

# The measure of a man

The Vault of Hope is a legendary museum built, maintained, and guarded by tireless clockwork servants, designed to store the intellectual seeds of civilization until the threat of the Demon Lord is finally vanquished. But now, the actions of a deranged cultist have enabled the corruption of the Demon Lord to enter the museum from the inside, and it's up to the characters to set things right.

The Measure of a Man is a darkly comic adventure for master characters, who face an easy task routing the perverse cultists that have taken over the Vault of Hope. But the characters soon discover that the debased cult leader Amra and the demonic horde he has summoned are a much greater threat.

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shadow of the demon lord



## THE VAULT OF HOPE

When the darkness of the Demon Lord began to spread, many feared the coming destruction not just because of its toll in human life but for the loss of history and culture that would accompany it. Even if humankind could survive to rebuild, how much of the past might be forever lost among the ruins of civilization?

In response to this fear, a group of altruistic nobles pooled their personal fortunes to fund the creation of a subterranean museum storehouse where works of art, culture, and history could be hidden away. The location of the Vault of Hope is not a secret, but is typically known only by sages, historians, and other intellectuals. The objects stored in the museum have more scholarly value than worth as treasure, and anyone who knows the vault's location can journey there. Many people do so for research or to offer up new items to be stored there, and the museum's clockwork guardians are more than a match for would-be thieves.

## THE CULT OF AMRA

Decades ago, a priest named Amra founded a loud but ultimately ineffectual cult with twin goals—undermining the World Mother's position as the most widely revered of the Old Gods, and destroying the notion that the prophet Astrid is an avatar of the New God. Amra and his followers obey a noxious dogma that blames the ills of the world on the moral turpitude of women, and that rejects the powerful symbolism of both the World Mother and Astrid in favor of making women wholly subservient to the wills of their male masters.

What Amra's cultists don't realize is that their charismatic leader has a darker purpose to his mad creed. Amra seeks the overthrow of all gods in favor of worship of the Demon Lord, believing that placating the Unspeakable One with prayer will stave off the destruction of the world. Amra believes that when he finally destroys belief in the sanctity of the World Mother and Astrid, the power of the Old Gods and the New God alike will be irrevocably broken, forcing folk to worship the Demon Lord in their absence.

Amra and a small group of cultists came to the Vault of Hope six months ago, researching religious lore that he hoped would shore up his desperate faith. Instead, he discovered a demonic incantation hidden in a prayer book in the museum's collection. Using the incantation to open a partially functioning portal to the Void, Amra summoned demons that helped him to overthrow and gain control of the museum's clockwork guardians. After his followers were fed to the demons as payment for their service, Amra sent forth word to all his cultists to join him at the renamed Great Hall of Manhood that is the cult's new home.

## THE DICK-RIBBON OF MANHOOD

Amra is a priest of only middling ability, but his control over his cultists is aided by a relic whose magic echoes his own mad creed. The *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* is a length of scarlet silk infused with demonic power. A non-male character who handles the relic (including creatures such as changelings and clockworks that have no biological gender) feels a sense of unease but can gain no benefit from it. A male character who handles the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* feels a surge of confidence and bravado, and must make a successful Will challenge roll with 3 banes or become compelled to don the relic.

A character who is compelled to don the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* immediately strips off all his clothing and armor, except for footwear and a helmet if desired. The *Dick-Ribbon* magically anchors itself around the character's genitals, modestly covering them and never needing adjustment. A character cannot wear any cloak, clothing, or armor while wearing the *Dick-Ribbon*, but can carry normal gear and weapons.

A character who wears the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* gains Defense 20; becomes immune to damage from disease and poison; immune to the diseased, fatigued, poisoned, and slowed afflictions; the Resilience, Endowed with Confidence, Figure of Manhood, Flustered by Fairness, and Manhood's Revenge traits and talents; the Manhood Slam and Virile Strike special attacks; and the Man Up special action (see Amra's statistics box on page 6 for details).

## ADVENTURE START

The Vault of Hope can be placed in any remote location in your campaign. The most obvious reason for the characters to seek out the fabled museum is to conduct research or to offer up some artifact of historical significance for its collection, both of which can be set up in previous adventures. Alternatively, the characters might be hired by a sage or a noble to journey to the museum with works to be donated or to research some piece of lore.

