

# DESOLATE FUTURES

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*Outline for a fantasy-horror role-playing scenario  
from the [WebRPG Adventure Plots and Ideas](#) forum.*

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## Introduction

The following scenario presents the outline of a campaign in a fantasy-horror setting. It is intended for a party of 4-6 zero-level, youthful characters with only minimal skills and equipment. The heroes will have a single non-weapon proficiency and perhaps some slight ability with a poor weapon, such as a club or knife. There is no armor better than leather available, and useful weapons are limited to those converted from farm tools.

The campaign setting favors a party of apprentice fighters and thieves, as any clerics or wizards in the group will be at a grave handicap. Due to the events that preceded this campaign, the power of the gods in this world is gravely limited. Hence any cleric characters will only be able to cast a few weak spells at most, and will have difficulty turning undead. Likewise, most of the knowledge of spell casting has been suppressed, so wizards will be unlikely to know even a single useful spell.

Prior to starting this campaign, the GM will have some work to do. This scenario shows only the outline of the full adventure, and the GM will need to flesh out many details.

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## Background

During the great dark age, the civilizations of man were swept aside by the armies of evil, and the land came to be ruled by the dead. Most of the world was now a bleak place, occupied by tirelessly roving bands of undead, and ruled by powerful, evil overlords. The ancient lands are stripped of living things, and only barren, dust-swept plains survive in its place. A deep layer of ice now covers much of the globe, and the

cold, dry winds blow constantly across the empty landscape. Only a few hardy lichen and a handful of strange new insect species survive above the ground.

The pitiful few human survivors of this disaster now cling perilously to existence in the remaining redoubts of nature. The ancient sites of life force are ruled by the much loathed Vivimancers. These immortal beings draw upon the primal life energies of these sites for their experiments in life creation, and they have built an entire menagerie of strange, mutated monsters.

The evil hordes are held at bay by the intense life force of these redoubts, and by regular sacrifices to the undead overlords. Never forgetting their tormented past among the civilized nations, the Vivimancer tyrants rule their pockets of life with an iron hand, and will brook no arguments over their ruthless decisions. The pitiful inhabitants of the redoubts are kept illiterate and mostly ignorant of their past and ultimate doom.

Most of the undead dwell in necropolis', the remains of the once vibrant and glorious cities that existed before this shadow world came into being. Groups of human sacrifices are led as slaves to these cities, where they will be tormented and slain, to be raised as new dead to serve the evil overlords.

All hope is not lost, however, as a secret underground movement exists in many of the redoubts. The leaders of this movement are called the Sisters of Eternal Mercy, and their symbol is the ever-blossoming rose. This group was forged from the descendents of Paladins and White Witches of ancient times. However, they live a constant life of dread under the every watchful eyes of the Vivimancer Tyrants. Captured rebels are tormented by the mutant experiments of the Vivimancers, then sacrificed to the dread hordes of evil. Their fate in the land of the dead is a most unpleasant end indeed.

Much of the fate of this world was foretold by the ancient writings of a single seer of great power. It was written in his tome that a group of heroes, each bearing a lock of white hair, will rise to bring new hope to the world. The Vivimancers, however, also have copies of these ancient writings, and thus seek to examine each new born child for such a lock. The Sisters of Eternal Mercy have been trying their utmost to locate such children and to secure their lives in secret places.

Thus far, the Sisters have succeeded in only a few notable case. Such children almost inevitably grow up to become a serious threat to the Vivimancers. It would seem that these blessed children have some unusual powers that aid will them in their cause, possibly an inheritance from their magical forebearers. They are heavily infused with life force, giving them a bonus to resist life draining attacks of the undead. They are also resistant to the magics of the Vivimancers, giving them a bonus to their saving throw against vivimancery whenever they are inside an island of life.

Now, as was foretold, several of these blessed children have been born in one generation, and the Sisters have labored valiantly to bring them to maturity in utmost secrecy. Unfortunately, the Sisters are betrayed by one of their own when they bring the young heroes together, and the children are taken prisoner by the Vivimancer lord. The blessed ones are little more than teenage boys and girls with little in the way of useful skills. They have no understanding of the meaning of good and evil, and have little inkling of the key role they are about to play in the future of this world.

Cast of Characters	
Dranken	Ruler of the Necropolis
Elewin Transkiot	Young tracker from the hidden valley
Endolyn	Krepine's creation and apprentice
Geant	Treant friend to Robin Broadleaf
Krepine Wold	Vivimancer of the Geant Island
Laerisus	Baelnorn of Rosewood Manor
Lancel Turcot	Traitorous "Unclean One" guard
Robin Broadleaf	The Sleeping Druid Prophet
Roark the Deceiver	Dranken's undead wererat spymaster
Sword of Requite	Intelligent sword commands skeleton squad
Trisay Byervin	Member of Sisters of Eternal Mercy

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## Part I - The Living Dungeon

Held against their will inside the living dungeon of the Vivimancer, the chosen ones desperately plot their escape. They are aided in their efforts by one of the guards, who is seemingly an agent of the Sisters. After escaping their cell, they flee to the dangerous underwarrens of the dungeon. In these unpleasant surroundings, they have several encounters with mutant spawn which they barely manage to survive.

Desperate and short of food, they are discovered once more by the friendly guard called Lancel Turcot, who offers them a means of escape from the city. Following a confusing series of sewers, tunnels, side streets, and abandoned buildings, he leads them out of the live zone and into the death blight.

The chosen ones are unwittingly trapped inside a culvert by a horde of undead. At this point, the guard removes his disguise and reveals his true self as one of the "Unclean Ones", an undead skeleton that served as a framework for the Vivimancer experiments. He informs them that they have been selected by his powerful master for an important mission, and they can either agree to his task or be sacrificed to the dark gods.

As it turns out, the powerful master is an undead beholder known as Dranken. He describes a site of unspeakable evil that none of his forces have been able to breach. However, his most powerful rival has also grown interested in the place, and appears to be working on a means to enter. It has reason to believe that living beings can enter the place, which would allow his forces to follow. However, a special ritual must be performed before the undead forces can safely enter. The heroes are to reach the ring of stones, perform the ritual, then await the arrival of his forces.

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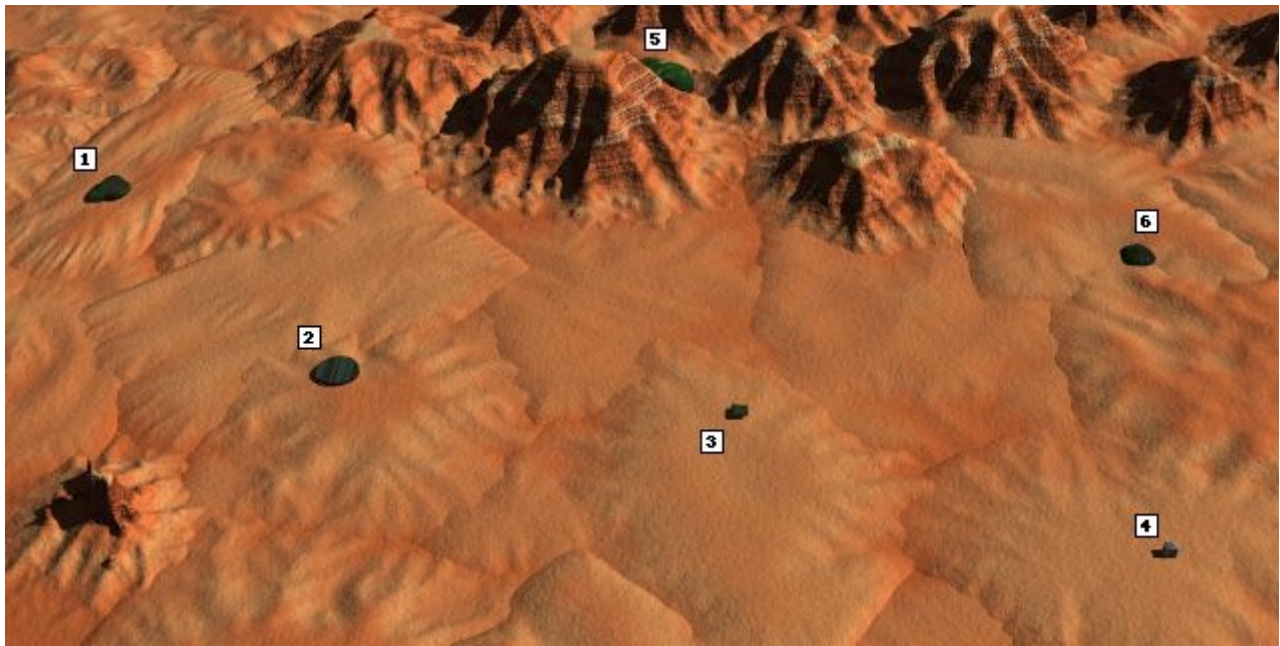


Figure 1. Campaign Map.

