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Dungeon Backdrop: The Splintered Crypt

System Neutral

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Dungeon Backdrop: The Splintered Crypt

Famed for his unswerving devotion to his celestial lord and his magical sword, Demon Bane, Val Karen was a paladin-hero of old. For five decades he stood between Ashlar's commonfolk and the darkness ever-pressing in on the small, isolated domain. Death is an implacable foe, however, and eventually old age caught up with the redoubtable paladin. Laid to rest not in the scared sepulchre below Tor Abbey but among the hills of his youth Val Koren's legend—and stories of his legendary blade—live on long after his hidden crypt was lost to time.

A recently landslide, however, has returned Val Koren's lost crypt to the world of men. And with it have returned the stories and legends of Demon Bane which is said to rest unclaimed and wielded with him in his sepulchre.

You are a GM, but you are busy. You want to write your own modules, but you just don't have the time. And you don't want to use commercial modules. You want to make your campaign your own. That's where the Dungeon Backdrop line comes in! Each Dungeon Backdrop presents a fully fleshed out and lovingly detailed self-contained dungeon ready for you to use as you see fit. Stock the dungeon with your own monsters (and—perhaps—their treasure), decide their back story and you are good to go.

Every Dungeon Backdrop is carefully designed to be easily inserted into almost any fantasy campaign and is compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game. Dungeon Backdrops: we describe the dungeon, you add the monsters (and the treasure).

Credits

Design: Creighton Broadhurst
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Using a Dungeon Backdrop

Tweak and modify this dungeon to make it your own. The parts of this supplement describing the actual dungeon itself feature extensive space for you to make notes—adding treasure, opponents and so on.

- **Location Descriptions**: The various location descriptions provided herein only describe the basic appearance of the dungeon's rooms, chambers and corridors. They do not include descriptions of any monsters lurking therein. Remember when describing the dungeon to your players the snarling orcs (or whatever) are probably more noticeable than the room's features. Also remember, creatures in the dungeon will modify their home to better suit their needs. For example, the aforementioned orcs may have set up a rough camp—mention these changes when describing the area.
- **Treasure**: The text only presents the details of minor treasures the PCs could discover in the course of their adventure. Most is of little value, but serves to underline the flavour of the dungeon. Remember to add level-appropriate treasure when designing the dungeon

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Dungeon Background

The Order of the Watch Eternal has ever stood in the vanguard of the fight against evil and chaos. An order of paladins and warrior-priests devoted to Darlen (LG greater god of Law, Order, Justice and the Sun) its members are heroes and protectors to the commonfolk. Of the many illustrious personages who have filled the order's ranks few are as well-known or celebrated as the ancient paladin-hero Kal Voren. Riding the land three centuries ago, Kal bore a magical sword of surpassing power. He called his blade *Demon Bane*, but it had another, older name: *Heaven's Fury*.

Kal fought the ever-gathering forces of darkness for almost five decades before dying peacefully in his sleep. Respecting his wishes, the order did not inter one of their greatest heroes in the deep sepulchre beneath Tor Abbey. Instead, they dug for him a hidden tomb in the hills to the west of Dunstone near the nameless hamlet where he had grown up so long ago. Here, the hero rested, among the land of his forefathers.

However, the world did not forget Kal Voren or the mighty sword which he had borne for so many years. Many folk desired *Demon Bane* and sought the tomb. Kal Voren had foreseen this and had sent the sword away shortly before his death. This fact was unknown to all but a few at the time and now is all but forgotten, and thus adventurers still search for his tomb. A recent landslip has uncovered the hidden tomb and it is just a matter of time before unscrupulous adventurers loot the place.

Additional GM Resources

Depending on your design for the Splintered Crypt, the following resources might be useful to you:

- *20 Things #6: Ancient Necropolis*
- *20 Things #16: Necromancer's Lair*
- *20 Things #29: Lich's Lair*
- *Monstrous Lair #8: Ghoul Nest*
- *Monstrous Lair #29: Vampire's Crypt*
- *Town Backdrop: Dunstone*

Additionally depending on your setup you might also need a town or village in which the PCs hear of the Splintered Crypt—Raging Swan Press has many such Village Backdrops available.

