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Splinters of Faith

— Adventure 1: It Started With a Chicken . . . —

By Gary Schotter & Jeff Harkness

**SWORDS &
WIZARDRY**



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This book is dedicated to the memory of Dustin “Lanky” Ray Cook, 1985-2009.

Special Thanks

Jeff would like to dedicate this book to Tammy, Kaitlyn and Alyssa. Gary would like to dedicate this work to Christina, Brooklyn, Kaden and Amberlyn. We also want to thank Greg Wilson for his wisdom and advice in solving many dilemmas and game mechanics issues.

And a special dedication to the 32 PCs who lost their lives during playtesting.



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**TOUGH
ADVENTURES
FOR TOUGH
PLAYERS**

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Splinters of Faith

— Adventure 1: It Started With a Chicken . . . —

By Gary Schotter & Jeff Harkness

Splinters of Faith is a series of 10 adventures that starts with a few chickens going missing and eventually leads to a confrontation with a reawakened death-priest. Along the way, PCs will recreate a relic called the *Scepter of Faiths* to aid them when they face off with the priest.

The series is designed to take PCs from 1st level all the way to 14th level or higher. Characters following the full series of adventures from start to finish will take part in a massive campaign that spans deserts, forests, icy mountain passes and the deepest jungle. Every adventure offers a set of temples – one good, one evil – for the characters to explore. You are currently reading Part 1 of this campaign.

The adventures are designed to fit together into one massive campaign, but each book stands on its own. You will find references to other adventures, but these are included to provide more information in case you plan to run the full campaign. This extra information often provides notes on things to watch for in the future adventure, but owning the book mentioned isn't required.

Besides the adventures, you'll also find – in most cases – two fully detailed temples that you can drop into your home campaign. Think of these books as your personal sourcebook for a variety of unique temples set in a number of different settings. Raid the books for ideas and unique holy sites for when your PCs go in search of healing. All but the first and last adventure contain a “good” and an “evil” temple, with both detailed to varying degrees.

The adventures are set in a generic world, but some of the areas mentioned draw on background presented in **Glades of Death** by **Necromancer Games** (used by permission), as well as other **Necromancer Games** products. In addition, many of the gods and deities mentioned throughout the adventures can be found in a free download at www.NecromancerGames.com. New deities are detailed in the individual adventures where their followers appear so the GM can incorporate their worship into the campaign if needed.

Background: A Splintered Soul

Ages ago, the death priest Akruel Rathamon rose to power, building an empire around the sprawling city of Al-Sifon. Fear reigned as Akruel overthrew nations and cities in a spreading circle around his burgeoning city-state, forcibly bringing more people under his iron fist while razing an ever-widening circle of destruction across the land.

Bloodshed marked Akruel's rise to power as he forced a single deity upon those he conquered: Aurikus, a god of death and rebirth of the soul. The priest-king forced all he conquered to worship Aurikus, and human sacrifice became commonplace in the growing empire — often sacrifices of those who refused to follow the new god's beliefs. Under Akruel's iron fist, entire nations fell into darkness, and Aurikus' power grew as more people converted — most unwillingly — to worshipping the dark being. But even as Akruel's power grew so, too, did his enemies. Pockets of opposition survived in the hearts of his blood-drenched cities, and priests of many faiths united in secret rebellion against the tyrant. As these minor thorns in Akruel's side gathered against him, the priest-king swore a dark pact with his master Aurikus: He would destroy all who would oppose him and his dark master.

The War of Divine Discord began on that dark day with a dark pact.

Akruel's minions spread their master's terror across the land in a

war that would last many decades, with Akruel's cruel stratagems nearly gaining the upper hand. But eventually the tide turned, and Akruel's fanatical forces couldn't stem the good-aligned people rising up against the death-cult leader. And as his enemies finally rallied and marched by the thousands against Al-Sifon, the death-priest knew that death finally stood upon his doorstep. Not willing to give up — despite Aurikus' whispered promises of the pleasures of death — Akruel devised one final plan to stave off the inevitable and to regain his master's trust: He'd rid his lands of his foes by outliving them.

Akruel brought together his remaining priests, and together they crafted a heart composed of lifeless flesh and enchanted with the powers of hell. In the darkest hour of the coldest night under a lunar eclipse, the priests raised their voices in a ritual chant and drew Akruel's tainted soul into the abhorrent flesh. For a brief moment, the forces of good got their wish: The death-priest died. But as the moon slid from the grasp of penumbral shadows, the *Frore Heart* pulsed with a hellish might as immortal blood — and Aurikus' evil — flowed anew through Akruel's veins. Akruel's body convulsed as the *Frore Heart* forever after claimed his soul.

Aurikus' dark blessing transformed Akruel into the most ancient of undead, a vampire lord. With immortality now in his grasp, Akruel's thirst for power and bloodshed increased tenfold. He slaughtered the priests who had bestowed his unlife, then marched against the foes approaching Al-Sifon, single-handedly destroying the men and women allied against him. Powerful warriors let their weapons fall from their quivering hands and cowered before the vampire lord as he shrugged off their strongest blows. Wizards fell to their knees exhausted after wasting countless spells trying to stop — or even slow down — the death-priest's deadly rampage. Those who did manage to strike the warlord saw his wounds close without a drop of blood flowing onto the battlefield. None knew then that Akruel's soul resided safely within the *Frore Heart*, making his body nearly impervious to harm as it regenerated all wounds he suffered.

As Akruel tore apart his enemies with his bare hands, a cloud of churning darkness roiled forth over the dead city of Al-Sifon. The cloud blocked the sun, perpetually darkening the skies. Under cover of a magical darkness trapped beneath the roiling cloud, Akruel walked freely during the daylight, striking fear into the shattered forces as they retreated from his attacks. Brave warriors fled before the death-priest, and Akruel and his minions pursued them across the continent.

But power did not grant Akruel vision. Unbeknownst to him, Asani Ta'Avan, a fallen priestess of Aurikus, met secretly with the factions opposing Akruel. The warlord's former concubine, Asani now feared her lover's undead form. Finally convinced Akruel was lost to her and fearing for her own mortality, she fled Al-Sifon as the War of Divine Discord raged on. The heart-rent priestess betrayed Akruel, offering her knowledge of the *Frore Heart* to his enemies. With the information Asani provided, the assembled priests forged a weapon to use against the death priest: the *Scepter of Faiths*. With the help of their gods — who themselves felt fear as Aurikus usurped their followers — the priests of the many religions determined that if they could pierce Akruel's heart with the scepter, they could end his reign of bloodshed.

But Asani's knowledge of the *Frore Heart* was incomplete. While she knew that Akruel could be slain by destroying his cold, black heart, she was unaware that the infernal organ lay *outside* his body. She incorrectly told the priests that the warlord's heart was key to

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stopping him, never knowing that Akruel stored the *Frore Heart* — and the very essence of his being — in a chamber hidden safely beneath Al-Sifon.

Not knowing that their objective lay within the temple and not the man, the priests bestowed the *Scepter of Faiths* on Shah Rasalt, a high priest of Arden, to end the bloodthirsty warlord's destructive advance across the continent.

As the roiling black cloud crept overhead following Akruel's advance, the armies of good prepared a final trap for the death-cult leader. Thinking his power came from Al-Sifon, they waited until he was far from the city of infamy, throwing good men and women into the warlord's path to keep him moving forward. Many lost their lives on the day of Akruel's reckoning.

Finally, just before all hope was lost, Shah Rasalt took the field, holding aloft the *Scepter of Faiths* like a beacon to the forces of good. During the titanic struggle that followed, Shah Rasalt plunged the *Scepter of Faiths* through Akruel's chest, driving the weapon into — and through — the death-priest's chest. The scepter's ash shaft and adamantine point separated Akruel's unbeating heart, doing no damage, but blocking the flow of the tyrant's immortal blood. The champion's holy relic weakened Akruel's connection to the *Frore Heart*, but did not sever the link. Even as Akruel stood motionless, to all appearances "dead," the *Frore Heart* preserved his soul and body. The war ended with Akruel, immobile and powerless, impaled upon the scepter, his face frozen in stunned disbelief and ferocious anger.

But even in defeat Akruel remained an obstacle that the combined faiths of good could not overcome. Despite their efforts, the unified faiths could not find a way to destroy Akruel's inanimate body once and for all. No one desired to pull free the scepter, but neither could they understand why it didn't end the unlife of the vampire lord. Finally, in frustration, Shah Rasalt ordered a mountainous tomb built over the impaled body of the vampiric priest-king. When the knoll was finished, Rasalt entombed Akruel's remaining cohorts alive within the vault's outer walls. Rasalt felt his actions enough to guarantee the land's safety.

