

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

DYING EARTH PHANTOMS OF THE ECTOPLASMIC COTILLION

DCC DYING EARTH #7:
A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY BOB BRINKMAN



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Phantoms of the Ectoplasmic Cotillion

A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

By Bob Brinkman • Project Lead: Marc Bruner • Cover artwork: Doug Kovacs • Cartography: Aaron Kreader
Editors: Brian Gilikson and Jen Brinkman • Artwork: Doug Kovacs, Aaron Kreader, Cliff Kurowski, Jesse Mohn, Chad Sergesketter
DCC Developer: Michael Curtis • Art direction & layout: Matt Hildebrand • Publisher & Dark Vivomancer: Joseph Goodman

Playtesters: Judge Julian, operyion fall, Svebor Midžić, Erol Otus, William Walters, Mel White

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INTRODUCTION

"A long time ago, when we all lived in the forest," murmured Comwell the Strangler, "there was a league of magicians and wizards – the Cryptoacademia. So great was their hubris, that they sought to bring about an end to death. For decades, they toiled in secret. Proxies scoured the corners of the universe for arcane formulae, lost to the ages. After near to forty years, the Cryptoacademia prepared to unveil their creation, the ring of revivification." The aged storyteller shook his head sadly before continuing. "An artifact they believed capable of overcoming death itself."

"Such knowledge? Well, there is a reason that the wizards worked in secret – there isn't a magician or witch alive who would not covet the power to overturn death. Upon learning of the discovery, other wizards and witches, such as Ashtark the Wizen and Morgola the Silvician, moved against them, seeking to wrest the secrets from their rivals. When the glimmer-dust settled, the members of the Cryptoacademia were trapped within their ossuarial laboratory, never to be seen again..." Comwell clicked his tongue against his teeth, "...and the ring was never found. To my knowledge, it remains to this day, 'neath that accursed hill."

Phantoms of the Ectoplasmic Cotillion is a DCC Dying Earth adventure for three to four 3rd-level characters meant to be dropped into a campaign whilst the PCs are traveling from one place to another. The PCs begin by seeking a long-lost artifact but find themselves confronted with the most restless of dead and an artifact far more dangerous than they might realize. Can the players unravel the mystery that plagues the phantoms, and find a way to release them – without destroying themselves in the process?

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Noxonmedes the Ossuarist, a magician fascinated with the plundering of the dead

Feloscenth, henchman of Noxonmedes

Garwig the Insouciant, member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost

Krisbasco the Accismutist, member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost

Mercanter the Ologiologist, member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost.

Otnica Mundmedes the Apricity Appreciant, member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost

Phubach the Prevaricationist, member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost

Sabbard the Ultracrepidarian, senior member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost

Shausadil, henchman of Noxonmedes

Wizbal the Minutiatician, member of the Conclave of Cryptoacademia, now a ghost

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

During the waning of the 19th Aeon, wizards referring to themselves as the Cryptoacademia sought to master the secrets, not of life, but of death. They toiled in secret for decades, until they crafted their masterwork, the *ring of revivification*, which they knew could hold death at bay. Despite their secrecy, such a discovery creates ripples and rumors of its own, and soon, other wizards gathered to wrest this knowledge from the Cryptoacademia. The resulting battle ended with the Cryptoacademia retreating into their laboratory, and their rivals unable to follow. The members of the Cryptoacademia were never seen again.

It is here that the legends end.

The challenge posed by the other wizards left the members of the Cryptoacademia badly injured and dying. Collapsing the entryway behind them, they sought to use the ring to ward off their deaths. However, there was only one ring, and they soon fell out amongst themselves desperate to be the wearer of the ring, to guarantee their own survival.