Adventure Hooks

The PCs can stumble on the Splintered Crypt by happenstance and decide to explore the locale on a whim. Alternatively, use one of the hooks below to lure the PCs to the crypt.

- **The Graven Door**: Rumours tell of a stone door graven with strange runes of unknown sort recently exposed by a landslip. The PCs learn of the door while resting in a nearby tavern's

Creighton's Design Suggestions

Given the main feature of this small complex, when stocking the Splintered Crypt, you've essentially got three choices about the state of the crypt and what might dwell within:

1. **Looted**: In this instance, the crypt has been looted before the characters arrive—this doesn't mean, though, there is no treasure to be found within. The band of adventurers who looted the crypt could have suffered casualties during their exploration of the crypt. Those casualties could still be present…and they could have risen as undead (or their corpses could warn the characters of traps lurking ahead).
2. **Undisturbed**: The rock fall (area 2) is a recent occurrence and the PCs are the first to reach the crypt; thus, the crypt itself remains undisturbed—and ripe for plundering.
3. **Being Looted**: When the characters arrive, another band of adventurers is already in the crypt. The characters might discover their rival hirelings and campsite outside the crypt and have to negotiate or fight their way inside.

The Moral Dimension: This adventure has a moral dimension—if you want it to. The characters will—essentially—be exploring the tomb of a long-dead paladin. Depending on your setup, this may present certain moral challenges for some of the group who might be reluctant to loot the final resting place of a mighty hero of good and light.

Of course, your setup may also give the PCs the excuse they need to explore the tomb. Perhaps an evil band of adventurers has already set out for the crypt and are already inside looting the tomb. Thus, it is the characters' duty to safeguard Kal Voren's remains and any holy relics still in the crypt.

common room when they hear excited locals discussing the discovery. The locals know rumours 1,2, 3 and 4 from the sidebar below. Intrigued, the PCs decide to investigate.

- **The Graven Door #2**: As above, but a peasant was in the vicinity of the stone door just yesterday and reported a second smaller collapse of the nearby cliff has revealed what looked like a dusty corridor. Obviously, the commoner didn't get too close to investigate, but he will happily guide the PCs back there for a small fee. The PCs realise if the collapse is recent, the complex beyond the stone door has probably not yet been looted, and decide to investigate.
- **Priest of Darlen**: The party encounter a priest of Darlen looking for a trustworthy band of adventurers. The priest has heard of the recent landslip and the discovery of a hidden tomb. He knows who rests within the tomb and is troubled by reports of several adventuring bands preparing to loot the place. Of course, he worries about Kal Voren's eternal slumber being disturbed, but he also fears *Heaven's Fury* may fall into the wrong hands and begs the PCs to secure the blade before it is too late.

The Order of the Watch Eternal

Devoted to Darlen this order of holy warriors stands between Ashlar and the encroaching darkness. It members are heroes and protectors of the common folk. Some of members delve into Gloamhold's sinister, benighted depths while others ride Ashlar's bounds in search of evil to drive back into the wilderlands.

The order maintains an extensive, well-defended sepulchre beneath Tor Abbey in which they inter their fallen members. Many followers of Darlen—paladins, fighters, cleric and the like—rest within.

Sample Members & Patrons

If you decide to use the "Priest of Darlen" hook, use one of the NPCs below. Both appeal to the PCs' good natures to recover *Demon Bane* and Kal Voren's remains, but will resort to bribery and pay if all else fails.

- **Kaija Timonen** (LG old female human cleric 3) nears the end of her days and worries the recent discovery of Kal Voren's tomb will result in his remains being desecrated. She further frets *Demon Bane* will fall into the wrong hands and become perverted by an unworthy wielder. Kaija walks stooped over with a cane, but remains indefatigable in her faith.
- **Sakari Ojanen** (LG male human paladin 2) energetically hurls himself into every day. Consumed with energy—and a determination to worship Darlen with his deeds— Sakari is a driven man. He dreams of wielding *Demon Bane* and smiting Darlen's foes like Kal Voren did of old. Unfortunately, Sakari cannot accompany the party as he must answer a summons to Tor Abbey, but he will await the party's news there.