Whatever your approach, the characters should know nothing about the cult of Amra until their fateful first encounter with its deluded followers.

## A MANLY CONFRONTATION

As the characters journey to the Vault of Hope, they are surprised to see a group of burly, apparently naked men approaching them through the open wilderness. Upon closer inspection, these cultists of Amra are revealed to be wearing only boots, helmets, and red ribbons glued in place to cover their genitals, modeling the look of their beloved leader.



The cultists are ranging abroad to seek out new converts and supplies in villages and wilderness steadings. Ordinarily, they offer up information on their mission and their faith (from the first paragraph of “The Cult of Amra,” above) whenever they encounter other people. But if the party contains any female characters, the cultists are distracted as they focus their attention on them and utter a series of epithets: “Zounds! A deceitful wench!”, “Behold this womanly foulness!”, “Get thee down, slattern!”, and so on.

If any character asks about or mocks the cultists’ attire, the leader responds with a withering gaze, an out-thrust groin, and a belligerent rejoinder: “Behold the true man, whom you mock for the sake of your fear! For I have shed the tunic and the armor of a boy, and have donned the dick-ribbon of manhood!” The cultists attack in response to any insult (including comments triggering the speech above), threat, or other provocation of your choice.

The cultists’ leader carries a rough map of the area. At the location where the characters know the Vault of Hope to be, the map’s legend instead identifies “The Great Hall of Manhood.”

### FIGHTING THE CULTISTS

The battles between master characters and cultists in this adventure are intended to be ridiculously easy. Protected only by their nonmagical mock dick-ribbons (which they attach using a foul-smelling resin), the cultists are driven by bravado, using Mad Certainty on every attack roll, pursuing characters who try to avoid them, and fighting to the death. Even as they are carved up, the delusional followers of Amra utter defiant death cries such as, “Feel how my manhood protects me!” and “You understand now the power of the dick-ribbon!”

## THE VAULT OF HOPE

The aboveground entrance to the Vault of Hope is an unguarded stone archway set into an earthen mound, from which spiral stone stairs descend into the earth.

All areas of the great underground museum consist of high-ceilinged chambers dug out and finished by clockwork labor. Ceilings are supported by buttressed stone columns, and walls and floors are finished stone.

The hapless followers of Amra remain blissfully unaware of the presence of real evil within the Vault of Hope, since the cult leader has ordered his disciples to keep out of areas where demons are found. Cultists are occasionally sacrificed in secret by Amra as a reward for his demonic followers, but the cultists’ missionary excursions cover those disappearances and replenish the cult’s numbers with new converts.

## DOORS AND GUARDS

All chambers in the museum have magical doors that open only when activated. Activating a door requires a character to use an action to touch the door and make a successful Intellect challenge roll with 1 bane. When a door is activated, it magically fades away to leave the doorway open for 10 seconds before reappearing automatically and needing to be activated again.

The clockwork guardians of the museum can activate doors automatically as an action, but the demons summoned by Amra lack the knowledge of how to do so. Demons normally move between areas only under the escort of clockworks, but they are smart enough to pursue characters who flee an area if they can reach a door while it is open.

## 1. HALL OF WELCOME

Descending the stairs, the characters find themselves before an oval stone door that glows with a magical blue light (see “Doors and Guards”). Beyond the door stands a huge, finely furnished sitting chamber occupied by 6 clockworks of comely form (see the sidebar), which attack the characters on sight.