Their understanding of the ring, and its powers, was flawed. Finally, a member of the conclave, Sabbard the Ultracrepidarian, locked the ring away in a small casket – preventing anyone from using it. The members of the Cryptoacademia died, cursing one another with their final breaths. Such was the collected force of will unleashed that the amplifying powers of the laboratory's central crystal, coupled with proximity to the ring, enabled their souls to rise from their corpses as shades, while their corpses independently animated, shuffling in circles within the chamber where they had their final confrontation. Even now, their skeletal forms, clad in stained and rotting finery, move about the room in a macabre shuffling dance, awaiting their final passage into the lands of the dead.

Breaking the curses of the Cryptoacademia and putting them to rest will end the expanded power of the ring, returning it to its original function.

ADVENTURE HOOKS AND COMPLICATIONS

Phantoms of the Ectoplasmic Cotillion is designed as a 3rd level adventure for the DCC Dying Earth setting and is meant for a group of established PCs. Here are a few potential ways to introduce this adventure into an ongoing campaign:

- The PCs are traveling, enroute to their next adventure. Whilst traveling, they spot the crystal-topped mound, and its wide entryway is visible from a distance. The mound appears to have been broken open, and the lure of easy wealth may draw in even the most jaded of wayfarers.
- While resting overnight in a traveler's inn, the PCs overhear Noxonmedes and his subordinates, speaking of a lost laboratory and the treasures within that they have as yet been unable to access, such as a ring said to raise the dead. Noxonmedes feels that the crystal that rises



from the mound may play a role in channeling magical energies into some item within the ossuarial complex. Magicians and witches may find themselves intrigued by the mystery contained within.

- While sitting around a traveler's fire, the party hears the tale of Comwell the Strangler (see Introduction). It doesn't take much convincing (perhaps several rounds of strong drink, or a few nicely jingling coins) for the storyteller to reveal what he knows about the location of the long-abandoned laboratory.
- For judges wishing to use this adventure as a primary quest for the PCs, a rival of Noxonmedes seeks to hire them. They feel that it is an inadvisable risk to allow Noxonmedes to gather more power as it may upset the local hierarchy among magicians (potentially elevating Noxonmedes above themselves). They would be most grateful if the PCs were to prevent their rival from obtaining whatever magic talisman lies within the mound. Their sponsor will tell the party that it is a ring of great power, but will be loath to inform the party of its true power lest the PCs take the item for themselves.

VANCIAN GLOSSARY

Accismutist: one who pretends to be disinterested in something while secretly wanting it.

Apricity Appreciant: one who appreciates the warmth of the sun during the winter.

Insouciant: one who is very calm and unbothered by the concerns of daily life.

Minutiatician: one who studies subtleties, trivialities, and trifling details which are ordinarily overlooked.

Ologiologist: one who studies the field of study itself.

Prevaricationist: one who doesn't give a straight answer.

Ultracrepidarian: one who offers opinions that extend beyond their knowledge.

ADVENTURE START

In the midst of rolling, forested hills, a crystal-capped mound rises, with a wide entryway sloping down into the hill. The mound itself rises twenty-five feet above the neighboring landscape, a height which is added to by its most notable feature. Jutting out of this landscape, emerging from atop the mound, is a scintillating champagne crystal which jaggedly reaches another twenty feet, like lightning flashing skyward. At night, beneath the stars, the crystal flashes with coronal discharges of veridian and flox sparks.

As part of their research, the members of the conclave stole the bodies of the dead and subjected them to dark and sinister experiments. They disposed of their castoffs by sealing the bones within the stone ossuary within the mound. The mortal remains were left, co-mingled and slumbering for eternity, until disturbed by the recent grave-robbing actions of Noxonmedes and his subordinates' search for the ring. The breaking of the mound's seal disquieted the spirits within. Sadly, due to the passage of strange aeons, the phantasms contained within are not wholly corporated and are confused and dangerous. They, and all the creatures animated within, move in time to the pulsing of the ring, in perfect 3/4 time.

The entryway to the mound has been recently disturbed, and a pair of picks and spades rest alongside the opening leading inward. The ground here has been heavily churned, and the soil holds the boot prints of at least two persons who entered the mound but have not returned.