Whispers & Rumours

If the characters thinks to learn more about the Splintered Tomb, use the table below to determine what information they uncover. Determine which rumours are true based on your dungeon design. Use the table below, to determine which rumour(s) the characters learns:

1. The tomb is the final resting place of Kal Voren—a famed paladin-hero of old. Kal Voren was a mighty hero renowned both for his faith in unwavering Darlen and his magical sword, *Demon Bane*, with which he slew countless foes.
2. The tomb holds not only Kal Voren's remains but also the paladin's accumulated wealth from a long, storied adventuring career. (False rumour).
3. Ferocious monsters—orcs, ogres and worse—dwell in the hills near the newly discovered crypt. Several adventuring bands have already fallen to their depredations.
4. Several adventuring parties have heard of the recently discovered so-called Splintered Crypt and are preparing expeditions to find, explore and loot the place. Several of the parties involved have unsavoury reputations.
5. A terrible curse lies upon the tomb; within its ebon depths lie the unquiet spirit of an ancient sorcerer-king. Explorers will only find death and madness within. (False rumour).
6. Kal Voren was not a hero—he betrayed the Order of the Watch Eternal. That is why he is buried in this tomb and not in the order's sepulchre under Tor Abbey. (False rumour).

The Crypt In Your Campaign

The Splintered Crypt is not like a normal commercially available adventure. While we have done the bulk of the work for you describing the dungeon in detail, setting out its history, designing plot hooks to get your characters to the dungeon and so on, there is still (a little) work left: you must stock the dungeon with appropriate monsters and treasures and make any other changes or additions you see fit. In short, you must make the place your own!

This Dungeon Backdrop is designed for use with the Duchy of Ashlar and the Gloamhold megadungeon. However, the dungeon is relatively self-contained and so with minimal effort it can be easily modified to fit almost any campaign world.

The major salient components of the complex comprise:

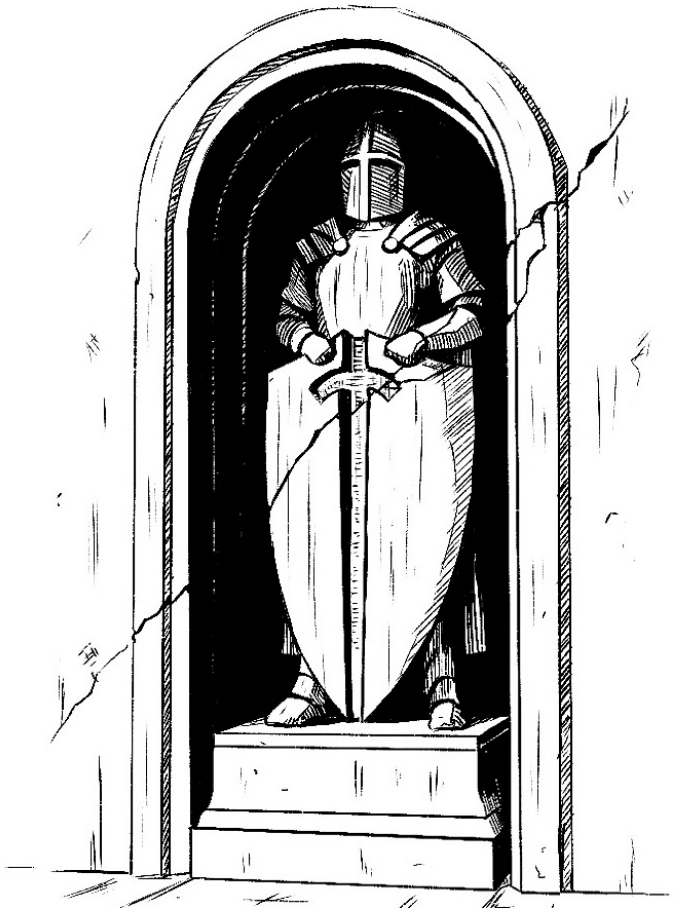
- **Self-Contained Crypt**: The Splintered Crypt is a small self-contained tomb that has lain undisturbed for centuries.
- **Long-Dead Hero**: Changing Kal Voren's identity and replacing him with an NPC of your own design is simple. Remember, though, you also might need to alter some of the tomb's cosmetic details to better suit the deeds and persona of the tomb's resident.

Because the crypt is essentially self-contained it could be placed anywhere in almost any campaign setting. It could even appear as an "add-on" or sub-level in a larger dungeon.