Key: 1) Vivimancer Prison; 2) Necropolis; 3) Stonehedge;  
4) Lost Castle; 5) Refuge; 6) Bioforge Sanctum.

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## Part II - Stonehedge

Prior to leaving the Necropolis, the heroes are carefully coached by Dranken to make certain they have the ritual memorized. He is extremely harsh to any member who fails to follow the procedure, having them flogged by the undead guards. When ready, the heroes are then escorted across the bleak lands by a sizeable undead contingent. Upon reaching the site, they discover that it has been invested by a horde of undead from Dranken's arch rival. To get within, therefore, the escort will serve as a suicidal distraction while the heroes enter through the back way.

Unfortunately, a few of the undead remain to guard the site even after the two undead groups are engaged. They will need to outwit or fight their way past these scattered guards before reaching the safety of the site. Once they make their way past the guards, they discover a Stone Henge-like site surrounded by a wall of roses. There is no other way in, so they must hack their way through into the middle.

The Stonehenge site is guarded by a ring of sacred roses that protect it from all undead and evil life forms. All who seek to enter the ring are instantly transported to another plane of existence. Only the chosen ones may safely enter. However, by hacking their way through the ring, the heroes will have opened the way for others to follow. They need to complete their ritual before the large undead horde can return from their fight.

It should be noted that the heroes are utterly ignorant of the true nature of good and evil, so they are unaware of the consequences of their actions in this ritual. It is only after they complete the rites that they begin to get a glimmer of the horrible act they have committed. All is not lost, however, as their actions have been foreseen and they will have the opportunity to rectify the situation.

**Ritual of Corruption:**

- 5 Human Skulls
- 5 Special Candles
- 1 Bag of Salt and Ash
- 1 Bag of Brimstone
- 4 Bottles of Unholy Water
- 1 Horn of a Goat
- 1 Scroll of Ritual Instructions
- 1 Bottle of Human Blood
- 1 Iron Hammer
- 1 Shovel

Begin with the skulls of five evil murderers. Arrange the skulls in a pentacle at the center of the ring of stones, with all facing outward. Create a closed line of brimstone between each of the skulls. Place a lit candle, rendered from the fat of a suitable sacrifice, atop each skull, then ignite the wicks.

Using flasks of unholy water, sprinkle every stone in the henge with a few drops of the evil substance. Speaking words of utmost evil, all now stand in the center of the pentacle and pour human blood onto the ground in each of the four compass directions. As an evil glow begins to permeate the place, continue to chant the dire words with hands linked and moving in a circle.

The sky above the site will grow dark, with an evil red glow along the horizon. Bolts of orange lightning will flash between the stones, sending shards of rock flying in all directions. Finally, the participants cut their palms with the horn of a goat, and use the drops of blood to douse the candle flames.

When the ritual of corruption is complete, a great wave of magical energy will be sent outward from the stones, possibly destroying the evil horde that waits outside the Stonehenge's barrier against evil. The place will have an unpleasant, darkened appearance thereafter. As a last step, the party must crush the skulls and bury them in the center of the stones, under a layer of salt and ash. This will seal the corruption against decay.

The wounds upon the palms of the participants will never truly heal until they restore the site, a sign that they have committed a truly monstrous act. Every time they commit an evil act thereafter, the wounds will drip blood and they will lose 1d3+1/level in hit points.

While digging into the earth to place the skull shards, the party also discovers an unusual piece of crystal. This bears some kind of message. (The heroes are all illiterate at this point.) On the back side is a simple symbol depicting a sword pointing downward that represents peace. As the characters will discover later, this piece of crystal, and the other matching chunks, are vital components of a powerful artifact.

At this point, the horde of undead have been obliterated by the explosion of energy, and the heroes are left to their own resources. However, they are now alone in a cold, bleak world with little food and plenty of threats. They will need to ponder the events

during the ritual; figure out what the symbols on the item mean; decide that it would be unwise to return to their new evil master; and figure out how to survive in the wilds.

To move things along, Dranken will begin actively seeking the heroes using undead flying spies and roving patrols. He wants to sacrifice them as pawns in retribution for the failure of a Vivimancer to supply his monthly allotment of living bodies. If the heroes get wise to the fact that they are being pursued (and they should get enough clues) then they will be hounded in the direction of a distant mountain range. Otherwise, they face a hopeless battle against waves of undead.

Along the way, they will have several opportunities to gather food and learn survival techniques. Food can be obtained from giant insects and toadstool caves, while water can be melted from ice patches. They will also need to fight off some minor undead scavengers. Some implements could be scavenged from the occasional ruins, although most iron will be rusted beyond recognition.

Once they reach the mountains and hope seems all but lost, they are discovered by a young tracker named Elewin Transkiot. When assured of their good intentions, she leads the group to a hidden valley containing a sanctum of life. Here they are fed, well treated, and given some essential training in combat and other skills. They will have several peaceful months in which to build friendships with the locals, and to gain their trust.

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## Part III - Lost Castle

With the help of the village elders, the heroes finally discover the meaning of the markings on the back of the blue crystal. It is part of a map and has directions leading to a location about a week's travel to the south. At this site is an old, abandoned castle that contains a crystal with the second part of the map. If the heroes have not already decided to do so, the elders encourage them to seek out this site, as it may hold the key to the survival of the sanctum.

<p>The intelligent sword "Requite" contains the spirit of a good-aligned felon tracker. It has several abilities, including concealment from some detect spells. In the hands of a typical fighter, it is a +1 weapon. But a valorous hero (with an alignment of "good") will gain the aid of the sword and it becomes +2 with some special abilities. The sword came into the possession of a skeleton, which it dominated and used to take over a squad of lesser undead. This squad has moved into the castle and is now using it as a base of operations to perform raids on evil forces. The sword also guards the altar mentioned below.</p>
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The skeleton commanded by the sword fights as a third-level warrior, and it commands the other skeletons in a clever and experienced manner. The young heroes can expect a difficult fight before they defeat the undead and obtain the sword.

Within the castle is an altar to one of the good deities of yore. However, the altar has been desecrated and is now haunted by the spirits of three former worshippers. To gain the second piece of the puzzle, the heroes must defeat the skeleton guards, then remedy an ancient injustice in order to restore the altar and lay the spirits to rest. The

bones of the skeletons must be given a proper burial or they will eventually re-animate and attack again.

The castle was the site of a last stand against the undead hordes in the vicinity. Within the sacred chambers beneath the castle, the surviving priests attempted to call forth the aid of the gods. However, the powers of the gods had been gravely weakened on this world, in part due to the lack of worshippers, but also because the evil one who travelled back in time somehow found a way to block the good gods from aiding the people. During the time of growing evil, the evil gods grew so powerful that they were able to block the portals that allowed the good and neutral gods to reach this world.

During the ritual that was intended to slay the besieging armies, the surviving priests gathered in the holy sanctum. They called upon their collective gods to save the forces of light from the encroaching darkness. Unfortunately there was a betrayer among them, a worshipper of the evil gods who used the dark arts to mask his true nature.

At a critical moment during the ritual, the betrayer, acting upon the instructions of his evil deity, attacked the high priest who was leading the ritual. With only a portion of the god energy invested in the crystal, the unleashed forces tore a hole into a realm of the spirit world. The betrayer, along with the ritual leader, was drawn body and soul into the rift. The remainder managed to avoid the tear, but their bodies were torn asunder by the negative energy forces.

In order to rectify this great evil, the heroes, as instructed by the surviving priest spirits, must enter the portal and retrieve the body of the evil priest. The energies in the crystal will serve to keep them alive during their brief journey, although they are not immune to undead attacks. Passing through the rift results in a brief, wrenching sensation.

Once through, the heroes stand in a garden that does not quite seem to exist. Wispy spirits of beings long dead wander through the garden, dressed as if enjoying a social picnic. Overhead the sky is the color of bone, and a black sun hangs in the sky. The air is an utter cold that penetrates to the bone, although standing in the shade of a tree seems to lessen this sensation. Each step the heroes take through the garden leaves a glowing footprint that emits a wisp of smoke. The pale grass in the foot print turns an ashen white.

It is at this point that the heroes hear some strangely muted yelling coming from atop a nearby hill. A pair of more substantial figures are beating each other bloody. They are surrounded by a ring of spirit beings that are threatening in appearance and seem to be slowly closing in on the pair.