There are no traps or the like to be found here, but a magician using their pandect ability will immediately recognize signs in the surrounding area, reflecting the great powers were once unleashed in this area, directed into, and out of, the mound.

No further trace of Noxonmedes or his henchmen is present outside. The group broke camp and entered the mound but fell prey to what waited within. Allow the party to investigate the exterior for what little information may be gleaned.

Area 1-1 - Entryway: *Light spills through the opening, partially illuminating three sets of muddy boot-prints in the descending corridor beyond. Two pairs of alcoves line the thirty-foot-long entryway, leading up to a pair of heavily corroded iron doors at the far end. Within each alcove is a statue, carved from marble and painted to give a resemblance of life, atop a marble plinth. A name plaque rests at the feet of each statue.*

The doors were rusted shut, and there are obvious signs that they were recently pried open, despite their now being closed again. Unless precautions are taken, the opening of the doors will result in the ear-wrenching grinding and creaking of the long-neglected hinges.

Close examination of the tracks reveals that one set moved behind the statue of Ottnica (Area 1-1D). The boot prints trail off before exiting the room, the mud having been worn from their soles.

Area 1-1A - Statue of Phubach the Prevaricationist: *The figure atop the plinth is hook-nosed and beetle-browed, a scowl immortalized on his face. Instead of robes, the figure is de-*

picted wearing the clothing of a well-to-do merchant, in dazzling blue trimmed with canary yellow. Rather than gazing straight forward, the statue glares toward another figure, to the southeast.

Carefully following the gaze of Phubach to the alcove at Area 1-1D reveals that the statue is not looking at its companion, but the wall behind them. This information grants a +1d bonus to finding the secret door.

Area 1-1B - Statue of Krisbasco the Accismutist: *The man represented here stands with one hand held upward, as if in declination of an offer. His expression however, hints at being desirous for whatever might be offered. He is clad in rich, flowing, gray-trimmed green robes which obscure most of his form.*

Examination of the plinth (requiring a DC 10 Intelligence check) reveals a hidden slot large enough for a coin. Dropping a coin, of any denomination, into the slot unlocks the secret door behind the statue across the hallway at 1-1D, doing so with an audible click.

Area 1-1C - Statue of Garwig the Insouciant: *This statue is of a woman in simple robes, arms crossed with a look of abject boredom on her face. Her beige robes are painted as to look threadbare, and hint at a life of austerity, save for the golden glint of a ring painted onto the middle finger of her right hand.*

While the ring is carved from the same marble as the rest of the statue, it has been cleverly done so as to allow the ring to rotate upon the statue's finger. Doing so has no special effect, it is just a detail that greatly pleased Garwig.

Area 1-1D - Statue of Ottnica Mundmedes the Apricity Appreciant: *The man represented here is rotund and bears a resemblance to those from the most northernmost climes. Adorned in heavy clothes, painted in muted shades of gray, like some animal skins, the figure is looking upward, their hands pulling their heavy coat open and bearing their chest. Despite his squint, there is a look of contentment on the man's face.*

Concealed behind the statue is a secret door which, while locked, requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence check to find. If unlocked via the coin slot behind the statue in Area 1-1B, the secret door is cracked open and is obvious to any onlooker.

Area 1-2 - Concealed Library: *The walls of the passage-way behind Ottnica's statue differ from the adjoining hallway, being natural stone. The short passage opens into an unevenly shaped chamber, containing several tables and small shelves with a number of large texts and rolled scrolls. The stone ceiling here has cracked, allowing a steady flow of moisture in from the earth above. Rot and decay have set in. The moldering frames of seven once-comfortable chairs are scattered about the room, each with a small adjacent wooden table.*

Disturbing objects within the room reveals that all has long since rotted due to the moisture within the chamber, as spores puff into the air. A single text survives—Sabbard's journal describing the creation of the ring (although not in a step-by-step form). Of note is one entry toward the end (see Player Handout 1).