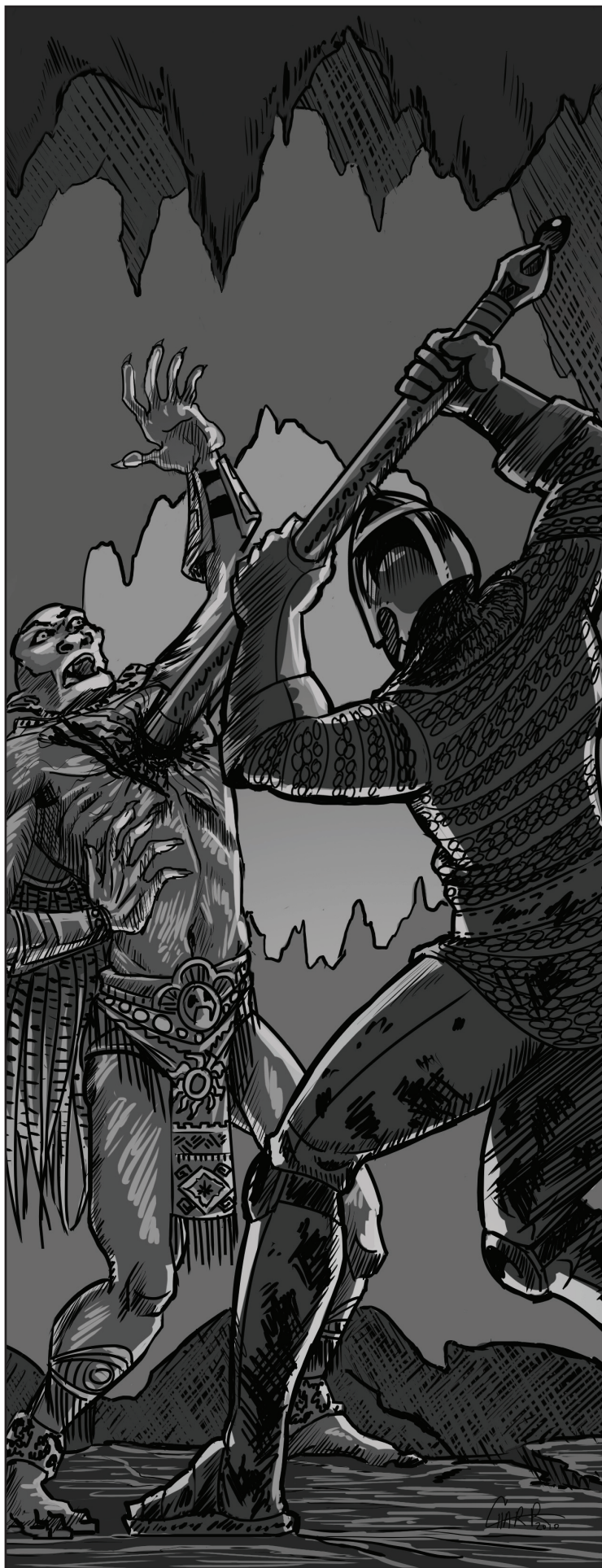
Over time, the tomb blended into the land, eventually disappearing from history. The bloody battlefield where Akruel was finally defeated passed into legend, and villages arose around the artificial hill to reclaim the land. But as the dreadful memories of Rasalt and his evil deeds dwindled, a few church elders who had blessed the *Scepter of Faiths* feared Akruel might one day awaken. When Shah Rasalt finally passed into Arden's embrace many years later, these church elders decreed that a stone slab be placed atop Akruel's tomb to warn of the ultimate evil buried under the newly fertile land. Markings on the stone slab pleaded that the *Scepter of Faiths* remain in the evil priest's heart.

Time passed, and men forgot the dire days of Aurikus' cult. Harsh weather scoured the slab, and eventually it disappeared into the dirt, just another rock formation buried on the plains. Eventually, followers of Freya discovered the hill and built a shrine atop the warning slab, unknowingly using the rock as the floor of their newly founded temple.

But time and the elements could not permanently erase all memories of the cruelty of Akruel Rathamon.

Rayne D'Anzeray, a scholar of Necromancy from the Theurgist Seminary of Thasizier, discovered references to Akruel. What intrigued him most were the rumors of Akruel's power over death itself. His ambitions and desire for his own immortality spurred him across the land in search of Akruel's forgotten tomb. After years of research, Rayne's searches through countless brittle scrolls and forgotten tomes paid off. In secrecy, Rayne hired a group of thugs and laborers to excavate the newly discovered tomb.

The necromancer got more than he bargained for. After finding Akruel's lead-sealed tomb, Rayne removed the



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Scepter of Faiths from Akruel's withered corpse. In the long-forgotten ruins of Al-Sifon, the hidden *Frore Heart* again beat a stuttering rhythm as long-dormant links between the relic and the vampire lord revived to replenish the warlord's spirit and strength. Centuries of death and decay vanished in minutes. Freed from perpetual death, Akruel immediately broke the *Scepter of Faiths* in two. The reawakened Akruel then vowed to revive the vanquished cult of Aurikus — now a demonic power known simply as Orcus.

In his haste for freedom — or perhaps because of his immortal arrogance — Akruel left the *Scepter of Faiths*' broken pieces behind as he took his first steps into a land that had all but forgotten the evil buried beneath it.

Who Is This Aurikus Anyway?

In Akruel's day, the demon prince Aurikus began consolidating strength. He drew evil men such as Akruel Rathamon to his worship, promising them power greater than they could imagine.

After the terrible War of Divine Discord, Aurikus' worship dwindled as Shah Rasalt's forces stamped out the demon prince's remaining influences. Aurikus' followers retreated to worship in secrecy. The demon prince's dominion over humanity waned but was not broken. Memory of his evil waned, but his few surviving worshippers diligently kept alive the demon's cult.

Over generations, this cult of Aurikus slowly regained a foothold in the world, but the worshippers took precautions to avoid being hunted anew. To better hide the demon's sinister past and heinous deeds, his mortal followers subtly changed his name. Now calling their master Orcus, the demon prince's followers set about restoring their lost religion.

Today, Orcus directs the forces of evil — with hardly any mention of his past name. Akruel's return is a link to this past, but one that Orcus gladly exploits for the terror the death-priest may again inspire. Despite the years, the demon prince's seething anger still burns for the churches that had a hand in thwarting his plans so long ago.

Reforging the Scepter

The 10 adventures that make up this campaign focus on the PCs stopping the death-priest Akruel's return by restoring the *Scepter of Faiths*. It's not as simple as taking the broken pieces of the scepter and hunting down the death-priest, however. Reforging the scepter requires tracking down the temples that originally crafted the relic and receiving specific blessings from each one. Once the Scepter is complete, the PCs must then face the very heart of evil as they attempt to stop the death-priest in his ziggurat of death.

Here is a brief description of each adventure, with approximate levels.

***Splinters of Faith 1: It Started With a Chicken ...* (Levels 1 through 3)**

This opening adventure introduces the PCs to the main villain and sets them on a quest to restore the broken *Scepter of Faiths*. PCs will delve into a burial mound to recover the scepter and discover the steps they must take to restore the holy relic.

***Splinters of Faith 2: Burning Desires* (Levels 2 through 4)**

PCs visit the aboveground dwarven city of Anvil Plunge, only to discover the starting ritual needed to re-forged the scepter cannot be undertaken because a piece of the holy forge is missing. PCs will have to travel into the sprawling Sin Mire Swamp to recover the artifact.

***Splinters of Faith 3: Culvert Operations* (Levels 3 through 5)**

The city of Bargarsport sits upon the sunken ruins of the old city — and the underground temple of Clandestine. But the temple's faithful are a conniving lot, and require PCs to face down a necromancer and his undead minions moving into the underground city before they will help.

***Splinters of Faith 4: For Love of Chaos* (Levels 4 through 6)**

PCs find that the temple of Iseleine, perched high atop a pillar standing in the middle of a lush, garden-filled pit, is in dire danger from a force strategically destroying the garden below. What's worse is the fact that the temple's high priestess viciously killed her husband ... then threw herself from the high pillar. On her was the oil of Iseleine needed to bless the scepter.