When they approach the fighting duo, the heroes see that the threatening spirits are disturbed by their crystal stone and open a path for the party. However, they still continue to close on the combatants.

Time on the spirit plane does not really exist in the manner as on the mundane world. Hence, the two figures they see fighting are the same evil priest and the ritual leader who were drawn through the rift. When the evil priest views the heroes approaching, he will immediately shape shift into the same form as the ritual leader in order to confuse them. If the heroes separate the combatants, they have only a few minutes to sort out who is whom, as the dark, encircling spirits continue to gather and close.

Whichever priest the heroes choose to pull back to the rift, the other will be seen being dragged into the mists by a pack of howling spirits. (Unless they manage pull both back toward the rift, a difficult task with the dark spirits hounding their steps.) Once the body of a priest is brought out, it will crumble into dust as the aging of many centuries catches up.

If the good priest was brought through, the portal will immediately close and the god energy of the crystal will be released. A garden of roses and food-bearing plants and trees instantly bloom within the castle courtyard. This provides a source of life-sustaining nutrition for the characters. The roses provide a barrier to further undead intrusions, making this a safe haven.

Should only the evil priest be brought back, the characters now have a real problem. They will need to expend the energy in the crystal in order to rescue the good priest, but this will eliminate their sanctuary.

Before they pass to the great beyond, the spirits provide another clue that helps the party locate the second piece of crystal and decipher its message. As they fade from view, the priest spirits will wisper "bless you" to the heroes.

The four pieces of crystal that must be located by the chosen ones contain symbols of good. These represent peace, health, love and life, the opposites of the four great evils: war, pestilence, famine, and disease. The pieces are keys that fit into the stone door of a time vault. When assembled, they also display a map to the location of the vault.

At this point, the party will need to travel back to the isolated sanctum in order to improve their skills, as the next test will prove more difficult. Once there, they discover that several of the inhabitants have been killed by marauding bands of undead, and the valley is getting increasingly pressed from all sides. (Dranken tracked the heroes to this place and has been raiding at night for more sacrifices.) The heroes may attempt to aid the valley folk, but will soon be convinced that the fight is best served by solving the puzzle.

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## Part IV - Biowright Sanctum

The third piece is located within an island of life run by a particularly tyrannical Vivimancer. The island of life where the characters must enter is centered around a tree of immense stature and girth. This tree towers over the surrounding landscape and can be seen for days before the characters arrive.

The Vivimancer is a practitioner of the magic of life. This differs from the Druidic abilities in that a Vivimancer is skilled at the creation of new life and the alteration of existing beings into different forms. Their skills combine the arts of the churgeon, biologist, and geneticist, but employ the magical skills of a wizard, rather than the abilities of a scientist or technician.

He has some healing abilities, but these tend to take the form of a flesh graft from one creature to another, producing no net gain in hit points. However, he is also a



master of rejuvenation, so Vivimancers can stay alive for great lengths of time. In exchange for this endless life, however, the Vivimancer must draw upon the powers of other life forms to sustain his own body.

Before the great incursions of evil undead in centuries past, the Vivimancers were much loathed by civilized people. This was caused by the ability of the Magi to perform horrific acts to other life forms, such as altering a child within a mother's womb, or causing a dire pestilence. (While they can practice their trade in this manner, they were in fact more likely to attempt to repair a birth defect.) Another cause for dislike is the habit of Vivimancers of experimenting with microscopic creatures, which has sometimes resulted in highly contagious plagues.

The Vivimancers were driven from common society by church decree, and came to dwell in a few islands of life. Within these islands, the powers of the Vivimancers were greatly improved, and they could do almost as they willed to the life forms around them. They protected themselves with various mutated monsters, then set about to experiment with their arts inside their living homes. These dwellings pulse with a life of their own, and bleed green goo when injured. The doors of the dwelling are shaped like heart valves and can be commanded whom to let in and when.

It was within these life islands that the Vivimancers learned to control the life crystals and used them to alter Treants into giant, rooted, intelligent trees that could serve as a dwelling and an immortal companion. Around the great tree, they formed a fortress of life using mutated creatures and plants as obstacles to invaders. The tree is permeated by many natural cavities that serve as rooms, and the face of the old treant is now turned inward and rests within the great hall.

Over the centuries, the Vivimancers have replaced various portions of flesh and weakened organs with new copies. The result is a patchwork quilt that somewhat resembles the aliens on the Star Trek series that are suffering from the Phage. As a result, their Comeliness is down in the 2-4 range. However, their great life span has given them considerable knowledge to compensate for this loss.

Here are some typical Vivimancer abilities:

- Graft Flesh (transfer 1d8+1 hit points)
- Graft Limb (attach a limb to a new organism)
- Graft Organ (replace a defective organ)
- Pool of Slime (acidic pool of organic goo that can move and attack)
- Rejuvenation (recover from the effects of aging during sleep)
- Minute View (view very tiny features)
- Living Wall (a wall of living flesh is created)
- Mutate (Weaker form of Polymorph)
- Womb Transformation (modify a fetus)
- Numb (temporarily neutralize nerves in the skin)
- Disease (create a nasty new disease)
- Create "Unclean One" (cloak animation with a layer of flesh)

This cosy world of the hermit Vivimancers came to an abrupt change, however, as the incursions of undead swept aside the life forms that had ruled the world for millenia. The fleeing survivors earned the pity of the Vivimancers, enough at least so that some were allowed to enter the sanctums and take refuge. However, the

Magi long remembered how they were turned out from the civilized world, and now treated these poor innocents as so much chattel. They maintain a network of mutant beasts who control and spy upon the refugee offspring, bringing news to the Vivimancer of any plots in the making. As a result, most coups were crushed in the formative stage. Only the hidden mountain valley was able to successfully overthrow their Vivimancer Tyrant, and that was most likely the result of a fluke.

To keep out the encroaching hordes of undead, Vivimancers have formed various life-based defenses along the outskirts of the Sanctums. They have also forged deals with neighboring Evil Overlords to supply them with new livestock to be animated as undead in the Necropolis'.

This sanctuary of life is approximately sixteen kilometers in diameter, and is ringed by a dense wall of thorn trees that create an all but impermeable barrier to the undead hordes. Within the ring of trees is an area of swampy woodlands that is patrolled by Ogre-sized, half-animal half-plant creations known as the Sentinels. These have been specially bred by the vivimancer for this purpose. As they are imbued with life forces, these creations are nearly immune to the life-draining effects of undead.

In the center of the sanctuary, the ground rises to allow the rich, cultivated fields of the village of Biowright. Because the life energy is so strong here, bumper crops grow every two weeks, allowing a surplus population. The village buildings are made from mutant plants that grow all the walls and ceiling under the care of experienced building tenders. The other serfs are busy practicing other necessary life-based crafts, as skills such as smithing or carpentry are banned - or at least limited. All metal and rock items are banned within the village.

There are all manner of wierd plants and animals being used for various cottage industries. Some plants grow blades that are almost as tough as steel. These are used for ploughs, shearing wool, clearing fields, etc. Other plants pump water up from deep underground, leaving pitcher-shaped leaves filled with sweet water.

At the very center of the sanctuary, forming the home of the Vivimancer Krepine Wold, is the immense tree known as the Geant. At one time this tree was a treant, but the Vivimancer altered its basic form to such an extent that it is now immobilized and the huge trunk is now riddled with chambers and passages. Krepine keeps his laboratory and experiments within the Geant in these various chambers. The face of the Treant, now known as a Geant, is still present within the great hall about half way up the trunk. The Vivimancer uses this hall when he needs company, although the Geant is at best a reluctant companion to the mage.

Due to their isolation, the villagers have become heavily inbred and weakened genetically. They suffer from many ailments as a result, including albinism. However, this has allowed some members of the Chosen Ones to be born and raised in relative safety within the village, providing a source of help for the heroes when they arrive. The only means by which the Vivimancer can identify the "Chosen Ones" among the villagers is through their great measure of life force. He has thus grown extremely paranoid of the villagers, and uses extreme measures to maintain his hold on power.

To maintain absolute control over his dominion, the Vivimancer created a cult of worshippers who sought his favors, and used them to manage the worker peasants. These cultists tried to use their favored position to learn the secrets of the

Vivimancers, and some succeeded to a degree. The Vivimancer was forced to ruthlessly suppress these upstarts, and he created a small host of Homonoculi to spy on the cultists and the peasants, as well as to carry messages to the other life sanctuaries. These small creatures are created with a chemical dependency that only the Vivimancer can satisfy, so they are utterly loyal to their maker. As a result, most ruthlessly coups are detected and crushed in the formative stage. Only the hidden mountain valley was able to successfully overthrow their Vivimancer Tyrant, and that was most likely the result of a fluke.