### COMELY CLOCKWORKS

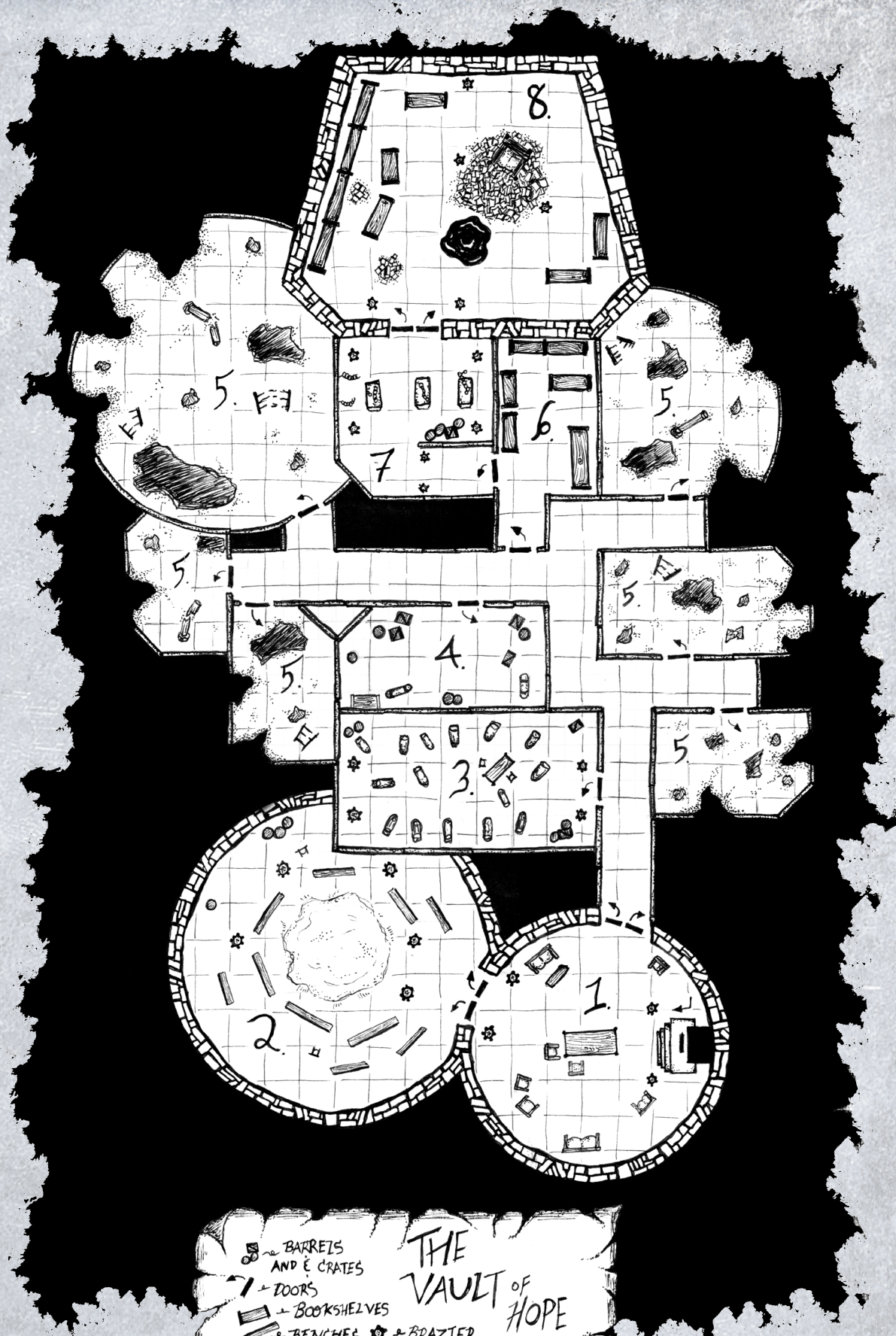
Amra’s magic has reprogrammed the clockwork defenders of the Vault of Hope to his service, even as his cultists have affected bizarre modifications to their forms. Unless otherwise indicated, all clockworks in the Vault of Hope have been refitted to resemble voluptuous warrior maidens. Their enormous breasts and ample buttocks are barely covered by scanty chainmail, and they strike provocative poses as they fight. The overall effect is more comical than threatening, but does nothing to hinder the clockworks’ combat ability as they attack any non-cultist intruders, ignoring attempts to parley.

If a clockwork is incapacitated, it speaks for the first and only time, crying out, “If only there were real men to protect me!” before it collapses to the floor.

## 2. ARENA OF MANLY GAMES

This former library has been ransacked, its bookshelves repurposed as benches. Piles of ancient tomes are regularly fed to flaming braziers that light and warm the place. The benches are presently occupied by an audience of 20 cultists facing a circular ring, with 2 clockworks in the ring and 2 clockworks serving ale and a selection of meat snacks (see area 4) to the spectators.