***Splinters of Faith 5: Eclipse of the Hearth* (Levels 5 through 7)**

The pyramid Seraph, once a holy temple, now lies under the sway of darkness. Breaking into the temple is hard enough, but braving the sinister twists awaiting in the dark catacombs will test the strongest PCs.

***Splinters of Faith 6: Morning of Tears* (Levels 6 through 8)**

PCs must enter a frozen wasteland to find a missing statue. But the icy wastes are the least of their worries in the Wailing Glacier.

***Splinters of Faith 7: The Heir of Sin* (Levels 7 through 9)**

PCs hope to simply strike the Grindstone of Muir, but are they worthy enough? They'll have to prove it by rescuing a paladin's daughter from the lair of a demon lord's cult.

***Splinters of Faith 8: Pains of Scalded Glass* (Levels 8 through 12)**

A disaster has injured and killed the priests of the Lady of the Searing Waters, but the nearby abandoned mines hold deadly secrets the PCs must unravel.

***Splinters of Faith 9: Duel of Magic* (Levels 10 through 14)**

PCs journey from a temple of good magic to face a coven of evil witches where they must rescue an astral deva.

***Splinters of Faith 10: Remorse of Life* (Levels 13 and greater)**

With the completed *Scepter of Faiths*, PCs must track down the evil Akruel Rathamon in the temple city of Al-Sifon before he consolidates his power and again sets out to conquer the land.

Do What You Want

These adventures are meant to be versatile. Don't want to send PCs on an epic quest to restore the *Scepter of Faiths*? Then don't. Use the individual adventures in your home campaign where you see fit. Don't like the *Scepter of Faiths*? Change it to something more appropriate for your campaign world. It could just as easily be the *Sword of Faiths*, the *Ax of Faiths* or the *Sickle of Faiths*. You'll need to change a few details along the way, but it shouldn't be too hard.

As the GM, change whatever you feel like changing. These adventures are meant to serve as a guide; you get to decide the final direction that it leads your group.

While the *Scepter of Faiths* must be restored in a certain order, the adventures still provide PCs with plenty of freedom. They can decide where they want to go and what they want to do within the scope of the individual quests. As the GM, you should guide PCs, but be ready to let them get into trouble on their own.

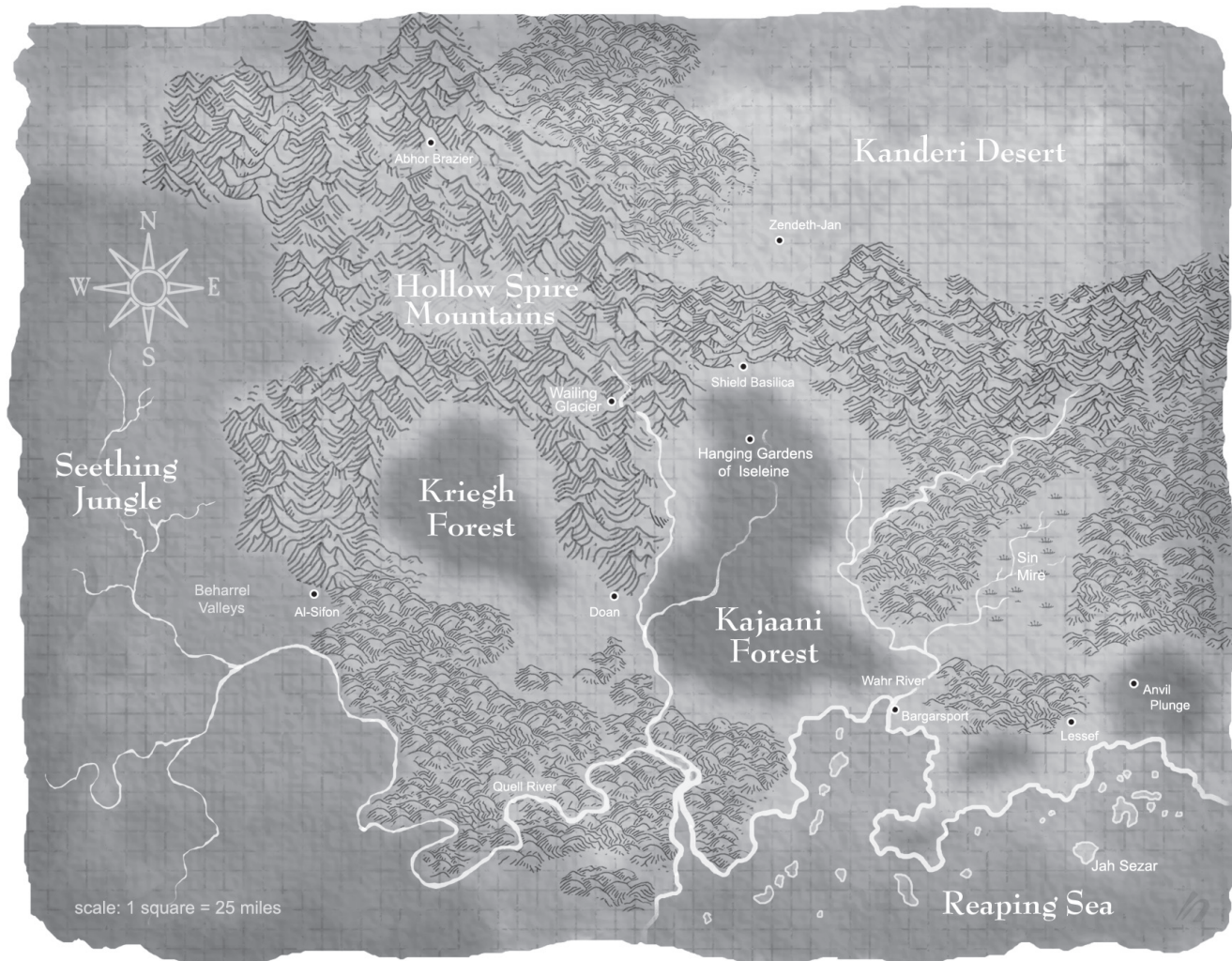
Adventure Hooks

The first adventure, "It Started With A Chicken ..." involves a temple to Freya built upon Akruel Rathamon's burial tomb. The slab warning of Akruel's evil serves as the weathered stone-slab floor of the temple. Low-level PCs are drawn into the village to help find a wily fox that the villagers believe is killing their chickens and somehow avoiding the trappers set on its trail.

The Referee's goal should be getting PCs to Lessef, where the campaign begins. Below are a few possible hooks you might want to consider:

New adventurers: The PCs are just getting started as adventurers, and actually live in Lessef. This hook lets a GM start a new or

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experienced group of players with low-level characters and progress them to higher levels (around 12th level or higher by the time they restore the *Scepter of Faiths* and face the vampire lord Akruel Rathamon and his minions in Al-Sifon).

Bodyguards: The PCs are hired by a traveling priest on a pilgrimage heading to different temples devoted to Freya. The priest, Sarnau, asks PCs to serve as bodyguards on his next journey to the out-of-the-way temple of Freya in Lessef. He offers a meager payment, but promises a grand adventure. He doesn't know the half of it.

Dire rumblings: A cleric PC receives a strange dream directing him to the temple of Freya within Lessef. Strange visions of battles, a broken scepter and a cadaverous figure haunt the PC when he awakes. He dreams of boiling black clouds filling the sky like an impenetrable thunderstorm.

The Scepter of Faiths

The Scepter of Faiths is a powerful artifact designed by a coalition of eight churches with a specific goal: Defeat Akruel Rathamon.

The scepter is made of a three-foot-long length of ash banded by adamantine rings for strength. The scepter's head is a fist-sized ring of gold and silver bands imprinted with religious symbols from the eight churches that joined together to create the relic. At the peak of the scepter, a pearl etched with a sunrise sits in the gold-and-silver mounting. The opposite end of the scepter is carved into a sharpened adamantine spike bonded to the ash.

At the beginning of the following adventures, the *Scepter of Faiths* is nothing more than a broken scepter sapped of its formidable powers. Before the PCs can face Akruel, they must craft another scepter by visiting the temples that originally created the artifact. Each blessing performed on the new scepter adds another power or ability to the relic. By the time the PCs reach the final adventure, the new *Scepter of Faiths* is a formidable weapon against undead and focused on destroying Akruel and the *Frore Heart*.