A few of the cult of worshippers use their position to aid the poor and down-trodden, but many seek to profit by blackmailing the supplicants and threatening them with entry on "the list of the damned". These unfortunates are then turned over to the undead as sacrifices. As a result, the cultists are greatly feared and hated by the villagers.

The cultists have been heavily mutated so they appear like enhanced Mongrelmen, with some weird grafts. They have infiltrated every aspect of the life within the village, so they act more like party members in a communist state. The Vivimancer is normally too busy with his experiments to monitor the priesthood closely, so they usually have free reign within the village.

Despite the presence of the Geant, the cultists, and the peasants, Krepine Wold has grown lonely over the years. As a result, he has built a youthful companion that he created from the pure forces of life. As a result he is almost completely impervious to the draining attacks of the undead. His "son" Endolyn is as hideous in appearance as his "father", and is maintained purely by the Vivimancy arts. Unfortunately, it has taken all of Krepine's arts to keep the youth alive, and the lad is almost always sickly.

Located in a hidden chamber deep within the roots of the Geant is a Druid held in a state of stasis, awaiting the arrival of the "Chosen Ones". When the Vivimancer first grew to power within the domain of the sanctum, the young druid Robin Broadleaf grew suspicious of the Mage and hid within the root chamber created to house the crystal, seeking to study it - and got trapped inside. Affected partially by the magics of the crystal and of the spells put upon the treant, she has slept hidden inside, with the crystal, for all this time. But while her body sleeps, her mind has been very active.

The Giant Treant has been hiding the presence of the Druid from the Vivimancer for nearly a millennium, awaiting the time when heroes arrive to free it from an eternity of bondage. The body of the druid Robin Broadleaf has merged somewhat with the surrounding wood, allowing her to draw any required nutrients from the root system. Despite the extremely slow rate of metabolism required by the Druid, however, she has still aged considerably in the time she has been asleep. Her long, white locks are tangled with dirt, and her finger nails have grown to almost a meter in length.

The sleeping druid is magically able to project her spirit in the vicinity of the tree, allowing her to have some interaction with the village and the surrounds. She has become closely integrated with the life forms inside the zone, so she travels between various plants and animals through the astral plane. This allows her to observe the goings on without being too obtrusive. The villagers refer to this walking spirit as "The Sleeper", as it often acts much as a sleep-walker would. A legend, passed quietly by the peasants through the generations states: "All shall be free when the Sleeper Awakes!"

Once inside, the characters will start seeing some peculiar behavior on the part of the local life forms. They are getting subtle clues about where and how to proceed... "What's that rabbit doing hopping on one foot and spinning around?" It will provide some amusing moments for the GM as the heroes try to figure out what is going on.

At first the Sleeper would not recognize the heroes as members of the Chosen Ones, as the druid has been too long asleep to remember her true mission. The Druid is also suffering from identity awareness, since she has become so tightly integrated with her environment. As the characters begin to show their purpose through deeds, however, this spirit will grow increasingly helpful. Thus, a shrub may suddenly part in front of the characters and allow them to escape capture, or a tree branch could bend lower to allow them to climb a tree.

Direct entry into the island of life will be extremely difficult for the characters. First they will need to work their way through the thorn bushes and interlocking branches along the perimeter. Next, while slogging through the marshy ring of ground, they will be assaulted by the more mobile hybrid monsters. Finally, the Vivimancer will rally his defenses and launch an all out assault on the "Chosen Ones".

An alternative approach will present itself within a few days of their arrival outside the island. In order to ward his sanctuary from the greater undead, Krepine, like the other Vivimancers who survive in the world, has forged a truce with his evil neighbors. In exchange for periodically turning over a group of humans to the Evil Lords, the land is kept free of invasion by the undead hordes. These captives, however, are taken to the Necropolis' to be used as sport and eventually turned into undead. The ruthless Vivimancers have little remorse for these captives, as they allow the majority of the villagers to survive.

Near the island is an old, abandoned building that is used for turning over the sacrifices to the undead. There is a tunnel beneath the building that passes into the island of life. The characters will discover this entry during a dramatic moment when a large party of undead head toward the character's location near sanctum. Fortunately they will stop at the abandoned building to receive the captives.

The captive turnover is performed on the night of a full moon. The Vivimancer cultists round up the captives and drive them through the underground ways to an old, abandoned building located just outside the perimeter of the sanctum. From there, the victims are rounded up by their undead captors and driven off to the city.

A bit of a search through the ruins will reveal a hidden trap door leading below ground. The catacombs beneath the earth form a confusing passage and the characters will have a difficult time trying to locate the entrance into the island of life. A number of hazards exist here, primarily as a deterrent against undead and fleeing villagers.

Occasionally some of the sacrifices manage to escape these exchanges by secret ways along the underground tunnels. Many of these escapees are slain by the abominations that dwell beneath the earth, but a few manage to live by their wits. These survivors band together for mutual support and have built small sanctuaries of their own. They are supported in part by the Sisterhood, who use these survivors as an underground railroad of sorts to spare the lives of the occasional chosen one.

While wandering through the tunnels, however, the characters will be "fortunate" to

meet up with a member of the Sisters of Eternal Mercy known as Trisay Byervin. (It seems she was directed here by the spirit of the sleeping druid.) She will lead the heroes to a refuge where they will meet up with several refugees rescued by the sisters. Among this group are two more "Chosen Ones."

This underground railroad will become equally vital to the heroes after meeting the druid, as the final assault of the undead hordes upon the islands of sanctuary is about to begin. Once the characters have successfully taken possession of the third crystal and received training from the Druid, they will hear news that this attack is underway. The only way out of the besieged sanctum is through the secret ways known to the Sisterhood.

In order to gain access to the crystal, the characters need to pass a test to the satisfaction of the Geant - the test being to awaken the sleeping Druid. The Geant will drop hints for the characters once they become aware of its presence. They will need certain possessions of the Vivimancer to perform this task, so some sneaking around inside the tree passages will be required.

When the characters finally awaken the sleeping druid, she endeavors to teach the group something of their duty to save the world. She also grants the heroes a boon in the form of two magical items. These charged items will allow the heroes to change their forms and disguise their life force from undead.

Unfortunately the vivimancer has grown far too powerful to be overthrown, so she concentrates all of her remaining energy into transferring the life essence of herself and the Geant into the crystal fragment. The resulting memories implanted inside the crystal will prove important later when the characters have the opportunity to fulfill their chosen destiny.

News is received at this point that the undead hordes are beginning their final assault on the islands of life. The heroes are forced to flee before they become trapped in the island. Nobody is able to join the heroes on their quest as they are all engaged in this final, desperate struggle. Indeed, escape via the underwarrens is the only means out, and even that requires a tough struggle with the undead hordes.

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## Part V - Enter the Necropolis

Upon completion of this third step, the party will likely return to the valley. Upon arriving in the mountain pass, however, they are devastated to discover that the place has been sacked by undead hordes. This should be a truly wrenching moment for the characters, as all of their remaining friends from the enclave are either dead or doomed to undeath, and their final hope for a future is dashed. There were few left to tell the tale, although they did discover an old woman who survived by hiding in a cave. She related that the survivors had been chained up and led off by Death Knights. She also saw their leader, an undead beholder that bore a remarkable resemblance to their former evil overlord.

Meanwhile, the fourth piece of crystal is, unfortunately, hidden within the very city run by Dranken. With a bit of work, the heroes manage to finally solve the third map and discover that it indeed points to a location within the heart of Dranken's Necropolis. What remarkable coincidences brought these events together in the heart

of the city of the dead, the heroes are yet to discover. For now, however, they need to find a way back into the city without being discovered by their former master.

One possibility, aided by the disguise spell cast by the old priest, is to pose as inhabitants of the sacked valley. They must join one of the groups of sacrifices as they straggle into the city of the dead. The spell allows the heroes to appear as defenseless commoners, even while carrying their weapons and armor. The heroes will need to follow one of the groups of chained refugees. When a suitable moment arrives, they can sneak into the camp and join as slaves.