Notable Locations at a Glance

The Splintered Crypt is a small, self-contained dungeon complex. It has the following notable locales:

1. **The Graven Portal**: This heavy stone door wards the tomb. Beautifully ornate, flowing runes decorate the portal.
2. **Crumbled Wall**: This portion of the cliff has collapsed, creating a second entrance to the Splintered Tomb.
3. **Chamber of Wards**: Three deadly, camouflaged spear traps ward this chamber (and, originally the chambers beyond). The collapse at location 2 means explorers can bypass this area.
4. **Tahvo's Rest**: Herein lie the bones of Kal's faithful squire, Tahvo Ehtaro, who died shortly after his master. Together in life, they rest together in eternal slumber.
5. **Hall of Pillars**: Kal Voren's stone companion guard watch over the approaches to his tomb from four deep wall niches.
6. **Chamber of Deeds**: The now faded murals decorating this chamber's walls celebrate Kal Voren's most famed victories. The crypt's architect also included several clever traps here.
7. **False Tomb of Kal Voren**: Designed to fool tomb robbers and the like, this tomb is nothing but a decoy.
8. **True Tomb of Kal Voren**: Here lie the undisturbed remains of the ancient paladin-hero Kal Voren.



Dungeon Dressing

Use the entries below, to breathe life and detail into the locales described on these pages. Alternatively, use the information below to describe otherwise empty areas.

1. Here the floor is cracked and uneven and small pieces of rubble–fallen from the ceiling–lie scattered about.
2. Dusty cobwebs hang from the ceiling and almost brush the floor. Tiny desiccated spider corpses hang therein
3. A large carving of Darlen's holy symbol–a blazing, rising sun, –decorates the floor. Once painted in vivid reds and yellows, the now faded carven sun has a sullen air to it.
4. Water oozing down the wall has created a smear of faded colour down a once-fine, but now ruined, fresco.
5. A sudden gust of wind from location 2 stirs up the dust on the floor and it swirls around the characters' ankles.
6. Dust sifts down from the ceiling onto the characters' heads.
7. Outside, the wind howls down the valley; the faint sound reaching the characters could sound like a wolf's call.
8. A faint, chill feeling sweeps over the party and the shadows in one corner of the area seem to become denser and to have a certain, disquieting substance to them. (If the characters are looting the tomb, perhaps a ghostly guardian emerges from the shadows to attack.)

Things to Find

Use this list, to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party discover if they take the time to search. Modify the value of items below to suit your campaign.

1. Indistinct smudges in the dust could be footprints or they could be nothing more than dust blown by the breeze entering the tomb through area 2.
2. An old, tarnished silver holy symbol of Darlen lies on the floor amid the dust, where it was dropped centuries ago.
3. Carven graffiti on the wall reads, "Darlen preserve Kal Voren".
4. A small niche in the wall holds the remains of a burnt down candle. The candle stands on a wax-covered gold holder.
5. A pattern in the dust is vaguely reminiscent of Darlen's holy symbol. Is it a coincidence or does the Noble One yet watch over his servant's rest?
6. Part of the plaster onto which this fresco was painted has crumbled and fallen away, exposing the crypt's wall.
7. A loose flagstone hides a small niche in the floor; within lies the mouldering remains of some small offering to Kal Voren's eternal soul.
8. A particularly well preserved fresco–depicting Kal Voten in all his glory– adorns the wall.

Generic Crypt Features

The Splintered Crypt has the following generic features:

Illumination: Unless noted in the text, darkness fills the Splintered Crypt. Read aloud descriptions assume the characters can either see in the dark or have their own light sources.

Vaulted Ceilings: The Splintered Crypt has barrel vaulted ceilings. Unless otherwise noted, ceilings in corridors are about ten-foot high; in chambers they are 15-foot high.

Walls: The crypt's walls are of cut and dressed stone decorated with (now faded) frescos celebrating Kal Voren's life and deeds.

Floor: Flagged, the floor is generally flat and unimpeded, although some of the flagstones have shifted and moved over the centuries.

Wooden Doors: The crypt's wooden doors are in good repair and open into the room they ward. Unless noted in the text, the doors are plain and unadorned.

Air Quality: The air in areas 4 (and the corridor leading to the room), 6, 7 and 8 is stale. Elsewhere, the air in the tomb is fresh.