SCEPTER OF FAITHS

Lawful +4 adamantine heavy mace, + 6 vs. undead

Senses Speech, telepathy

Lesser powers: *bles* (3/day), *speak with dead* (3/day)

Greater Powers: *detect undead* (30 ft.), *protection from evil* 10. ft. radius (at will), *cure serious wounds* (3/day). At the user's choice, the scepter may *cure serious wounds* when striking undead, inflicting an additional 3d8+15 points of damage. (A successful save halves the damage.)

Special abilities: Locate creature (only Akruel Rathamon, always active). The scepter can also determine when creatures are near death.

Special Purpose: Slay undead, intent on destroying Akruel Rathamon and the *Frore Heart*.

Dedicated Power: *Resurrection* 1/month on wielder.

Personality: The *Scepter of Faiths* is unfaltering in its quest to destroy all undead, but it has a particular desire to face and destroy the death-cult leader Akruel Rathamon. The scepter has no sympathy for undead, evil or practitioners of the necromantic arts. It tolerates neutrality as long as the creature in question shares its mission and values, and does not get in the way of its goals to destroy the undead. The *Scepter of Faiths* is very aware of the awesome power it contains and requests that its wielder use it over all other weapons. It speaks in a firm feminine voice filled with authority and confidence. It does not abide cowardice or selfish acts by its wielder.

The *Scepter of Faiths* speaks an ancient, but understandable, form of Common.

Restoring the Scepter

When Rayne D'Anzeray pulled the *Scepter of Faiths* free of Akruel's withered chest, the *Frore Heart* immediately restored its unholy connection with the death-priest, reviving and slowly rejuvenating his desiccated body. Akruel's first act upon reawakening was to break the scepter in half and toss aside the splintered pieces. He was unaware — but likely would not have cared after so long trapped in his burial mound — that the broken halves of the scepter could still serve as a blueprint for crafting another relic that could potentially defeat him. His only thought at the time was to escape back into the world he had been denied for so long.

Fortunately, the designers of Akruel's tomb feared that the death-priest might someday escape. They made sure to include instructions on how they created the *Scepter of Faiths* in case the warlord should ever escape.

The stone doors surrounding Akruel's tomb (Areas H2 through H9 in the following adventure) detail the eight temples that banded together to originally craft the *Scepter of Faiths*. Each door contains a snippet of the process to create the scepter from start to finish. The specific ritual required at each temple is also a part of the verse. Each ritual is further described at the end of each adventure.

It Started With a Chicken...

This adventure starts with a village's missing chickens and ends in a forgotten burial mound rife with reawakened undead. It is designed for characters of 1st to 3rd level.

The narrow dirt path broadens into an expanse of well-trod ground and dry saw grass. A collection of ramshackle buildings sits amid the cut stumps of the cleared forest. An inn – boards covering its windows and an iron chain dangling from its front door – is the largest structure. Houses built around the inn are barely more than one-room shacks, most falling down or ripped apart for their timber. Rising above it all on a gentle hillock, a small whitewashed church marks the scattered buildings as a town. The hill is strangely unnatural, the only such rise for miles around.

A few people shamble between the buildings, eyeing new arrivals as they go about their daily routines. All of the townsfolk are old, stooped by the weight of years of hard work and harder conditions. Their wrinkled faces are mixed with sweat, dust and tears; the visible marks of their long lives of toil.

Suddenly, an old man's voice rings out, shattering the silence: "That damned fox! It took another of mah chickens!"

Background

The village of **Lessef** sits alongside a dirt road connecting the cities of Storm Haven and Bargarsport. The small farming town is home to fewer than 25 people, a number that dwindles each year as the town's youth leave in search of adventure and wealth. The town struggles each year to survive by trading grain and livestock. No one wants to face the fact that the town's days are numbered.

A small, whitewashed church is the community's only landmark. Poverty's Bethel, a shrine to Freya, sits on a knoll overlooking the dilapidated town. The hill is the only peak for 20 miles in any direction in the flat farmland. The shrine is the lynchpin of the community, serving as a community center, temple and protection from the occasional dangers of the plains.

The three-room church sparkles against the sky, a glimmer of hope to those looking up from Lessef. A cemetery dating back hundreds of years surrounds the bethel, the broken monuments littering the hillside. A frail priest named Alмеры Burgand tends the church and its grounds. Alмеры arrived in Lessef 50 years ago and refuses to leave. He admits that the town's future looks bleak, but he's devoted to Freya and provides for the town's faithful as best as his deity allows.

Alмеры has two adopted children, Uliana and Jossan, whom he is raising to worship Freya. Their father left the children in the priest's care three years ago, but Alмеры has not heard from the man since. The children help maintain the church and grounds.

Alмеры welcomes all visitors, especially those needing help or those down on their luck. He offers free shelter, nourishment and healing within his meager means. All he asks is for guests to help with chores and return the kindness to others someday.

Adventure Background

Poverty's Bethel sits upon an ancient burial mound that covers the tomb of Akruel Rathamon. The burial mound's true purpose is disguised by centuries of erosion and the founding of the village and church atop it. The villagers of Lessef know nothing of the ancient evil buried in their midst, although they all know a massive battle once took place on the ground they now call home. At the moment,

however, they're too busy surviving to worry too much about it. The future is hard enough to get through; why worry about the past?

And it's getting tougher to survive now that one of their chief food supplies is mysteriously vanishing. Over the past week, a number of the town's chickens have disappeared. Farmers set guards and traps to capture the suspected fox, but they've had no luck so far stopping the cagey animal. Every couple of nights, more of their pheasants vanish.

Gerlach (Neutral human male Thief 2), a hired thug, is behind the missing poultry. **Rayne D'Anzeray** (Chaotic human male Magic-User 8) hired Gerlach and his men to excavate and guard an entrance into the side of the knoll opposite the town. Rayne and three followers disappeared into the mound three days ago, leaving the remaining thugs behind at the campsite. Quickly bored with guard duty and dry rations, Gerlach quietly ventured into Lessef to find fresh food. He captured a number of chickens and now dines on campfire pheasant each night. Gerlach carefully conceals his cooking fires from prying eyes. The boy Jossan, however, recently saw smoke coming from the forest on the north side of the knoll, but didn't think much of it. Jossan also claims that "the voices of the dead" sometimes drift up from the cemetery during the night. The sounds are actually the thugs' campsite revelry.

Poverty's Bethel and Lessef

Lessef (small village): 10-gp limit; Assets 50 gp; Population 25; human 100%.

Authority figure: Alмеры Burgand (human male Cleric 3).

Important characters: Scaby (human male, tavern proprietor); Jossan, (human male); Uliana (human female).

Locations in Lessef

The village of thirty buildings is a ghost town. Boarded and abandoned houses line the dirt streets. Shacks are weathered, dilapidated and beyond repair. Sturdy structures are now used as warehouses for straw and hay during the winter season. Ramshackle farms dot the town's outskirts. Only the tavern remains operational.

Lessef's central feature is a well that dries up each midsummer. The dusty area around the well serves as a town market. On an average day, two farmers display seasonal crops from pull carts. Most locals barter for goods, seeking to trade products, seed and livestock to survive.

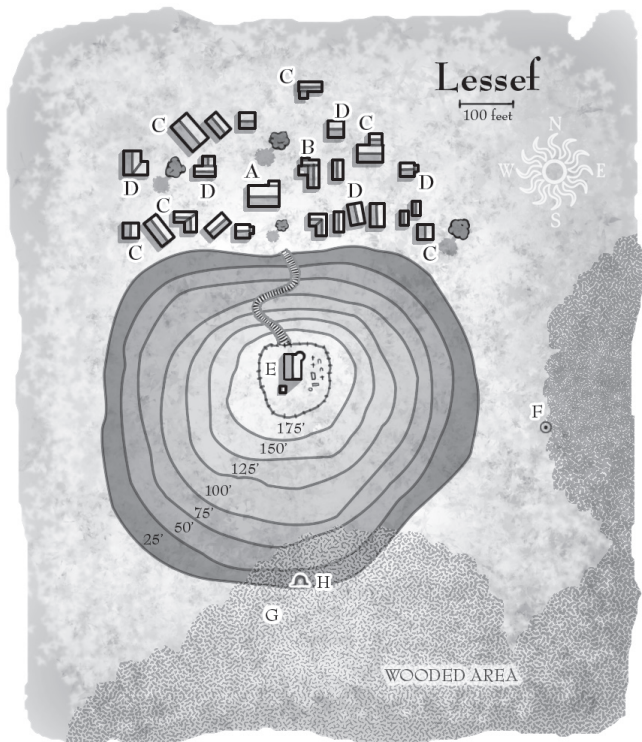
Lessef sits in the shadow of a knoll that rises sharply from the otherwise flat plains. The small wooden temple dedicated to Freya perches atop the low hill, its whitewashed walls gleaming defiantly above the poverty-stricken environment.