Once more the heroes draw close to the city of the dead. Shrouded by the perpetual cloud hanging overhead, the decaying city remains every bit as gloomy as during the last visit. A sensation of utter malevolence hangs about the place, perhaps more noticeable now as the heroes have come to know the true nature of good and evil. The following description can be read aloud to the players:

The utterly disheartened captives trudge slowly across the barren dirt, their dragging chains rattling with pitiful clinks as they draw close to the great gates. Overhead, the dark, foreboding cloud hangs low over the city, like a great omen of doom. Flaying the slaves with his cruel bone whip, the knight of darkness drives the wretched herd forward to their certain end.

Passing beneath the decaying wall, the humans quake in terror as they view the many victims impaled upon curved iron stakes, or hanging at the end of a noose. Dark stains running down the walls tell of the torment suffered by these victims before they mercifully passed beyond. Now only their bones and a few pitiful rags hang down as witness to their fate.

Within the heavy stone walls, the gloom from the low, dark cloud only adds to the great sense of oppression. The human captives stand in a shivering pack in the center of an old court awaiting their fate. Hideous ghouls strain against the wall of skeletal guards, their eyes locked on the living feast beyond. With a voice so hideous that it sends the humans into a moan of terror, the death knight orders the ghouls away, and the slaves are driven onto their final march.

Everywhere the captives glance within this city, they find only death and decay. Groups of walking corpses labor over many tasks, repairing crumbling walls or other, less comprehensible tasks. Every action of these groups is guided by beings of death so utterly vile that the humans are forced to shield their sight. The clanking footsteps of the slaves stir small clouds of choking white dust, the fine remains of the skeletal forms which dwell in this city of the dead.

This dark cloud has become an entity into itself, a manifestation of the horrific fate of all the life forms on this world. The cloud hides the daylight from the city, allowing any undead to safely wander the streets after sunrise. However, the cloud also pelts the place with black blobs of decay. This evil matter has run down into the sewers, where it has become an evil gloop that consumes both the living and the dead.

The city is broken up into several circular zones, each performing a particular function in the service of the overlord. The outermost ring is defensive, with scores of skeletons and badly rotting zombies ready to fight off any incursions by other evil

overlords.

The inner ring is the "administrative" center of the city, and has the best preserved undead ready to serve the needs of the overlord Dranken and his commanders. Many of these undead are maintained in near living condition by the necromantic arts. Dranken's spy-master Roark is one such well-preserved undead who is capable of passing himself off as a living being. Unfortunately, he was a Wererat when alive, and his flesh is sufficiently well preserved that he still suffers from this condition.

Dranken looks for those within his "tribute" for those with some skill he can use - musicians, furniture makers, jewelers, silversmiths, weaponsmiths, etc. When these and other artisans come back as undead, some measure of their skill dies with them. Hence he has elected to keep a few of these "special" slaves around for his use - or until he tires of them. These are kept within the walls of the palace, where they are relatively safe from marauding undead. However, many of these living "pets" of Dranken have become infected with Lycanthropy, courtesy of Roark.

The other rings within the city serve to hold and torment the living tributes provided by the Vivimancers, or as manufacturing centers for making military equipment. Work gangs of undead maintain the building walls in some semblance of their original state, cleaning up rubble and repairing the fallen walls. The streets between these zones are patrolled by squads of skeleton lords, zombies, and vampiric commanders. These groups are particularly drawn to living beings, so careful concealment is required for living creatures to wander the streets.

Each ruler of a Necropolis controls a special gem or crystal, which he uses to bind his creations to him - a greater one which is used to draw off most of the life essence for the undead lord to feed off of and to hold his power, and small chips (broken off of the main crystal) that are used to allow small groups and armies to venture forth away from the central crystal.

For an undead lord to defeat another, they must take the other lord's crystal and battle for control of the inner magic. The loser of this battle will be stripped of magic and suffer a complete mental breakdown. These deranged overlords are often kept in gaols within the ruling palace for the endless amusement of the victor.

The following locations within the city hold features of interest:

1. The Slave Pens

When the captives are led into the city, they are dragged into the "Pit of Despair" next to the coliseum. Each captive is collared, and each collar contains a small piece of the crystal. As each captive dies, the crystal removes the life force and transfers its own evil power back into the victim. The intended victims fight each other in the coliseum for the Undead lord's amusement. How well they fight is used to determine where they wind up.

The slaves are given rudimentary training in combat techniques by their Death Knight masters, if only to make the fights more interesting. To build their fighting spirits, they are told that after ten victories in these "contests", the survivors are allowed to live free within the palace. (Indeed, there are a few living survivors within the palace.)

Nine fights is fairly rare, but there have been a few gladiators that have lasted that long and usually seem to be able to win the tenth fight. However, at a critical moment, each seems to make a fatal mistake. The crystal within the collars controls some of the actions of the fighters, allowing Dranken to "fix" the fight by means of his greater crystal.

To watch the climactic fights in the coliseum, Dranken sits on his throne in the coliseum with the greater crystal safely concealed in the base of the throne. As luck would have it, the heroes are able to witness once of these culminating fights. The heroes, with their life force safely masked, are randomly selected along with a few zombies and skeletons to guard Drankens little chamber at the coliseum.

Since the crystal is the final key to their quest, they are able to feel its presence and power nearby. This pulsing energy, the result of generations of life forces drawn from the coliseum, forms the final and most vital component of a time artifact. Without this colossal energy, the artifact will be unable to perform its essential function of activating a hidden time gate. With all the heavy undead in the vicinity, however, obtaining the crystal by an all out assault, however, would be suicidal at this point.

Since the heroes were able to use the disguise magic provided by the priest to hide some of their weapons and armor, they will eventually be able to escape the arena. There is almost no hope of rescuing all the other survivors from the valley, although they may free one or two of the fittest prisoners to aid them in their cause. Once outside the Arena, the heroes will be alone inside a city of undead - all hungry for the taste of life force.

Fortunately, the druid had provided for this eventuality by giving each hero a bone necklace with a small skull engraved with an open rose. When worn about the neck, these devices will hide the life force of the hero from lesser undead, allowing them to move freely through the necropolis. Unfortunately, the heroes may occasionally be rounded up and pressed into work details by the skeletal lords.

## 2. Rosewood Manor

From the outside, this appears to be a mere shell of a building, with a collapsed Wizard's tower, a barren garden, and a ring of dead roses. This is actually an illusion created by Laerisus, a Baelnorn (LG Elven Liche) who makes the manor his home.

The ring of roses are enchanted with a necromantic spell that produces a narcoleptic effect on any undead, sending them into a deep sleep from which they never awaken. The manor is indeed a shell of its former self, although it is covered by a rich layer of ivy. (The entire manor grounds are protected from the raining gloom by a large force disk.) The Wizard's tower is still intact, however, and is protected by a Necrophidius, Crawling Claws, Dreads, and a few undead recovered from the grounds.

If the party is successfully able to reach Laerisus, he can aid them in several ways. The undead Elf can summon supplies and equipment, a few scrolls and



potions, and magical training for any Wizard's in the group. He is also familiar with the many writings of the ancients, and can answer many questions for the group. He will not, however, leave his tower to aid their cause. (But his familiar is able to travel through the city and send them news he has uncovered.)

### 3. Scriptorium Cellar

The cellar of this old scriptorium now houses a Bone Naga and a nest of undead serpents. The cellar contains a number of items considered of value to the former owners and the Naga guards the horde of knowledge against their return. Of course, most of the scrolls have decayed to dust, save for a couple of notes of historical interest. They may also find a useful scroll.

### 4. Abandoned Temple

This old Temple is home to several Berserker Spectral Minions. These are the ghosts of the guards who were charged by their god with protecting the site. They have quite lost their minds and now attack anything that enters the sacred grounds. Priests in the group will find a useful item or two hidden within the defiled altar.

### 5. Royal Mausoleum

The royal mausoleum is guarded by a Crypt Thing, created as a last, desperate measure to protect the royal remains from being animated. He controls several squads of skeleton guards to protect any intruders he teleports inside. The tombs have long since been plundered by powerful undead, although there is one well-hidden tomb of interest within the catacombs...

### 6. Sewer Grating

During one flight from a more powerful undead patrol, the heroes are forced down a dead end alley. When it looks like the end is imminent, a sewer grate opens up and a voice shouts to them "Come on, this way!!"

Into the sewers they go. They meet their rescuer who is covered head to toe in sewer slime and mud. He leads them through a labyrinth of tunnels and to a large chamber which serves as the living area for the few lucky refugees. Somewhere along the trip a drain opens up, getting the players soaking wet but, more importantly, washing a little dirt off of their mysterious leader to reveal..... WHITE HAIR!! Just like their own.