While the contents are long-since ruined, the magical energies of the curse-fueled ring have warped the molds here, changing them into something wholly new and dangerous. Once one spore cloud is triggered, the other items in the room release their spores as well, coalescing into a trio of slender, whip-like forms.

While this chamber is intended solely as a trap for unwary players, judges are encouraged to place spell information or legends and rumors here, that may point the players toward further adventures beyond this one.

Necrotic mold (3): Init +2; Atk tendril whip +2 melee (1d6 plus DC 14 Ref save or be entangled); AC 14; HD 1d8+2; hp 7 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP encroachment, death throes; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will N/A; AL N; Crit M/d8.

When a victim is entangled by the necrotic mold, it seeks to force itself into its victim through their ears, nose, and mouth. Until freed, the victim suffers 1d3 points of damage per round as the mold flows inside of the victim, concluding its encroachment when the victim has suffered damage equal to the necrotic mold's maximum hit points, indicating that it has fully entered the skull of the victim. If this occurs, the victim is automatically infected with necrotic mold, loses 1 point of Intelligence, and the mold's incubation begins.

When destroyed, the necrotic mold bursts into a cloud of its compositional spores, covering a 10' radius and blocking out all light in the area for 1 round as it falls to the ground. Living creatures in the affected area must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or become infected by the spores. Additionally, should the spores strike an open source of flame, they will explode doing 2d3 damage to all within the spore cloud.

If the spore remains of a necrotic mold are carefully collected and saved for later use, they may be thrown at a flame source, causing an explosive effect in a radius of 2d5 feet as per the death throes above.

Area 1-3 – Ossuarial Chamber: *Between two pairs of open double doors, and flanked by a pair of statues, rests an ornate stone ossuary. The innermost set of double doors are carved from exotic woods and are embellished with images of vainglorious magicians at the height of their power, unleashing their magics upon indistinct figures lacking in any real detail. To either side of the chamber are alcoves, each housing the looming stone figure of a magician. The ossuary itself has been forced open, likely by the two dead men lying next to it. Looks of horror are carved into the rictus of their faces, crowbars still clutched in their lifeless hands and an extinguished lantern laying at their feet.*

Breaking open the ossuary freed the horror within, which used its fear attack to still the hearts of those responsible. Noxonmedes fled deeper into the mound, leaving Feloscenth and Shausadil to their fates. The creature contained within (an ossuarial horde) has since moved further into the mound. Upon entering a room there is a 10% chance of encountering the horde as it roams the laboratory seeking vengeance (see Area 3-1). Should the horde be defeated, it will reform in 1d3 turns and continue to move through the mound until the curse is lifted.

INFECTION!

Those infected by necrotic mold lose 1 point of Intelligence per day, as the spores grow within the brain of the victim. It takes one full week for the fungal growth to run its course, after which the victim begins to weep black, slimy trails of necrotic mold from their eyes and ears, leaving them temporarily blind and deaf for 1d3 days. If the fungal growth reaches completion, the Intelligence is permanently lost as the mold departs, taking the rancid brain matter with it. Infected are allowed an additional DC 12 Fortitude save once per day of the incubation cycle, with a successful save resulting in their being cleansed of the growing necrotic mold and their Intelligence returning at a rate of 1 point per day.

Stopping to rifle through the belongings of the two henchmen garners the following:

- 12 assorted daggers, knives, and shivs
- +1 club
- 2 crowbars
- 1 lantern
- 2 flasks of oil
- 10 terces
- 3 skins of wine fortified with spirits (good as a drink or a solvent)

Area 1-3A – Statue of Mercanter the Ologiologist:

The beard of this magician is long enough that it reaches the base upon which the statue rests before being doubled back up again and hanging down over the figure's shoulder – brushing the back of their legs. Mercanter's features are severe, his eyes sunken, his posture stooped, and his fingers crooked with arthritis as he stares at a closed tome clutched in his gnarled hands. Even though carved of marble, the statue conveys the obsession-fired weariness of the magician.