Area A: The Pebble

The Pebble is the only business surviving in the dwindling town. More aptly dubbed "Scaby's Shack," the one-room tavern serves cheap liquor to the disheartened locals. **Scaby** (Lawful human male) pawns off watered-down ale to those who can afford the drink (1 cp).

Scaby is not proud of making his living off Lessef's misery. He is a callous, little man with a permanent smirk plastered across his weathered face. He tends toward portliness, the only person in town who is not stick-thin. Scaby doesn't get along well with Alмеры

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Burgand. Scaby won't set foot in the church on the hill, even during the direst of emergencies.

The talk of the town in the small bar is of the vicious and cunning fox stealing the town's chickens. The fox has bypassed all traps set out for it, and no one has even caught a glimpse of the varmint. A reward of a bushel of potatoes and a jar of vinegar eggs is posted for trapping or killing the animal.

Area B: Imelda's Palace (Inn)

The five-room inn's windows are boarded up. The run-down building has been vacant for a year and was donated to the Temple of Freya after **Imelda** died of natural causes. A crude sign nailed to the door states that travelers are welcome to stay for a contribution to the temple. Almetry holds the key to the chain locking the front door.

Area C: Common House (Occupied)

These meager homes have one or two rooms. The majority of occupants are elderly. Residents eke out a living by maintaining small gardens and livestock.

Area D: Common House (Vacant)

The vacant houses are uninhabitable, the owners either long dead or long gone from the failing village. Neighbors occasionally dismantle the homes for firewood and fencing.

Area E: Poverty's Bethel

Location: Quiet farm community

Nickname: Bethel of Freya

Deity: Freya, goddess of fertility, prosperity, nature and rebirth

Leader: Almetry Burgand, the Benevolent (Lawful human male Cleric 3)

Servants: 2 initiates (adopted Lawful human children)

Dress: Almetry wears patchwork robes, heavily worn from use and age; the children wear simple robes or any other clothing they can scrounge and repair.

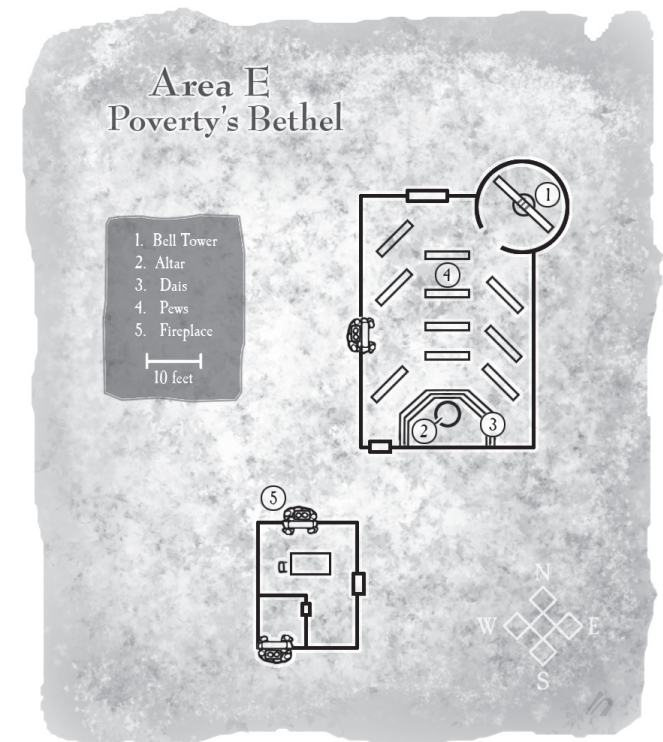
Unique Characteristic: Common shrine built atop a slab of stone warning of an ancient evil

A worn dirt path leads up the rise to the small church perched atop the knoll. Earthen steps carved into the mound have been ravaged by the elements, but are still useable. A well-kept cemetery surrounds the white chapel, and a low wooden fence keeps out the village's goats.

A small bell tower sits on the left side of the wooden church. The bell is rung for services, during special ceremonies and in case of emergencies.

Rows of pews facing a round altar of stone fill the airy worship chamber. A depression in the top of the narrow altar holds holy water. Large shuttered windows remain open at all times except during bad weather. A brick fireplace stands against one wall.

A separate parsonage — the largest house in Lessef — sits behind the bethel. The two-room house has a common room and a bedchamber for the children. Almetry sleeps on a mat in the corner of the main room.



Almetry Burgand (Lawful male human Cleric 3, Wis 18) has lived in Lessef and Poverty's Bethel for nearly 50 years. The elderly cleric deeply loves the town and the small shrine. A rare male priest of the female-dominated priesthood of Freya, Almetry passionately believes Freya eventually shall provide for the community. A wiry gentleman of indeterminate age, Almetry keeps what little hair he has tucked behind his oversized ears. During more prosperous times, believers filled his chapel. These days, he is lucky if half the citizens of Lessef attend. Almetry and his "children" live off meager food donations from the village. The children have renewed Almetry's hope and vigor.

At the moment, the fox plaguing the villagers troubles Almetry. He feels something is odd about the animal; too many chickens have gone missing recently, more than a fox would be capable of taking. Another disturbing fact is that none of the farmers has reported any

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blood or feathers left behind when one of the hens or roosters goes missing. Alмеры asks for help tracking the animal, even offering a *potion of cure light wounds* for anyone willing to help. He'd prefer that the wayward animal be trapped and removed peacefully, but understands if circumstances require otherwise.

Jossan (Lawful human male, 11 years old) and **Uliana** (Lawful human female, 9 years old) are Alмеры's adopted children. Three years ago, their down-on-his-luck father Ras Wald left them with a relative before traveling to find work in Bargarsport. Ras hoped to eventually bring the children to Bargarsport to live with him. When the relative died unexpectedly, however, Alмеры took the children in and raised them as his own. For the most part, Alмеры is the only parent the children have ever known, although Jossan carries a sketch of Ras and occasionally asks visitors if they've seen the man. The kids do a lot of the work around the temple grounds for the aging Alмеры. (See Area Q3-F in *Splinters of Faith 3: Culvert Operations* for more on Ras Wald.)

Alмеры collects items Lessef's farmers occasionally discover about the village while tilling their fields. Buried items found in the fields around the village include rusted weapons, tools to carve stone, mining implements and even ancient pieces of armor. Alмеры believes Lessef sits on an ancient battleground or military encampment. He keeps these items in the bethel's cellar and gladly shows them to visitors if they inquire into Lessef's history.

Alмеры is unaware that Poverty Bethel's very foundation is a warning from the past. He recently discovered "writing" beneath his broom after sweeping the floor, however, and readily shares this information. He likes to believe the message is "divine," mainly because his eyesight is now too poor to make out the words. Removing the years of packed dirt requires a good cleaning to read the entirety of the message. Jossan has also seen the letters and is trying his best to decipher the message to surprise Alмеры.

To view the slab, furniture and rugs must be moved and the slab scraped clean. Alмеры eagerly allows PCs to investigate the markings as long as they put everything back. He loves a good mystery.

When the slab is cleared, the cryptic prophecy written into the stone can be read. It is written in a familiar but ancient dialect:

"Take heed, for undying iniquity rests within these walls.
Upon this site the scepter of united faith fulfilled destiny.
The dread priest, Akruel, shall rule no longer.
We, the faiths of the world, place this stone
so none shall ever forget the bloodshed.
Take heed, lest evil awaken!"

Area F: Fox's Den

Adept trackers may find this innocent fox's burrow. Small prints are evident on the outskirts of town. The tracks never enter the village, however, as the fox is too spooked by the villagers. PCs who capture the fox gain the reward, but the pheasants continue disappearing.

FOX: HD 1; 6 hp; AC 6 [13]; Atk 1 bite (1d4); Save 17; Move 12; CL/XP 1/15 XP.

Area G: The Camp

The thugs' campsite is easy to find despite their efforts to hide it. The hideout is nestled amid excavated dirt and crushed stone. Footsteps in the dirt lead to and from Lessef, evidence of Gerlach's nightly visits to the town to steal the poultry. Twelve six-foot-tall stone blocks sit outside a tunnel that leads into the knoll upon which the bethel to Freya sits. The thugs used oxen to pull the stone blocks from the tomb.

