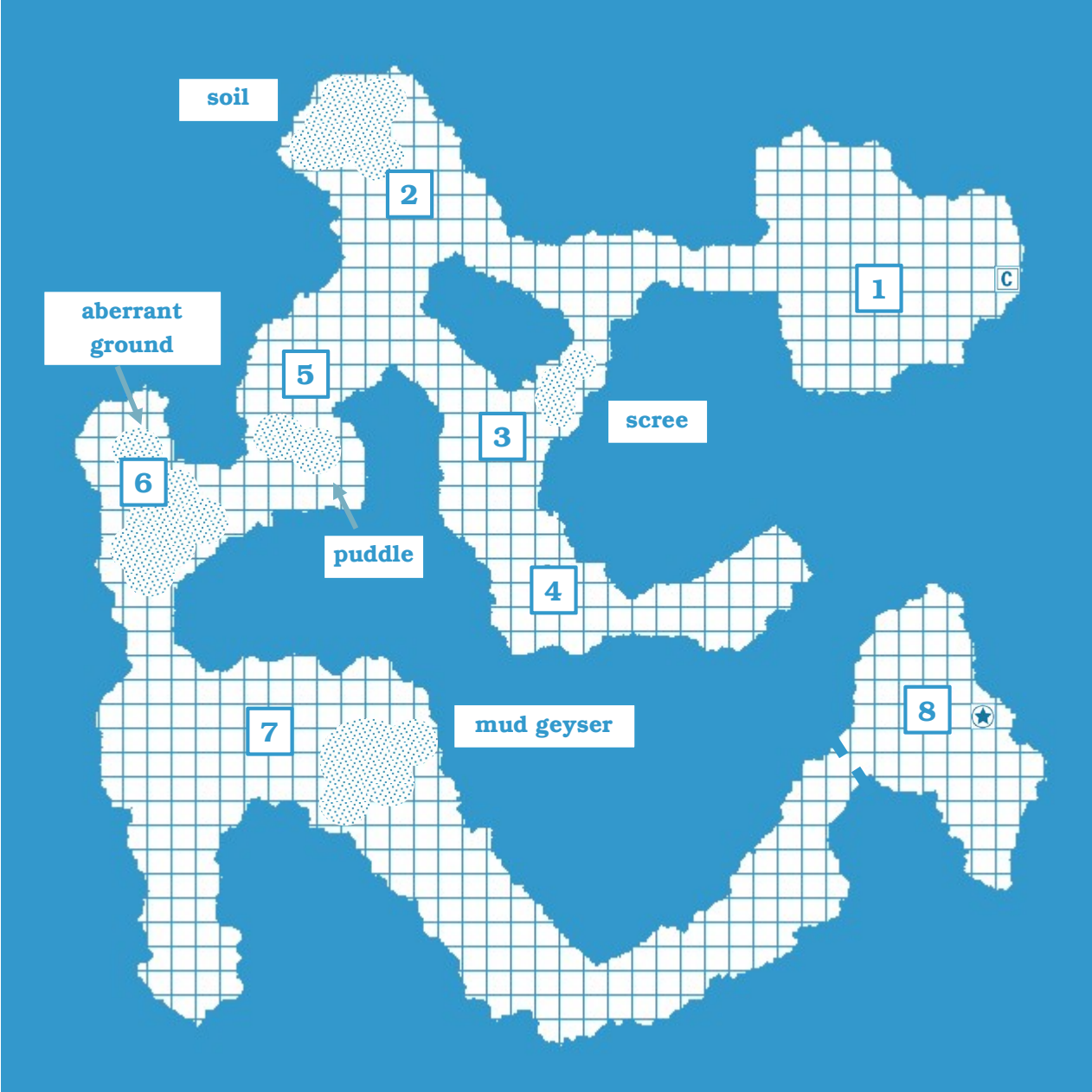
However, if the PCs can give a credible account of what they saw in the caverns (perhaps producing some physical evidence), and can also explain a little about the nothic's telepathic abilities, Harburk will accept their story.

After declaring Grindol to be "not guilty on account of magical possession", Harburk will turn to the PCs, give a huge sigh, and say, "One thing I never could stomach about Red Larch – all the damned necromancers..."

NIGHTWALL COTTAGE MAP



CAVERNS MAP



CREDITS & LEGALS

Design: M.T. Black

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