A Note on Traps

When the crypt was dug from the living rock of the surrounding hills the architects included several cunningly designed and hidden traps in its design. Such features appear in areas 3 and 6, but could also feature in areas 4, 7 and 8. The state of these traps (if they exist) depends on your setup of the crypt. In particular, if another adventuring party has already breached the tomb, it is likely they have disarmed or set-off one or more of the traps.

Outside the Splintered Crypt

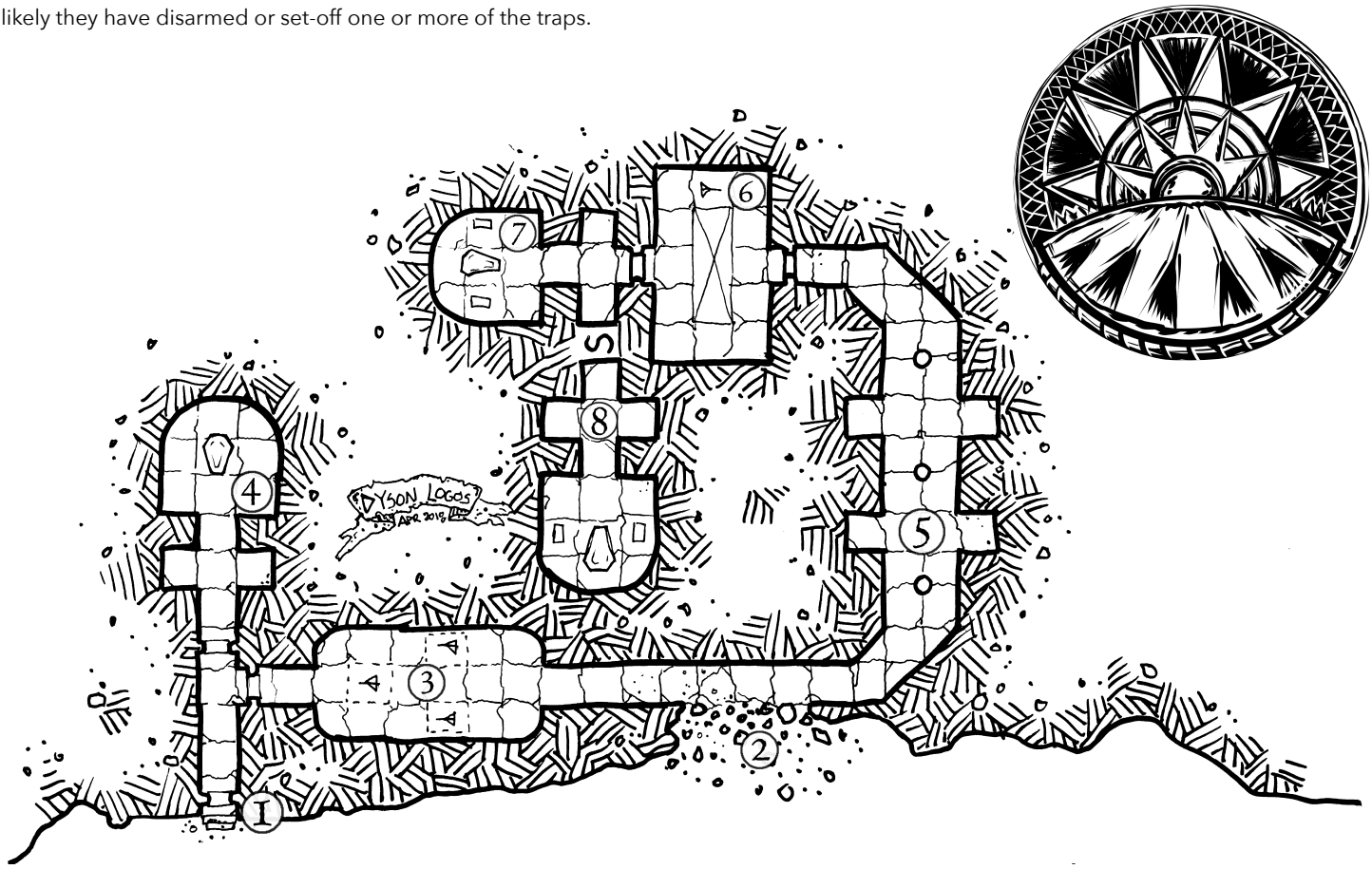
The Splintered Crypt lies in an isolated rocky valley a half-score of miles to the south and west of the town of Dunstone. It lies near a rocky promontory known throughout Ashlar as the Sphinx (for its decidedly singular, exotic appearance). The Sphinx is a well-known landmark lying along the dangerous trail wending its long way through the wild, monster-infested western hills to eventually reach the isolated castle-hold of Ravenscrag.