Two oxen and a cart of mining tools sit nearby. Rayne's horse is tied to a tree. Chicken bones and refuse lie around a fire pit.

Guarding the tomb's entrance are **Gerlach and 4 thugs**. The thugs are strong, but dumb. The thugs believe they are helping loot an

undiscovered tomb, and have devised a plan to mug Rayne when he returns. They have been waiting for five days.

GERLACH (NEUTRAL MALE HUMAN THIEF): HD 2; 7 hp; AC 6 [13]; Atk short sword (1d6+1); Save 13; Move 12; CL/XP 2/30XP.

Combat Gear: leather armor, short sword

Other Gear: mining pick, shovel, crowbar, hammer, chisels, 100 ft rope, 9 sp, 6 gp.

Personality: Gerlach is short and brawny. From a distance he is often mistaken for a tall dwarf.

THUGS (NEUTRAL MALE HUMAN 4): HD 1; 4 hp; AC 7 [12]; Atk short sword (1d4+1); Save 17; Move 12; CL/XP 1/15 XP.

Combat Gear: crowbar (as club), padded armor

Other Gear: dice, mining pick, shovel, hammer, chisels, 100 ft rope, 4 sp, 3 gp.

Personality: These thugs are bored and tired of eating chicken.

Area H: Akruel's Tomb

Akruel's tomb is filled with the remnants of unspeakable evil. After being sealed inside the crypt by Shah Rasalt's men, many of Aurikus' followers tried to escape — only to find that Rasalt had further sealed them into the tomb by burying the entire structure under tons of dirt and stone. Eventually, fear, exhaustion, dehydration and hunger — not to mention vicious infighting that killed many worshippers — took its toll on the buried faithful of Aurikus. Still, some of the more powerful cultist eluded death, their anger transforming them into free-willed undead who remain trapped, awaiting release.

The barrel-vaulted corridors' ceilings are 12 feet high. The tombs have domed ceilings that reach 24 feet. The walls, floor and ceilings are made of cut limestone blocks seated perfectly atop one another. Gnarled bones litter the floors and deep scratches line the walls of each tomb, evidence of the desperate, but futile, attempts made by the cultists to escape.

A single iron brazier hanging on rusting iron chains dangles 15 feet above the floor in each room. Each brazier contains a *continual flame* that lights the chamber with a flickering sickly-green glow. Dust covers everything in a thick, gray layer.

In many rooms, Akruel's most-faithful followers recreated Aurikus' holy symbol — a skull set atop a femur — using the bodies of their dead and dying compatriots. These grisly icons still decorate many of the sealed tombs.

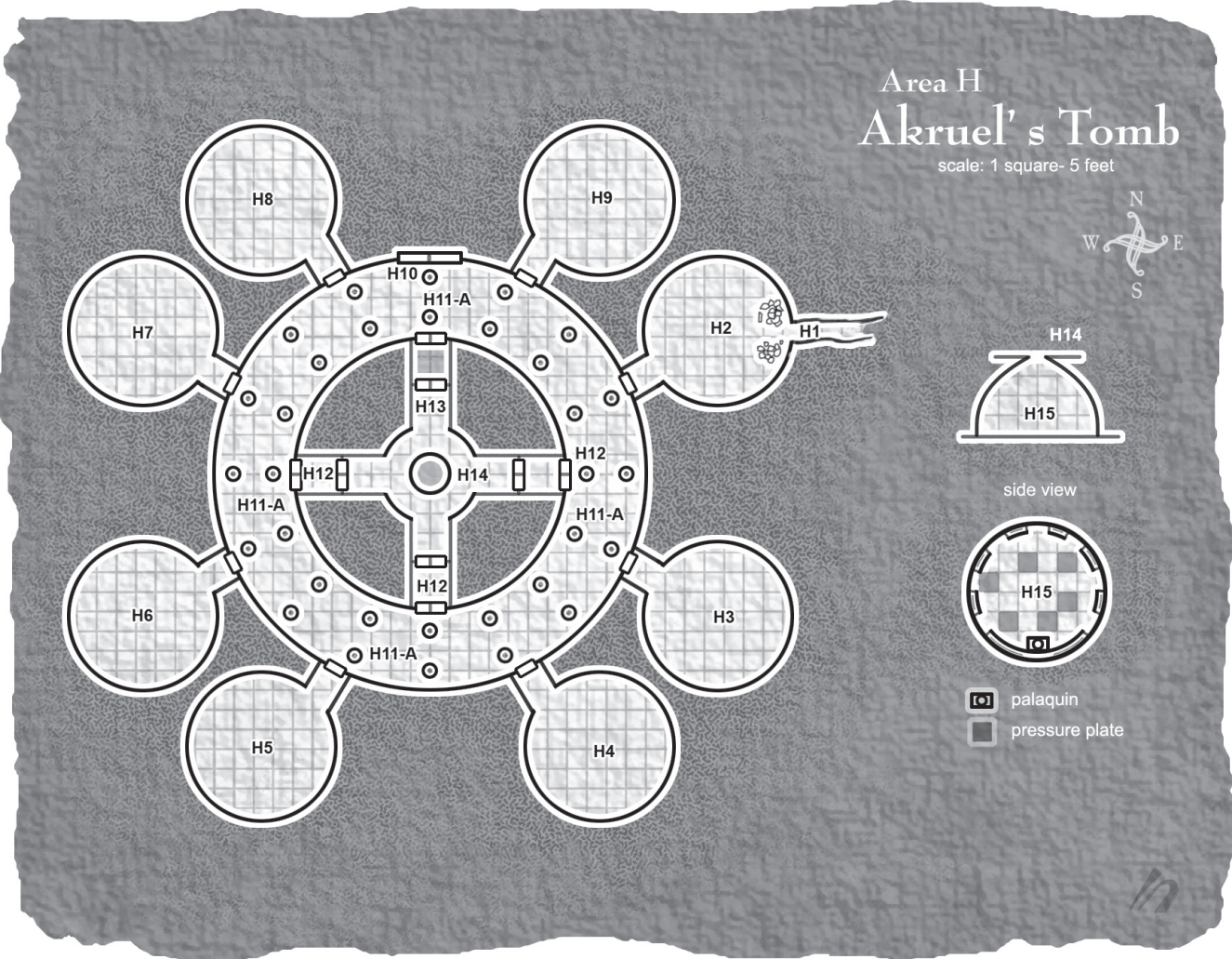
Area H1: Entrance Tunnel

The earthen tunnel descends at an angle through 50 feet of unstable dirt to a stone wall. Newly cut pine posts support the walls and ceiling of the entry tunnel. Split logs covered in thick grease line the floor. Rayne and his hirelings broke through the tomb's outer wall, then pulled the heavy stones out through the access tunnel using the makeshift fulcrums. Following the tunnel requires a Dexterity check to avoid falling because of the grease and unstable floor.

Rayne demolished one of the blocks, leaving behind mounds of crumbled stone. Stagnant air wafts up the passage from the empty tomb beyond the opening.

Area H2: The Empty Tomb

The tomb's door was forced open centuries ago and lies askew in the frame. Bits of bone fragments litter the room. The walls are decorated with skull and femur symbols of Aurikus crafted from real skulls and thighbones. The followers of Aurikus entombed in this room broke down the door and escaped into the hall before they turned on one another.



Area H3: Sealed Tomb

This stone door is still sealed, but badly battered. Bricks and other debris used to pound on the portal lies at the base of the door.

The skeletons of 50 worshippers of Aurikus are piled behind the door. The bones tumble harmlessly into the hall when the door is opened. The worshippers' tattered clothing bears the marks of a forgotten priesthood. The room is empty, but one of the deceased concealed a *potion of strength* before being buried alive. There is a 5% cumulative chance per hour of finding the potion, but characters must dig through the contorted skeletons of the worshippers.

Area H4: Opened Tomb

The metal bar for the stone door is split asunder and the door lies in two large pieces on the floor of the room. The door is scratched and scarred, but still legible. Akruel's followers who were entombed here escaped from the chamber into the hall long ago. The room is empty.

A lesser shadow lurks around the ceiling of this room, staying in the natural shadows from the brazier hanging in the room. The shadow is not confined to the room, and often moves about the hallway outside the chamber. It prefers to drop down on the last PC to pass beneath it. Any disturbance in the hallway brings the shadow to investigate. It is intelligent enough to know to wait until the PCs are engaged in other battles (with the zombies roaming the halls, for instance), before entering melee.