He is, of course, the leader of the small band of refugees but he has no knowledge of any "prophecy" that he is a part of. He does, however, know a lot about the inner workings of the city, including where Dranken keeps the crystal while he sleeps and even a secret way into the chamber with it, avoiding some of the guards. The only drawback to this secret entrance is that it goes right past the lair of the "devourer" (the slime monster that is made out of concentrated evil globs.)

Unfortunately, most of the refugees are old and crippled from their constant battles with the "devourer" in the sewers. However, they are healthy enough for

a suicidal attack on the palace while the young heroes go after the crystal. This would buy the party the time they need to get past the traps in the inner sanctum.

The sewer survivors are also able to supply the starving party with food stuffs and replace lost equipment with supplies salvaged from the city. They may even have a magic item or two...

## 7. Palace

Dranken, the undead beholder overlord, has cleverly arranged a false crystal trap designed to draw in his opponents. Anybody attempting to capture this fake crystal is liable to be killed or captured by the traps and guards. Meanwhile, he stores his primary crystal in a well hidden chamber beneath his inner sanctum.

Life within the city of the dead will be especially difficult for the characters. They will need to live by their wits from moment to moment, seeking to avoid the more powerful undead who could see through their disguise. There will also be the problem of lack of food and safe hiding places, plus poor sleep brought on by nightmares due to the negative energy in this place. The wounds suffered when the characters performed the Ritual of Corruption will turn into seeping sores.

While the characters are wandering through the streets of the Necropolis, use the following tables to generate random encounters:

### **1d100 Necropolis Encounter**

01-20	Patrol zombies* lead by a Ghast
21	Lich and a Flesh Golem
22-29	Skeleton guards with Penanggalan Leader
30	Death knight on undead horse with Skeleton knights on undead horses
31-36	Slaves with Sons of Kyuss Guards
37	Undead entertainer trying to get money by juggling small painted skulls
38	Undead cat and dog chase each other around the PCs
39-48	Undead guards march down the street
49-53	Undead horses drag undead in cages to the arena for disposal guarded by ghastrs and zombies* with a Skeleton knight leading
54	A man with no hair runs past the PCs
55-61	Patrol of skeletons lead by a ghastr
62	A Skeleton with out a head stumbles into the PCs
63-70	A group of undead merchants tries to sell something
71	Two Flesh Golems carry a coach past them and a piece of paper is thrown from inside the coach and lands next to the PCs
72-74	Some bone golems push a catapult past lead by a ghastr
75	A undead bumps into a PC and tries it steal something

- 76 A "band" of deranged skeletons wearing thread-bare kilts marches down the street attempting to play various broken musical instruments, including three bagpipes. They make no sound whatsoever, but any undead in the vicinity flee in obvious pain with their hands held over their ears...
- 77 A group of skeletons is buried under a pile of rubble from a collapsed wall or ceiling. Only their limbs project out from the pile, scraping futilely at the various rocks which hold them down.
- 78-83 A sudden strong gust of wind stirs one of the omnipresent piles of bone dust, creating a cloud of white powder that functions much like a Choking Cloud spell. Unfortunately, this bone powder will also disable the life masking magic for 1 turn, drawing any predatory undead in the vicinity.
- 85 A drunken undead tries to pick up a party member... and tries to take her back to his place for another drink, etc. (Use a female skeleton for a largely male party.)
- 86 An obviously intoxicated undead wanders up to one of the party members, places an arm around them and begins telling their death story.
- 86-90 With the influx of new life-energy into the crystal, all the nearby undead are affected, getting almost drunk - the closer to the Coliseum, the stonger the effects. To add to the effect, the clouds overhead can darken and rumble, then later spit out more globs of gloop. However, the intoxication effect has diminishing effect on higher-level undead, otherwise the city would be unguarded and vulnerable to invasion whenever there is a death.
- 91 A kid, alone and desparate within the city, is spotted by the characters. The name of the kid is "Toad", the sole surviving member of the fey races, allowing him some magical abilities that have kept him alive in this city of the dead. He barely stays alive by stealing food from the two areas with live humans (the Arena and the Palace) and has come to know some underground paths fairly well. However, Toad has not yet joined up with the other group of chosen ones that live in the sewers, perhaps because he thinks they are merely well-preserved undead. Toad may also sense that a good mage lives somewhere in the city, having met and played with Laerisus' unusual Faerie Dragon familiar. However, he does not know where the mage lives.
- 92-00 Roll twice and combine encounters

### **1d10 \*Zombie Reaction**

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- 1 Blank, idiotic Stare
- 2 Fixed Stare
- 3 Cold Stare
- 4 Emotionless Stare
- 5 Wandering Stare
- 6 Gawking Stare
- 7 Dazed Stare
- 8 Vacant Stare
- 9 Love Struck Stare
- 0 Mindless, cold-blooded Stare

The "Unclean One" who freed the heroes from the gaol of the Vivimancer, only to

have them captured by Dranken, has since been promoted for his "good" works and is now one of the overlord's minor functionaries. As the Death Knights do not trust this upstart, they have been plotting for his ultimate demise. As a result, the "Unclean One" has developed a strong incentive to overthrow Dranken and seize control of the crystal for himself.

Since their successful corruption of the Stonehenge, the "Unclean One" has been watching the progress of the party with more than a little interest. He believes the heroes could be useful in his plots, and so has been careful not to reveal their presence within the city to Dranken or his Lieutenants. Of course, the heroes would be unlikely to trust this two-faced creature, so he must time his approach with care.

The "Unclean One" will also want to enlist the aid of all of the living in the city in this plot. Since he can nearly pass as a living being then he would be allowed to pass through the refugee camps in the sewers and try to convince them to join in his plots.

It is his plan to sneak into the inner sanctum and, with the aid of the heroes, find the location of the crystal. As he knows the crystal is the same one that the party seeks, the acquisition of the stone by the heroes will eliminate Dranken's source of power and give him the opportunity to seize control of the city.

The Undead Were-Rat Spy Master, Roark the Deceiver, lost favor with Dranken when the "Unclean One", Lancel Turcot, was able to procure the heroes from the Vivimancer city. As a result, he has been actively spying on Lancel in hopes of tripping him up and regaining his lost status. He is unaware that the heroes are back in the city, but does discover Lancel sneaking around the Inner Sanctum, trying to find a way into the Crystal room. He decides to facilitate the activities of Lancel, knowing that he will find favor with Dranken later when he unveils the betrayal.

As luck would have it, the large piece of crystal that Dranken uses to contain his evil power is also the fourth piece of the quest that the heroes are trying to complete. Hence, they will need to find a means to enter the palace and find the crystal within Dranken's inner sanctum. As the grounds are home to some of the more powerful undead within the city, this task is not going to be easy.

There are three entrances to the Inner Sanctum. The western entry is the most accessible to the characters, so they are most likely to enter from this side. To the north is a second entrance from Dranken's upper quarters. Finally, there is a concealed exit to the east that has been prepared by Dranken so that he can make an escape if the city is invaded. If the heroes later escape by this secret passage, Roark will be waiting outside to finish them off.

The crystal is located on an island in a pool of undead sharks. The chamber is also guarded by giant skeletons and a trap or two. To reach the island requires crossing by means of some stone pillars, some of which are illusionary. The key to obtaining the final piece is "truth". The heroes will need to use this key in order to gain access to the sanctum, win their way past the defenses, and gain control of the crystal.

Once they have done so, the four pieces float together in mid air, forming a map that points to the very Stonehedge site that they had earlier corrupted! However, Dranken, Roark, and his other cronies break in at this point through the north entrance and force the heroes to flee. They have time to gather the pieces of crystal from mid-air, but find that an after-image of the map remains. It is now a race against time to reach

the stonehedge before the evil overlord.

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## Part VI - Catacombs

The world of the characters is slowly coming to an end now, and they see groups of fleeing men and women from the overrun life zones. All are being relentlessly pursued by large groups of undead. The heroes are also in a chase, both to reach the site before Dranken and to flee a huge horde of relentless, unsleeping pursuers.

Once at the site, the heroes have a battle with an advanced guard of Dranken's flying undead. After fighting off these beasts, they follow the instructions of the dead priest and restore some of the powers of the site by cleansing the place of the ritual artifacts. This momentarily blocks further intrusions by the weaker undead while the heroes find the entry into the catacombs beneath. With the curse lifted, the palms of the characters no longer seep blood and they can now begin to heal.

The catacombs were constructed a millenium in the past to preserve ancient knowledge and life forms into a distant age when they can once again be released into the world. The architects of this tomb of time is a race of peaceful, benevolent Ogre who foresaw the coming age of evil and decided to become the guardians of the future.