Reading Mercanter's full name aloud results in a crackling sound as the painted marble of the tome splinters and falls away, revealing a very real book. The volume, *Mercanter's Manual on the Studies of Study* is fragile, and may be carefully read once before falling to ruin. Reading the entire volume requires 10 hours, minus a number of hours equal to the reader's Intelligence modifier, and grants a permanent +2 to future uses of a magician's pandect ability (by literally teaching them how to study more efficiently).

Area 1-3B – Statue of Wizbal the Minutiatician:

The face of this figure is partially obscured by some form of lenses arranged before their eyes. Along the belt of the crimson-painted robes all manner of calipers and measuring devices are represented. The magician herself is slight in stature, her representation standing a mere six feet tall, including the eighteen-inch plinth upon which the statue rests.

Concealed along the back of the figure of Wizbal is a powerful magnifying lens. Measuring 3 inches around, the lens enlarges items viewed by 10×, making even the smallest of details observable. Its magnification is also strong enough to allow for the starting of fires, using the diminished light of the red Sun. The lens is well concealed however, requiring a specific check along the back of the statue to find. Those not enraptured with minutia will not find Wizbal's gift.

Area 1-4 - Lower Hall of the Crystal: *Beyond the double doors is an immense chamber, fifty feet per side, ornately decorated with fine furnishings as well as items for ritualcraft. The floor of the room is inlaid with runes and sigils of the sort used in ritual summoning and binding. In the center of the chamber, rising from the floor is a crystal, ten feet in diameter, that rises through the floor and pierces through the ceiling above. From its placement, it seems to be the same crystal as that which was seen rising from the top of the mound. Two doors exit this room; one to the south is closed, while the other to the east is ajar.*

This room was specifically crafted to enhance the summoning of demons and sandestins. Attempts at demon summoning made here gain a +1 bonus. Noxonmedes' flight has left a trail of open doors, making him easy to track, should the party so wish.

Area 1-5 - The Twin Labs: The layout of both chambers is identically mirrored, varying only in which aborted experiments remain within.

The laboratory contains a large metal worktable, with blood-stained leather straps and heavy chains to restrain test subjects. Against the wall across from the entrance is a worktable covered with a number of unpleasant looking dissection and vivification tools. Glass vials and bottles line the back of the table, their liquid ingredients long since congealed into tarry goo of unknown properties.

Have anyone bold (or foolish) enough to sample the material in the bottles on the worktable roll on the following table.

d10	Result
1-6	Sticky, foul tasting, inert goo.
7	Concentrated sealant: binds wounds closed (stabilizing someone who is bleeding out) but grants no healing.
8	Concentrated healing elixir: imbiber regains 1 HD for a taste; there is 4 HD worth of healing in the bottle.
9	Concentrated <i>potion of human control</i> : imbiber's Personality is reduced to 1 for 2d6 rounds (successful DC 16 Fort save negates).
10	Concentrated black widow venom: imbiber permanently loses 2d4 points of Strength (successful DC 15 Fort save reduces this to a loss of 2 points of Strength).

Area 1-5A: *Upon the table here lies the flayed and desiccated corpse of an erb. Where it tried to gnaw through its restraints is clearly visible.*

If approached, the erb will animate, snapping its restraints

STRANGE SYMBOLS

Examining the crystal running through all three levels of the laboratory, reveals that it has been etched with a number of strange arcane symbols, the likes the party has not before seen. It is through these alterations to the otherworldly harmonics of the crystal that allow for it to be used for the enhancement of magic in rooms where it is directly exposed (Areas 1-4, 2-4, and 3-1):

- Magicians gain a +2d bonus to their "up" amplification die in this room, as well as doubling the value of Personality burned for force of will.
- Witches, upon success in transferring vitality, are granted the maximum healing result of the appropriate Hit Die (i.e., a d10 hit die results in 10 hit points of healing).
- Any rote magic unleashed in this room is automatically treated as one spell result higher, before any additional amplification or empowerment.