The area in the crypt's immediate vicinity comprises several steep-sided valleys. Some of the deeper valleys feature sheltered woodlands of elder trees which local legends populate with lurking creatures of foul and sinister intent. Isolated homesteads and tiny hamlets of woodcutters, hunters and the like dot the area.

Rivals' Campsite

Depending on the GM's setup there could be a campsite outside the Splintered Crypt. If another group of adventurers has already reached the site their retainers and servants—or the adventurers themselves—could be in camp when the characters arrive. This could set up an interesting role-playing encounter between the characters and their rivals (or their servants), or could herald the adventure's first combat.

The surrounding hills, as detailed above, are home to many dangerous monsters and the other adventurers no doubt know this. Thus, the camp's occupants are likely to be on their guard, and therefore difficult to surprise.



GM Notes

The status of the traps in area 3 depends on your setup of the crypt. If the characters are not the first to explore the place, the traps may be sprung or disarmed. Similarly, the stone door in location 1 is a good place for a magical trap—perhaps exploding runes or a glyph of warding lurk among the door's runes.

1: The Graven Portal

Originally, this was the only entrance to Kal Voren's tomb.

A heavy stone door—covered in beautifully ornate, but now worn and pitted, runes and sigils—pierces the cliff.

Graven Stone Door: Graven with many religious symbols and the like, this heavy stone door wards the Splintered Tomb. Carved in the language of the heavens, the symbols read, "*Herein slumbers Kal Voren. Despair oh evil-doer at his goodness and righteousness*".

2: Crumbled Wall

This portion of the cliff has collapsed, creating a second entrance to the Splintered Tomb.

Piles of rubble lie in front of a jagged gash in the cliff face. Beyond, a narrow passageway runs parallel with the cliff.

Dense Rubble: The rubble is difficult terrain; it slows movement rates by half and inflicts a -10% chance to move silently.

Illumination: Dim light fills the corridor within ten-foot of the collapsed wall. Darkness shrouds the rest of the area.

3: Chamber of Wards

Three deadly, camouflaged spear traps ward this chamber (and, originally the chambers beyond). The collapse at location 2 means explorers can bypass this area.

Opposite you, a single corridor leads away from this long and dusty, but empty chamber.

Traps: The crypt's builders placed several hidden traps here. They may—or may not—be active, depending on your design.

4: Tahvo's Rest

Herein lie the bones of Kal's faithful squire, Tahvo Ehtaro, who died shortly after his master. Together in life, they rest together in eternal slumber.

A stone sarcophagus, graven with many symbols, stands in the middle of this chamber. Faded frescoes depicting the same man at various stages of his life decorate the chamber's walls.

Stone Sarcophagus: Decorated with many graven symbols this stone sarcophagus has a heavy lid. A cleric or other character trained in matters of religion can identify several religious icons associated with Darlen. Inscribed over the symbols are the words, "*Tahvo Entaro, Faithful in Life, Faithful in Death*".

Inside the Sarcophagus

The skeleton of a short, burly man, his arms crossed over his chest, lies in the sarcophagus. He is clad in chainmail and a longsword lies at his feet.

5: Hall of Pillars

Kal Voren's stone companion guard watch over the approaches to his tomb, from four deep wall niches.

Three slender pillars hold this long hallway's ceiling aloft. Four niches—two to the east and two to the west pierce the walls.

Stone Pillars: Carven images of weeping angles carrying Kal Voren to his rest decorate the pillars. Originally, the carvings were painted, but such decoration is now faded and has flaked away in many places.

These slender stone pillars provide partial cover (+2 AC) to anyone in an adjacent square.