Deep within the catacombs is a time gate that creates a time warp in its immediate vicinity. This warp has the effect of slowing the flow of time in the proximity of the pool, a perfect environment for preserving fragile knowledge and life forms for a future age. As a result, for each level downward within the catacombs, the rate of time flow is halved. This time slowing can be detected by several means. First, the murals on the top level are faded with time, while those lower down look in better shape. There is also a difference in pitch when talking to somebody at a different heights or levels on a stair case. Finally, rocks dropped down a shaft will almost appear to slow down as they descend.

The catacombs are also filled with traps, distractions, false passages, hidden doorways, and ageless guards such as golems. These are intended to hinder and destroy any undead who penetrate the entry, so they are generally less effective against living beings. Those of a good nature will be aided by clues that only they can unravel. Nevertheless, there remain many hazards for the heroes.

Beneath the lowest levels of the labyrinth are huge caves stocked with tanks that hold samples of each species in time stasis. To amuse themselves during their guardian duties the Ogre occasionally take out a few of these creatures and let them carouse about on the various levels. Some of these creatures have proven difficult to put back in their cell, so there are a few random monsters in various niches about the labyrinth. These will come as a suprise to the characters, since they have never seen their like before.

The many chambers on each level also contain various treasures, sample goods, beverages, artifacts, models, animated illusions, books, and museum settings designed to pass the knowledge of the ancient times into the future. Also located on each level is a garden chamber that serves as a rest stop for the Ogre Guardians. This garden contains various edible plants and flowing pools of water for refreshment.

They also contain rose bushes which serve as a barrier to lesser undead.

Elsewhere on each level is a hole that emits an odd-smelling odor. This hole descends about 20 feet into darkness, and is intended to serve as a latrine where the Ogre can relieve themselves. The hole descends down to the next garden room.

The catacombs are nine levels deep, with ceilings, doors, and other openings much taller than the players, making the place appear to be designed for giant beings. The walls are carved from sandstone and slope inward slightly, making the ceiling smaller than the floor. Openings are Inca-style, and the doors are well-balanced slabs of ageless Granite. The floors are covered in random tiles of basalt and granite, which are in turn covered in places by deposits of sand from the walls and ceiling. Spells of detection will completely fail in this place, helping the heroes to hide from the evil overlord. The levels are organized as follows:

1. The top level has the quickest rate of time flow within the structure, so it is designed to store items that do not age rapidly. Here are stored various statues, ceramics, crystals, and other stone pieces. The corridor walls are decorated by tile mosaics and bas relief carvings. The garden room on this level has been abandoned and the plant life has run wild. Several sprites, brownies, or faerie dragons have taken up residence here, and they have gone a long time without pulling a favorite prank on a human.

The floor is dusty with sand up here, showing various footprints from creatures that have escaped from the Ogre Guardians and multiplied within the many chambers. These include various giant insects, carrion crawlers, gelatinous cubes, and so on, but absolutely no undead beings. Only a few magical traps remain untriggered by these wandering beasts, although there are a number of obstacles that are difficult to bypass such as steel trip wires, openings in the floor, and so on. The heroes will discover triggered traps as they explore the catacombs, along with the skeleton of the slain creatures.

### **Lamprey Trap**

The players walk through a door which vanishes behind them. They are now in a small room with two doors leading out. One door goes right back to where they started. Inside the other door the players will see a large, open chest on the floor filled with (illusionary) gold coins. When they attempt to pass this door, six land lampreys will fly out at them and the door will magically slam shut. No matter how many times they open the door the lampreys will still be there and the door will still shut.

### **Descending Ceiling**

The ceiling along this corridor slopes downward until it leaves an opening 1.5' in height. Beyond the ceiling immediately rises to normal height. A row of spikes project downward from the low point, making it look like a trap. In reality this is merely an obstacle and the vulnerable character is attacked by an animation when attempting to crawl beneath the low ceiling.

### **Wall of Magical Flames**

A barrier of intense flames blocks this corridor. The flames seem to emit heat, but it has no effect on living creatures. All the characters' equipment can burn, however, so the heroes will need to toss their goods to the other side and pass through naked. Any undead who pass through the flames are vaporized, unless they can protect themselves with magic.

2. The second level continues the various stone exhibits found on the first level. The flow of time is much slower here than on the surface, so the floor and other surfaces are less dusty, and there are fewer signs of aging. The garden room is rarely occupied at this level, so the heroes are unlikely to run into an Ogre Guardian. However, the plant life is better maintained.

### **Diamond Trap**

Along this hallway the heroes sight the largest diamond any of them has every seen. If they touch the diamond, which is actually an illusion and can't be moved from the pedestal, a bone demon will materialize behind them and attack. This demon is actually a vivid illusion, but the heroes are unlikely to know of such magic and thus can be harmed.

### **Pool Trap**

A pool room has four exits that slope upward. The floor is covered by a foot of water. Several statues stand on pedestals in the pool. Each statue has an arm that will pivot and a metal implement makes contact with the water. The room floor is studded with copper knobs. Each exit has a porticullis that can be raised or lowered by combinations of the arms making contact with the water. Unfortunately, doing so with certain arms completes a circuit and any characters in the water are shocked. The heroes will need to solve a riddle on each statue to determine if it is trapped or not.

3. The third level contains the collection of relics made from pure iron, steel, and other metals. There are museum chambers with all manner of metal weapons and armor, which the heroes can choose to equip themselves. Note that they may be inexperienced in the use of such items. However, there are exhibits and animated illusions that demonstrate their use.

The traps on this level are still primarily magical in nature, although a few well-built mechanical traps are in evidence. Fewer wandering creatures have escaped on this level, so most of the traps are active. The garden room is regularly visited on this level, and is well maintained.

**Spiral Trap**

A narrow spiral staircase winds around a column in an open chamber. While descending the steps, the vulnerable characters are attacked by flying guardians. The bottom rungs of the staircase are missing, so the characters who attempt to flee downward find themselves trapped unless they fall 20'. Meanwhile, the top rungs begin to fold into the pillar one by one, slowly but methodically closing the other escape route.

**False Trap**

This structure appears to be a trap that houses a giant round boulder. There are tracks along the walls and a groove in the floor, with a spike-lined pit trap at the end of the corridor. By this point the characters should be a bit spooked by all the traps, so they are likely to avoid this passage.

4. By the fourth level, the flow of time is sufficiently slow that more vulnerable materials can be stored. Hence, this level is used to store and display exhibits made of wood, reed, and ivory. Many hybrid tools are on display, including an amazing assortment of pole weapons.

The traps at this level are primarily mechanical in nature and show signs of regular maintenance. Likewise, the obstacles are more devious and cunning at this level. There are secret passages in strategic locations, along with spy holes. The heroes will find it increasingly difficult to find the way down to the next location from here onward.

It is here where the heroes are most likely to be first spotted by an Ogre Guardian, who will carefully monitor their behavior to determine if they are peaceful and friendly. He is likely to be offended if the heroes have tampered with the exhibits by stealing armor and weapons.

5. The time flow on the fifth floor is sufficiently slow that even fragile art such as paintings, tapestries, and cloth work can be stored and displayed. Many of the exhibits at this level display scenes of life as it existed prior to the destruction of civilization by the undead hordes. The heroes can use these models to gain some information and clues about the place where they will be heading through the time portal.

As always there are obstacles and traps at this level, although the traps are entirely mechanical and more finely tuned than before. It is also at this level where they are likely to meet with an Ogre welcoming party. The attitude of this party will be heavily weighted by the previous behavior of the heroes within the catacombs. If the party has been malicious and destructive, most likely the Ogre will be openly hostile and demand that the heroes leave. Should one of the Ogre be slain, then they will depart for the lower levels in order to gather reinforcements for a counter-attack.

Due to the tremendous number of years that the Ogre have protected the catacombs, their tongue has become very outdated. They speak in a dialect that



should be difficult for the heroes to understand. However, they do have suitable spells of magic to alleviate this problem.

6. If the heroes have played their cards right, they will be escorted down through this level toward the time gate by the Ogre. They may even be given a guided tour of the exhibits by the guardians. This sixth floor continues the display of the art work from the fifth floor. There are frescoes on the walls that have been painstakingly transferred from sites around the world.
7. On the seventh level is the upper floor of the great library. Here is stored all the knowledge of the past, or as least as much as the Ogre were able to gather during the last years before the great cataclysm. Invisible stalkers are used here to guard the hallways, and deadly toxin traps and anti-undead devices ward the access ways.
8. The eighth level continues the great library. Also located here are reading rooms and study areas for the Ogre Guardians. This floor is heavily used by the Ogre, and is well maintained. Few traps are in evidence as the Ogre do not want themselves accidentally triggering the protective devices. Those that do function are usually made with creatures that have been conditioned no to attack the Ogre guards.
9. The final level is where the liquids and other volatiles are stored. This is also the location of the great time pool, so time is flowing at its slowest at this level. The main quarters of the Ogre are here, along with the tunnels leading off to the stasis chambers of the various creatures and plants. Many living things in a zoo-like setting.