LESSER SHADOW: HD 1; 4 hp; AC 6 [13]; Atk 1 touch (1d4+Str drain); Save 17; Fly 18; CL/XP 3/60 XP. **Special:** Drains 1 Str with hit (if a victim is brought to a Strength of 0, he becomes a lesser shadow); partial incorporeal (50% chance to ignore damage from nonmagical silver weapons).

The Tome of Horrors by Necromancer Games, Page 228

Area H5: Fulcyst's Lair

The door to this foul-smelling chamber is open.

Fulcyst, an entombed subpriest, was an appallingly evil man. He was among the longest-living survivors buried in the tomb and existed by devouring the other priests' flesh. Finally, as he inhaled his last breath of stagnant air, Fulcyst pleaded with his dark lord for eternal life. Aurikus granted the wish, and Fulcyst's body wasted away in death, withering into a ghoul. With renewed strength, Fulcyst tracked and fed on the remaining survivors.

The necromancer Rayne made a pact with Fulcyst for safe passage. Fulcyst eagerly awaits Akruel's return and slays those who seek to interfere.

Fulcyst often sits on a throne of bone and dried flesh he crafted for himself after long years of boredom. The throne contains bits and pieces of entombed priests he devoured, as well as rats and other burrowing creatures that found their unfortunate way into the tomb. He fashioned a crude dais for the throne by forcing followers to drag unused stone blocks from other rooms.

FULCYST (CHAOTIC GHOUL CLERIC OF ORCUS 3): HD 3; 19 hp; AC 5 [14]; Atk bone club (1d4), 1 bite (1d4) or 2 claws (1d3), 1 bite (1d4); Save 13; Move 9; CL/XP 4/120 XP.

The Doors of Piety

Each of the stone doors (rooms H2 through H9) is inscribed with a description of the temple that helped defeat the dread Akruel, the required ceremony, plus a snippet of verse showing the order in which each ritual must be performed. The priests feared that one day Akruel might escape and that the knowledge would once again be needed. GMs may want to stress the elaborate carvings and words upon each door to draw attention to the blessings. The inscription on each door is written in an ancient dialect (DC 12 Linguistics or DC 9 bardic knowledge). PCs may very well stumble on the doors randomly, and have to construct the verse line by line.

The full instructions written on the eight doors for restoring the *Scepter of Faiths* read as follows, with a line-by-line breakdown immediately afterward:

“Forge first in Dargath’s fires,

Two kisses bestow by Ayianna’s daughter.

Bathe three drops of beauty on Iseleine’s spire,

Then shall Arden’s midday suns pour forth like water.

In the fifth hour of mourning, Voard’s humble tear tempers,

With the sixth strike of Muir’s grindstone, virtue is proffered.

Seven nights burn in Ninevah’s pool-like embers,

In the halls of eight disciplines, perfection freely offered.”

H2. **Anvil Plunge** (*Splinters of Faith 2: Burning Desires*): *Blessing of Joining Flame*; “Forge first in Dargath’s fires.”

H3. **Clandestine** (*Splinters of Faith 3: Culvert Operations*): *Guidance of Fate*, “Two kisses bestow by Ayianna’s daughter.”

H4. **The Hanging Gardens of Iseleine** (*Splinters of Faith 4: For Love of Chaos*): *Anointing of Perfection*; “Bathe three drops of beauty on Iseleine’s spire.”

H5. **Seraph** (*Splinters of Faith 5: Eclipse of the Hearth*): *Convocation of Radiance*; “Then shall Arden’s midday suns pour forth like water.”

H6. **Monastery of World Sundering** (*Splinters of Faith 6: Morning of Tears*): *Remembrance of Angst*; “In the fifth hour of mourning, Voard’s humble tear tempers.”

H7. **The Shield Basilica of Muir** (*Splinters of Faith 7: The Heir of Sin*): *Rite of Virtue*; “With the sixth strike of Muir’s grindstone, virtue is proffered.”

H8. **The Lady of the Searing Waters** (*Splinters of Faith 8: Pains of Scalded Glass*): *Consecration of Water*; “Seven nights burn in Ninevah’s pool-like embers.”

H9. **Theurgist Seminary of Thasizier** (*Splinters of Faith 9: Duel of Magic*): *Enchantment of Power*; “In the halls of eight disciplines, perfection freely offered.”

Each door is crafted from solid stone and set into its frame with rusted iron hinges. Metal bars on the outside further strengthen the portal. Not all of the doors have survived through the ages, but the inscriptions fortunately remain, even on the broken doors.

STONE DOORS: 4 in. thick; Hardness 8; hp 60; Break DC 28.

If used separately from the *Splinters of Faith* adventure, the doors communicate any clues the GM wants to place there to lead PCs to further dungeons or adventures.

Special: Immunities, paralysis, Spells 1—*cure light wounds* [reversed] (x2).

Combat Gear: Bone club

Other Gear: Tattered robes, unholy symbol, pouch with 3d6 iron bits

Personality: Fulcyst is loathsome, even for a ghoul. Dried black skin hangs from his frame like tight leather armor. His teeth form a sharp, bony ridge. Fulcyst places sharpened and carved bones under his taunt skin to create an inhuman appearance. Two large bones resembling horns adorn his skull. Although he understands Common, he only speaks in Abyssal.

Area H6: Sealed Tomb

The door is closed and unscathed. Al-Sifon’s most heinous war criminals were entombed within for their wicked crimes. As Shah Rasalt’s men closed the chamber’s doors, a bloodbath ensued as cultists fought one another for the right to “lead” the worshippers who survived. The last remaining cultist fashioned a throne from the dead and placed the others’ prostrated bodies around it. His body remains upright on the throne. He also placed Aurikus’ icon about the room: Femurs stand upright, with skulls facing outward wedged into the wall above them. Nothing else of interest remains.

Area H7: Ghoul Tomb

This bone-filled room is home to **2 ghouls**. They stand in the center of the room, swaying as they face one another. Sharpened bone shards have been driven into the floor seams, giving the chamber a frightening appearance. A few skulls set atop thighbones remain throughout the room, but the majority of the bone decorations are broken or splintered. The ghouls have been in the room so long that they leave only if pursuing PCs. They don’t venture out to investigate disturbances. If anyone or anything enters the room, however, the ghouls scramble through the bones in a frantic rush to get at the creature.

GHOUL (2): HD 2; 19 hp; AC 6 [13]; Atk 2 claws (1d3), 1 bite (1d4); Save 16; Move 9; CL/XP 3/60 XP. Special: Immunities, paralysis

Area H8: Zombie Bats and Rats

Desiccated rats flop about the floor of this room, while the ceiling ripples with thousands of undead bats. A priest driven mad by days of being buried alive animated the poor creatures to liven up his final moments. These unfortunate animal undead congregate in this room where they were created, but swarm intruders as soon as anyone enters. The creatures’ bones are so brittle from age that the poor things explode in a puff of bone dust if stepped upon or swatted out of the air.

ZOMBIE BAT SWARM: HD 3; 20 hp; AC 4 [15]; Atk swarm (1d6); Save 14; Move 6; CL/XP 1/60 XP.

ZOMBIE BAT SWARM: HD 3; 20 hp; AC 5 [14]; Atk swarm (1d6); Save 14; Move 6; CL/XP 1/60 XP.

Area H9: Gillespy the Tormented

The door has been broken open, but is shut. Gillespy, a ghoul at the bottom of the tomb’s undead pecking order, resides here. The other ghouls in the tomb ruthlessly beleaguer Gillespy by picking his flesh from his bones. Fulcyst keeps the ghoul alive with carefully applied negative energy spells so the other undead may use him as an object for their cruelty.

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GILLESPY (GHOUL): HD 2; 19 hp; AC 6 [13]; Atk 2 claws (1d3), 1 bite (1d4); Save 16; Move 9; CL/XP 3/60 XP.

Special: Immunities, paralysis

Other Gear: Gillespy hides an emerald worth 100 gp in his cranium.

Description: Gillespy is little more than a skeleton with bits of flesh clinging to his joints. His tongue remains attached so his grief-filled cries can echo throughout the tomb to the delight of the other ghouls. Gillespy gladly parleys with any who'll listen to his ranting, but turns against them at the first opportunity. Gillespy is not above leading PCs into fights to destroy the undead that continually antagonize him.

Area H10: The Original Entrance

This entrance once led to an opening in the west side of the knoll. The doorway is bricked over with blocks of limestone, and rock and dirt fill the passage. The solid stone blocks are scarred from repeated strikes by rock and bone.