However, such an increase in power comes with its own perils. Any spell cast here also requires a Luck check, with a failure resulting in a catastrophic effect (corruption, misfire, demon taint, etc., as if the spell check were a natural '1') in addition to any result from the casting. Additionally, so great is the power coursing through the area surrounding the exposed crystal that all casting inflicts a loss of 1d3 points of Stamina as the caster struggles to contain the raw power coursing through their body.

with a single tug, and leaping to engage the party with surprise.

Animated erb corpse: Init +1; Atk claw +5 melee (1d6+2) or bite +5 melee (1d3) or hurled spine +4 missile fire (1d7+2, range 30'); AC 12; HD 3d8; hp 20; MV 20' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, magical hybrid traits; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +6; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Area 1-5B: *Upon the table here are the mutilated remains of a pelgrane, its beak chipped and cracked as if having been struck repeatedly with some great blunt instrument.*

If approached, the pelgrane will animate, but is well and truly held by its bonds and cannot break free, posing no threat. The true danger is from Mercanter, who descends from the ceiling of the hallway outside the lab and attacks from behind.

Mercanter (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk paralyzing touch +6 melee (1d4 hours paralysis; DC 14 Fort negates); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, immune to nonmagical weapons, paralyzing touch, telekinesis, turn invisible; ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1d3 turns); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Area 1-6 – Vestment Chamber: *Seven sets of hooks are set into the walls here. Each set of hooks holds ancient scraps of clothing, with matching worn boots and sandals at their base. An additional hallway winds out of the room to the east.*

It is here that the members of the Cryptoacademia would exchange their everyday clothing for their ritual garb (as illustrated on their individual statues). Going through the pockets and pouches found here garners 2 golden centums and a handful (12) of terces.

In the clothing left behind by Garwig is a tattered journal, detailing her experiments. Of chief interest is the final entry (see Player Handout 2).

The hallway exiting the room leads to an earthen stairway, extending further upward into the mound.

Area 1-7 – Kitchen: *This chamber, shaped like a truncated triangle, is set up as a meager kitchen and dining area. A small table, with four chairs is in the center of the room. Along the south wall is a small stove with a pipe winding up into the ceiling and, presumably, venting atop the mound. The northernmost wall, a mere 5' wide, holds a dry washbasin and a handful of plates, mugs, and utensils. The west wall of the chamber is made up of shelves stocked with preserved foods, rat-chewn sacks of grains, and salted meats of dubious edibility.*

With their work wholly consuming them, the members of the conclave treated dining as an interruption to be quickly dealt with rather than a repast to be savored. This attitude shows in the quality of items here. The foods, when they were still edible, are of passable quality, and the crockery is all basic and of the sort that one might find upon the cart of any itinerant tinker. The only edible item remaining, should anyone seek to check, are a dozen pickled eggs in a piece of heavy crockery.

If the sacks of grain are investigated, the remains of the rats who had made a meal of their contents pour forth to attack the creature which disturbs their somnolence.

Animated rat swarm: Init +4; Atk swarming bite +1 melee (1 plus enervational drain); AC 9; HD 4d8; hp 24; MV 40' or climb 20'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20' x 20' space, un-dead, enervational drain, half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +0; AL N; Crit N/A.

This swarm bears perhaps the most feared power among un-dead. Their bite inflicts minute damage but also drains their victim of long-term memories and their very life force itself. In addition to the damage from the bite, victims suffer a loss of 1 XP (DC 8 Will save negates). The draining of experience does not reduce the level of the victim, but the lost experience must be regained through adventuring before further levels may be gained. If a victim is reduced to 0 XP, they lose their abilities and memories, including the loss of all class abilities.

Area 2-1 – The Secure Portal: *Ascending the stairs you look out into a ten-foot by ten-foot room with a massive armored door set into the north wall. The door is ajar, allowing an examination of its makeup, looking to be four inches thick and made of solid*

metal, with the portion of the door facing out of the room being heavily scarred and battered – by what immense power is unclear. The door is opened by way of a massive wheel set into its middle which apparently works some form of latching system.