Once the characters are taken to the bottom level, they are given an unusual artifact by the Ogre leader. He was instructed to do so in such a situation by a priestess, but will have no idea as to the purpose of the artifact. The characters will not have a lot of time to make up their mind what to do at this point because of the differing time flows. Every day on the top floor would correspond to 28 seconds on the bottom. So almost as soon as they are on the ground floor the news of the attack of the evil forces reaches the Ogre.

The evil hordes would quickly descend the levels (taking heavy losses which they wouldn't care about) until they started to slow down on the last few levels. The situation takes a dramatic turn at this point as the evil draws closer to the heroes, and all the Ogre Guardians are drawn off to fight the invaders. Sounds of battle and magic ring through the walls, growing ever louder as they close on the pool. The heroes will need to quickly decide how to use the artifact to activate the time pool and how to enter the portal.

An examination of the crystals the characters located earlier will reveal that they slot into openings within the artifact. The completed artifact causes the pool to activate when it draws near, but to enter the portal the party must go underwater. The gate is a glowing area of colored patterns between four tall stones. Upon entering, the characters have a long, wrenching sensation as they are passed back into history.

The artifact is the control piece for the time gate, a powerful magical structure that allows travel through time. The artifact also has some magical powers that allow control over the flow of time, including slow, haste, and time stasis. The grip has a set of glowing sigils that display the amount of time before those who entered the gate are returned to their original time. Note that proximity of the artifact is required in order to successfully return to the future. Those outside a 100" radius will be left in the past.

The wielder of the artifact can employ the following powers:

- Withdraw, once per day
- Slow Poison, three times per day
- Slow, once per day
- Haste, once per day
- Extension III, twice per day
- Hold Monster, once per week

Finally, the artifact can be used to cast a Temporal Stasis spell up to three times. However, each such use of the artifact requires a saving throw or the wielder ages a year.

The pool is actually an artifact of the god of time, a neutral aligned deity who has played a subtle part in the play thus far. As the heroes are returned to the past, they enter a dream like state in which they witness subtle clues about their mission. If they appear to be failing in their mission, these clues will grow increasingly obvious although not enough to bend the rules of time travel and causality.

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## Part VII - Back to the Future

They arrive in a communal well of an Elven tree hamlet that is being raided by a large band of Orcs. (Quite a change for players who are used to fighting undead and living mutants.) Unfortunately, the portal is still open and a powerful undead figure steps through... a demonic figure shaped like a giant winged skeleton. He looks around at the mayhem, then laughs maniacally before flapping away to the south.

This is the same evil being that destroys the world of the future, and the actions of the characters from this point on will determine if he is successful. Upon passing through the temporal proximity field of the crystal artifact, the demon is struck by a blast of time energy. (The rod will simultaneously buzz and glow annoyingly.) The air around the demon will ripple and it will scream in horror as it falls from the sky. Being an immortal, however, it can just barely survive this blast of aging. The beast manages to recover enough to continue its flight to the south where it can lick its new wounds. It should now be fairly clear to the heroes that leaving the safety radius of the rod, some 100 meters) would most likely prove fatal.

The past of this world is a typical fantasy setting in which the forces of good and evil are in fine balance. Magic in the past is much weaker, and is thought of as a dark art. The evil forces use these dark powers in an effort to twist the world into their image. However, there are several "fulcrum" points at which the future could have swung toward a bleak setting of utter evil.

The fulcrum points of history will be modified by the evil being which was brought into the past by the heroes, and these are the fault points in time that must be repaired in order to rescue the future. Ultimately, this evil being must somehow be defeated in order to save the world. When the evil is finally cleansed from the land, the world of the future becomes a magic rich setting in which good and order have gained the upper hand, at least for the moment.

An examination of the artifact reveals that it has a peculiar pattern that constantly changes. This is the time remaining until the characters are returned to the future - initially set at three days. When the artifact counts down to zero, the characters are wrenched back into the future, from whence they can discover the results of their manipulations. Most likely the world of the future will be equally bleak in some fashion until the evil influence is cleansed.

At this point the heroes see a young girl trapped in the upper floor of a burning building. Meanwhile several of the elven villagers are being dragged off by Orcs in a couple of crude wagons, perhaps to be eaten as lunch. The characters must immediately decide whom to rescue, if anybody. The girl is actually young Robin Broadleaf, although at this age her name is Roberta Baker. Hence, to have any chance at saving the future, they will need to rescue this child.

Unfortunately, one of the villagers in the wagon is the foster mother of Roberta. If they rescue the kid, then they will always catch up to the wagon when it is too late to save her parent. Naturally this will prove quite traumatic for the girl and will go a long way toward shaping her future.

The tree hamlet is located deep within a forest, far from any human civilization. To have any hope of reaching the outside world before the time rod pulls them back to the future, the heroes would need to immediately abandon the village and head out into the trees. The well at the center of the village is a revered site to the Elves, and they would normally be quite shocked that humans would foul the waters with their presence.

Some distance to the west a young treant sapling is located in a nearby sacred grove that is being torched by the Orcs. With any luck the heroes will spot the fire during one of their time visits and set out to investigate. If the heroes leave for the grove shortly after their arrival, they will reach the sapling in time to save it from being burned by Orcish tormentors. Otherwise, they find a patch of burnt trees and a plot of loose soil from whence the sapling fled.

The girl, of course, is terrified of the Orcs and so she will want to stick beside the heroes. When they figure out that they need to reach the burning trees, the kid will tag along and meet the Sapling. With any luck she will even be instrumental in saving the Sapling, thus forging their life-long bond at an earlier age. When the kid and the Sapling bond together, the crystal artifact begins humming softly and a ring of roses

magically blossoms around the sacred pool. This should now make it obvious that the child is also sleeping druid and likely the same being who made all the prophecies about the chosen ones.

The combination of the stored memories in the artifact, and the early friendship between the girl and the treant, will now suffice to save the future! The life energy in the crystal is sufficient to defeat the evil being that follows the characters through the portal, and the girl and treant will grow knowledgeable and strong enough together to turn the tide of darkness. By gifting the pair with the artifact, the heroes return to the future with their mission completed! (A leap of faith for the heroes at this point, but one that is necessary for the tide of darkness to end.)

The following list shows some of the potential unpleasant futures that are produced when the characters meddle unsuccessfully with the past. Some of these worlds will have eerie connections to the original bleak undead setting, usually in the form of matching good and evil characters.

1. A seemingly paradise world, but completely uninhabited. As in *Forbidden Planet*, all of the humans have been destroyed by the evil spirit of their former dark nature. This powerful spirit now begins to prey upon the characters.
2. Giant bug-eyed creatures are seen emerging from strange floating silvery craft and begin attacking pitiful bands of human warriors. Blasts of energy from their staves turn the ill prepared human defenders into just so many charred remains.
3. The surface of the world is entirely covered in a metallic surface that is home to a robotic race. The characters emerge on the barren underside of this cyber-city, a dimly lit area that is home to a pitiful few human refugees and the metal columns that support the metal shell.
4. A bleak war world similar to the armageddon scenes in the *Terminator* movie. I.e. humans versus the big machine in a post nuclear holocaust. The characters have basically no chance against the machines, so they witness countless death scenes as a warning against trying to join the fight.
5. Searing desert sands with nothing but giant insect races that dwell beneath. These emerge from below and attempt to pull the heroes down into their lair. The scent of blood will attract increasing numbers of these huge bugs.
6. The surface is ravaged by constant weather extremes, with changes taking place over the course of a few hours. There is no surface vegetation to provide cover, and the extreme winds make travel difficult and hazardous.
7. The time portal is on a small island in the midst of a vast acid ocean. Horrible sea beasts snap and claw at anything on the beaches.
8. Piles of green slime crawl across an endless stone plain beneath a dark, overcast sky. There is no sign of other life forms about, as they have all been absorbed by the slime.

When the heroes are returned to the future with their mission completed, they find a world of life where people are happy and the forces of evil have been defeated... at least for the moment. This new setting can be any fantasy land in which the GM chooses to run his players, and they are certain to have all new adventures in the world they have just saved!

*Bob Hall, August 14th, 1998*

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