Area H11: The Corridor

Pillars spaced 10 feet apart line the walls of this round, 20-foot-wide corridor. Bones and shreds of clothing, all layered with dust, cover the ground. Tracks lead in both directions.

A. A group of undead stands among the pillars, the 3 zombies swaying to an unheard rhythm.

ZOMBIES (3): HD 2; 13 hp; AC 8 [11]; Atk 1 strike (1d8); Save 16; Move 6; CL/XP 2/30 XP.

Special: Immune to sleep and charm

Area H12: The Iron Doors

These iron doors bear many scratches and dents, but haven't budged. A deadly poison once trapped the entrances, but its potency has declined over the years. A pressure plate in the center of the corridor releases the noxious gas. The inner doors have an internal lock that cannot be accessed from the corridor.

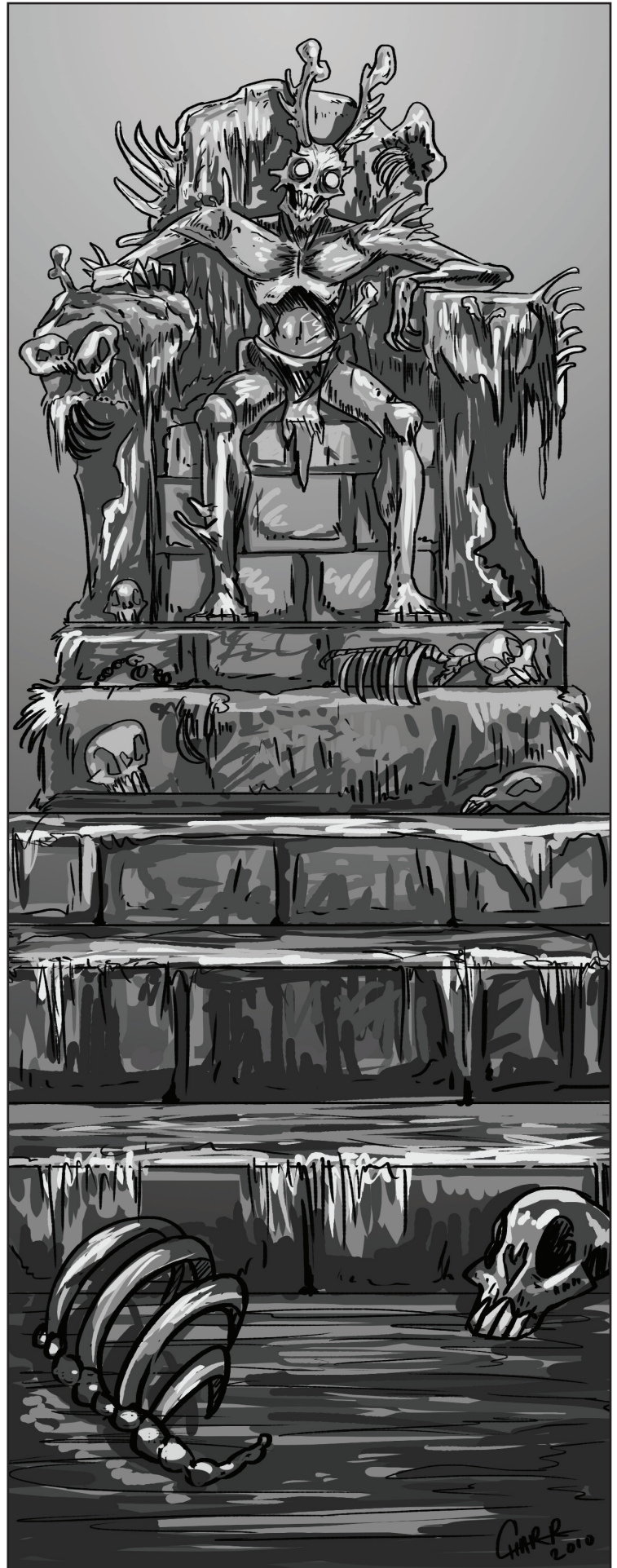
If the trap is triggered (2 in 6 chance), it releases a *stinking cloud* in a 10 ft. by 10 ft. cloud.

Area H13: Open Doors

These iron doors are open and a three-day-old corpse lies in the hallway. This poison gas trap — which remained potent — killed one of Rayne's henchmen when he stepped on the trigger plate. The henchman's leather armor remains on the body. It smells of almonds.

Area H14: Descending Chamber

Limestone blocks surround a five-foot-diameter lead plug. A three-foot hole has been melted through the center of the plug, and a hemp rope fastened to a piton in the wall hangs through the opening into the darkness below. The knotted rope drops 20 feet into Akruel's tomb. The room



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smells of smoke and stagnant water. Rayne and his remaining two companions used an alchemical fire to pierce the lead stopper and gain entrance.

Area H13: Akruel's Tomb

The walls of this 20-foot-tall domed room hold seven burial niches. Each niche contains the remains of Akruel's wives and offspring. Soft lead covers the smooth floor, walls and ceiling to prevent divination magic and magical entry. The opening in the ceiling is the room's only entrance and exit.

A thin layer of stagnant water covers the floor. The water is the remains of a water elemental Rayne and his men accidentally released as they entered the chamber. A henchman's soaked body lies sprawled on the floor, his head twisted backward on his neck. His backpack holds 50 feet of rope, a grappling hook, seven pitons, a hammer, thieves' tools, and a bag of dice and cards. The corpse holds a longsword and wears leather armor.

Pressure plates on the floor (2 in 6 chance to trigger the trap) release guardians that are tasked to slay any intruders into the tomb. Rayne and his men slew one of the guardians water elemental after the dead henchman triggered the trap, but 2 water elementals still remain. Hidden chambers in the upper portion of the knoll contain the trapped elementals. The chambers are accessible through six-inch pipes that connect to the outside. The room was designed to collect rainwater to sustain the elementals. But over time, the tubes became clogged and the huge elementals stagnated and evaporated to their current size. When a plate is stepped on, it opens a tube near the ceiling and releases the elemental.

An ornate palanquin sits atop a raised dais against one wall of the room. Ancient symbols to the vanquished sun god Arden decorate the palanquin. The palanquin glows with a soft, golden light like that of the sun at dawn. It was placed here by Shah Rasalt in the hope that the everlasting sunlight being emitted would eventually destroy Akruel's form. Unfortunately, that plan failed.

The naked body of a withered human corpse now sits slumped near the divan. Akruel drained the unfortunate henchman's lifeforce upon his restoration and borrowed the man's clothes. The corpse still carries a short sword. A belt pouch under the leather armor contains

25 gp. The splintered halves of the *Scepter of Faiths* lie near the body. The broken scepter radiates faint divination magic, and the broken pieces still glow from the presence of the tomb's undead.

Rayne animated the skeletons in the niches before leaving the tomb three days ago with Akruel. In the room are 7 unarmed skeletons that attack anyone entering the chamber.

Rayne and Akruel left no clue to their ultimate destination or how they escaped the tomb without being seen by Gerlach and the thugs waiting outside the burial mound. If PCs enter Akruel's tomb without dealing with Fulcyst, he waits at the top of the rope to attack as PCs exit.

SMALL WATER ELEMENTAL (2): HD 3; 18 hp; AC 3 [16]; Atk strike (1d8+2); Save 14; Move 6/18 (when swimming); CL/XP 3/60 XP.

SKELETONS (7): HD 1; 6 hp; AC 8 [11]; Atk strike (1d6); Save 17; Move 12; CL/XP 1/15 XP.

Special: Half damage piercing weapons

Concluding the Adventure

PCs should finish the adventure with the knowledge that they must proceed to Anvil Plunge to recraft the *Scepter of Faiths*. They may think to take the splintered halves of the original scepter, but these are not required to craft a new relic.

If the PCs are unsure where to go next, Almetry can help. He knows the location of Anvil Plunge from past pilgrimages, and suggests taking the broken scepter there to see if the dwarves remember the relic and can recreate it.

The villagers of Lessef welcome the adventurers back, and fulfill any promises that were made (assuming the PCs either disposed of the fox or can prove that the animal isn't responsible for the missing chickens).

The campaign to restore the *Scepter of Faiths* has just begun. In *Splinters of Faith 2: Burning Desires*, the PCs find themselves in the massive Sin Mire Swamp as they are forced to recover a missing dwarven artifact for the city of Anvil Plunge.

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