**THE VAULT OF HOPE**

- BARRELS AND CRATES
- DOORS
- BOOKSHELVES
- BENCHES
- BRAZIER
- BED ROLLS
- PORTAL
- PILE OF BOOKS
- DEBRIS
- ROUGHLY 2 YARDS SQUARE





Unlike the clockworks that were refitted to female form by the cultists, those in the ring of combat have a male form featuring grotesquely oversized genitalia. The clockworks wield their massive members like clubs, smacking each other while the cultists cheer them on. When intruders appear, the cultists order all four clockworks to attack, then join the fray in the following round.

### USING DICK-RIBBONS AS DISGUISES

Enterprising players with a flair for roleplaying might consider having their characters strip down and disguise themselves as cultists in order to infiltrate the Vault of Hope. Nonmagical dick-ribbons can be claimed from fallen cultists and attached with any adhesive. If all the characters don such a disguise, they can fool any clockworks in the museum, even if they carry weapons and gear normally not carried by the cultists, and even if the party contains non-male characters.

The same is not true of cultists. In no case will they be fooled by non-male characters wearing dick-ribbons. If the party is all male, fooling other cultists requires all characters to make an Intellect challenge roll. The result of the highest successful roll is the number of rounds that pass before the cultists recognize the party's deception. If all the characters fail, the cultists immediately see through the disguise.

Demons in the Vault of Hope attack any living creatures, including cultists and characters in disguise.

## 3. BARRACKS

This was once a grand hall storing tapestries, banners, and textiles. Those have all been roughly hacked apart to create pallets and bedrolls, currently occupied by **20 cultists** sleeping. Another **10 cultists** are lounging about, engaging in loud arguments and contests of arm-wrestling or muscular flexing, but they attack as soon as the characters are spotted. The noise of combat wakes the sleeping cultists, 5 of which join the fray each round.

If combat lasts until the fifth round, **3 cultists** run for the door. If they are not pursued, they return in 5 rounds with **4 clockworks** from one of the ruined chambers (so not yet in female form) in an attempt to even the odds.

## 4. STORES

High shelves in this chamber once held relics of heraldry and political history (coats of arms, ceremonial weapons, historical records, and the like). The lower shelves have been emptied and are now filled with barrels of weak ale and crates of salted meat, prepared offal, and blood puddings.

The chamber is occupied by **5 small demons**, which can be initially observed excreting foul fluids into the ale casks and the meat stores. They attack any creatures except for the clockwork guardians.

## 5. RUINED CHAMBERS

The cultists determined that certain chambers were extraneous to their conversion plans for the museum (see the map on page 4), so they ordered clockworks to destroy the buttressed columns in these areas, which collapsed their ceilings. These areas are now filled with dirt and rubble that makes them difficult terrain, along with destroyed paintings, books, tapestries, jewelry, and the scattered remains of clockworks caught in the collapse.

The first time characters enter a particular ruined chamber, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, the chamber holds **2d3** inactive clockworks in normal form, waiting to be beautified by the cultists. On a 4 or higher, the area holds a number of corpses of cultists that were sacrificed to **1d6 tiny demons** and **1d3 small demons** that linger in the area. The demons attack the characters as soon as they enter.

Characters who search any ruined chamber for 10 minutes can turn up jewelry and portable artworks worth a total of 10 to 60 gc. The first of the ruined chambers the characters search also contains an enchanted object.

## 6. GALLERY OF MAJESTIC MANHOOD

The high walls of this chamber are lined with shelves that hold thousands of paintings and illustrative works. The **15 cultists** and **2 clockworks** toiling in this area are busy examining the paintings, but they break off their work to attack at the first sign of trouble.

Characters who investigate the cultists' work note that images showing male figures in heroic poses and situations are being set aside and rewrapped for storage. Any paintings that depict unheroic men or that show women in active, heroic poses have been slashed and heaped in a huge pile in the center of the chamber.

## 7. HALL OF SACRIFICE

The antechamber to this former reading room is guarded by **2 small demons** that attack any intruders. Beyond lies a grim chapel featuring three stone altars set with chains. The grisly remains of some two dozen cultists that were sacrificed to ravenous demons lie on those slabs, and **4 small demons** are rampaging amid the carnage. Around the altars, **3 clockworks** dutifully collect body parts, which they use to assemble bloody phallic sculptures that line the walls of the room. Each of the dozen sculptures already completed is a 10-foot-high mass of rotting meat in the shape of a grotesque and turgid male member, held together with tightly wrapped entrails and reinforced with shattered bone. Any character who enters this room must make a successful Will challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Insanity.