The Companion Guard: Each of the four wall niches in this hall hosts a stone statue of a vigilant knight. Each wears plate mail and holds a large shield in front of them. Each shield has a carven groove in it sized for a longsword. Filling each carven groove with a longsword unlocks and opens the door to Kal Voren's true tomb. Removing the swords locks the secret door.

6: Chamber of Deeds

The faded frescos decorating this chamber's walls celebrate Kal Voren's most famed victories. The crypt's architect also included several traps here which may, or may not, be active.

Faded frescos depicting a noble warrior triumphing over a succession of terrifying demonic or undead foes decorate the walls of this chamber.

Faded Frescos: The frescoes here depict Kal Voren's greatest victories such as his banishment of the otherworldly fiend Bala Sygax, the Despot of the Smouldering Hills, and the utter destruction of the Lord of the Nineteen Obsidian Steps, the lich lord Namtar Anshan.

7: False Tomb of Kal Voren

Designed to fool tomb robbers and the like, this tomb is nothing but a decoy.

A plain stone sarcophagus dominates the centre of this chamber; two wooden lecterns, black with age, flank the sarcophagus.

Plain Sarcophagus: This stone sarcophagus is a decoy placed here to deceive tomb robbers.

Plain Lecterns: Twin lecterns watch over Kal Voren's apparent resting place. The mouldering remains of old prayer books lie atop both.

Inside the Sarcophagus

A jumbled mass of bones lies among a variety of grave goods and the like. Chief among the dusty remains are a silver holy symbol of Darlen and a pitted, rusted sword with an ornate gold hilt.

GM Notes

Kal Voren's false tomb (area 7) is an excellent place for a fell trap or the locale in which to encounter another adventuring party.

Additionally, the sarcophagus in Kal Voren's false tomb is likely stocked with treasures to placate any tomb robbers getting that far into the tomb.

8: True Tomb of Kal Voren

The characters are the first explorers to discover this hidden chamber. Here lie the undisturbed remains of the ancient paladin-hero Kal Voren.

Secret Door: A locked secret door wards Kal Voren's true tomb. Perceptive characters searching the tomb discover the door and a nearby loose stone in the wall. Prying out the stone reveals a small niche; a recessed carving of Darlen's holy symbol decorates the niche's rear wall. Placing a holy symbol of Darlen in the recessed carving unlocks and opens the secret door. Alternatively, a successful open locks roll unlocks the secret door.

A stone sarcophagus decorated with a carving in high relief of a skeleton at rest dominates this dusty, stuffy chamber. Two ornate lecterns carved to look like kneeling angels flank the sarcophagus.

Dusty: Dust lies thickly in this chamber.

Ornate Sarcophagus: A large, ornate sarcophagus stands in the centre of the room.

Lecterns: Ornate lecterns carved to look like kneeling angels holding aloft prayer books flank Kal Voren's sarcophagus.

Inside the Sarcophagus

Kal Voren's Remains: Preserved in death by his celestial lord's beneficence, Kal Voren appears as he did when he died—an elderly man with a careworn face. He wears simple white robes edged with silver and gold thread.

Inscription: The underside of the sarcophagus' lid bears the inscription, "*The Ravens and the Grey Mistress Show the Way.*" A graven image of a flaming sword points to the inscription. This is a clue to the hidden location of *Demon Bane*.

Conclusion

Once the characters have explored the Splintered Crypt, the adventure doesn't necessarily have to end.

Desecrated Crypt: Depending on who you decide slumbers in the crypt the characters may have to decide what to do about the desecrated paladin's tomb. Its location is now general knowledge and even if the characters have defeated any immediate threat to the place other adventurers will no doubt eventually try their luck in Kal Voren's tomb.

Where Lies Demon Bane?: *Demon Bane* (or *Heaven's Fury* to give the weapons its original name) does not lie with Kal Voren in his tomb. Characters aware of the hero-paladin's famed weapon may well wonder where it now rests. If the group counts a paladin among its ranks the quest for *Demon Bane* could become a personal goal for that character. Alternatively, any follower of Darlen would surely like to ensure the weapon remains in the faith and is not borne by a non-believer (or even worse, falls in the hands of the faith's enemies.

Characters discovering the inscription in Kal Voren's sarcophagus have their first clue regards the sword's location, but the significance of the carving may not be immediately clear.

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