The demons and the clockworks ignore each other, but the demons immediately attack any characters detected beyond the antechamber. The clockworks attack only if threatened, or if any creatures try to activate the door to area 8.



## 8. THRONE OF AMRA

This area was once a grand library, but its thousands of books are now heaped up into a grotesque throne cemented together with demonic ichor. The floor at the foot of the throne is a glistening black pool 3 yards across—a partially functioning portal to the Void. Amra opened the portal using the incantation he found in this chamber. The magic grants him control of the demons he has summoned as long as he keeps them well fed on hapless cultists.

Amra sits atop the throne, where 5 small demons and 5 tiny demons act as his servants by oiling and massaging him. He glances down indifferently at the characters, unconcerned by their presence and engaging them in conversation. Amra speaks with the same bravado and machismo as the other cultists, though if he sees any female characters in the party, he is noticeably shaken, averting his eyes from them and momentarily cringing if challenged by a woman.

Amra talks proudly of his dark plans (see “The Cult of Amra”), in between taunting the characters with cries such as, “I defy the scourge of the fair sex!”, “All will tremble before my manhood!”, and “Are you prepared to behold the power of the *Dick-Ribbon*?” If threatened, or when he determines that the characters are not here to join him, he orders his demons to attack.

The throne is 30 feet high and is difficult terrain for any creature other than Amra. The portal to the Void is presently dormant and cannot be used to summon demons during the encounter. Even so, any character who enters the area of the portal automatically takes 2d6 damage and gains 1 Insanity.

Amra allows his demons to do the fighting for him, climbing down to enter the fray only after he is attacked directly. If he is slain, the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* and his genitals detach at the end of the round (see his statistics box), fighting until destroyed.

## AFTERMATH

When Amra’s demonic genitalia are finally incapacitated, the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* flutters to the ground (and can be claimed by the characters if they so desire). The portal collapses, and just as it does, any demons still within the Vault of Hope are drawn back to the Void. Surviving cultists seek out the characters and fight to the death, but the museum’s clockwork guardians ignore the party now that Amra’s programming no longer affects them.

With the threat of Amra ended, the clockwork guardians regain their original programming and begin the process of cleaning up and rebuilding. Characters of a benevolent bent might decide to lend their aid to restoring the museum, or you might use the task of replacing the artworks and lore destroyed by the cult as hooks for further adventures.

### AMRA

DIFFICULTY 100

#### Size 1 human

**Perception** 14 (+4)

**Defense** 20; **Health** 50

**Strength** 15 (+5), **Agility** 14 (+4), **Intellect** 16 (+6), **Will** 13 (+3)

**Speed** 10

**Immune** damage from disease, poison; diseased, fatigued, poisoned, slowed

**Resilience** Amra takes half damage from weapons.

**Endowed with Confidence** Amra makes Will challenge rolls to affect other creatures’ minds with 3 boons.

**Figure of Manhood** Amra makes all attack rolls with 2 boons.

**Flustered by Fairness** A female character who encounters Amra can use an action to make a Will challenge roll to fluster him. If she gets a success, Amra makes attack rolls with no boons for 1 round.

**Manhood’s Revenge** If Amra is killed, the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* focuses its magic into his genitals, which detach from his corpse with a squelching sound and become an independent creature. Each character who sees this transformation gains 1 Insanity. The demonically infused genitalia wear the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* like a flowing cloak as they soar majestically into combat, fighting as a tiny demon with the flier and sightless traits.

#### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Fist** (melee) +5 with 2 boons (2d6 + 5)

#### SPECIAL ATTACKS

**Manhood Slam** Amra executes a potent groin thrust against a creature he can reach. The target must make a successful Agility challenge roll with 1 bane or take 3d6 damage and fall prone.

**Virile Strike** Amra attacks twice with his fist against one target creature. If he gets a success on both attack rolls, he can use his Manhood Slam against the same target using a triggered action.

#### SPECIAL ACTIONS

**Man Up** As long as he is not immobilized, Amra can seize the *Dick-Ribbon of Manhood* where it surrounds his genitals to focus its power and heal 2d6 damage. Each creature that can see him when he does this must make a successful Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity.

#### MAGIC

**Power** 2

**Enchantment** presence (3), charm (2)

**Forbidden** harm (3), obedience (2), vision’s end (1)