Meant to prevent any accidents from above from spilling into the chambers below, or allowing any summoned horror to escape, the door to this room is near impregnable. Of course, a fleeing tomb robber isn't too concerned about closing the door behind them. Close examination of the wheel on the other side of the door reveals mystic sigils and runes worked into the handle. Attempting to turn the wheel from the outside without first uttering the name of one of the Cryptoacademia results in the 5' square alcove on the other side being scorched by a blast of fire for 1d10 damage (DC 12 Reflex save for half).

Area 2-2 – Sabbard's Hall of Ego: *This ten-foot by fifteen-foot antechamber has a door to the north and a pair of double doors cracked open to the west, through which spills pale, scintillating light of veridian and flox. The eastern portion of the room is dominated by a central alcove housing a larger-than-life statue of a sagacious looking magician.*

Area 2-2A – The Statue of Sabbard the Ultracrepidarian: *Ramrod straight, the statue denoted "Sabbard" stands a full eight feet tall, atop a plinth which takes its head near to the ten-foot-high ceiling. Merely looking upon the face of the cerulean robed magician conveys a feeling of their great wisdom and intelligence. The statue's robes are painted with a representation of the autumnal night's sky.*

In an effort to never be challenged for authority, Sabbard enchanted his statue to subliminally create feelings of subservience in all those who gaze at his stone visage. To avoid falling under his sway requires a successful DC 13 Will save. Those who fail receive a -1d penalty to do anything contrary to the wishes and actions of Sabbard (including attacking his ghost, whose visage is still recognizable) for 1 turn. After 2 rounds, Sabbard's form emerges from his statue and attacks.

Sabbard (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk draining touch +6 melee (1d4 physical ability points, player's choice); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, immune to nonmagical weapons, draining touch, future sight, telekinesis, turn invisible, ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1 turn); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Any creature that gazes into the ghost's eyes receives a shocking glimpse of a possible future. A character attacking the ghost must make a DC 10 Reflex save or inadvertently gaze into the ghost's eyes to receive this glimpse. This glimpse is always a potential death of the most disturbing fashion. If not yet encountered, the judge is encouraged to describe the vision as one associated with a potential future encounter with the ossuarial horde (see Area 3-1). The revelation of their potential death stuns the victim for 1d3+1 rounds (a successful DC 13 Will save negates).

As with his companions, Sabbard cannot be permanently destroyed, nor lain to rest, until his soul and body are joined once more. If defeated, his ectoplasmic form regenerates





VILTA SOLARIS SUFFERS A
HORRIFYING VISION AS A RESULT
OF ENCOUNTERING THE GAZE
OF SABBARD THE ULTRACREPIDARIAN!

within a single turn, at which point he will seek out the party. Should Sabbard's shade enter a room with other hungry ghosts, they gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls.

Area 2-3 – Sleeping Quarters: *Spartan does not even begin to describe this sleeping chamber. There are no actual beds, merely several hammocks for use by the members of the Cryptoacademia when inevitably overcome by weariness. A number of small footlockers lie on the floor, open and on their sides, contents strewn about the room as if from a great windstorm.*

Two members of the Cryptoacademia haunt this chamber and have destroyed most of the personal possessions here with telekinetic force. They emerge from the floor and immediately attack but are bound and unable to leave this room unless summoned by the ring.

Among the wreckage is a page from Wizbal's journal detailing her findings about the power of the crystal and the risks it may pose (see Player Handout 3).

Garwig (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk paralyzing touch (1d4 hours paralysis, DC 14 Fort save negates); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, immune to nonmagical weapons, paralyzing touch, telekinesis, turn invisible, ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1d3 turns); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Krisbasco (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk special; AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, immune to nonmagical weapons, banshee scream 3/day (1d4 sonic damage plus DC 14 Fort save or 1d4 hours deafness; 100' radius), chill aura, horrid appearance, telekinesis, ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1d3 turns); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Living creatures within 100' of Krisbasco's ghost suffer 1d4 damage per round from his chill aura, which also renders him immune to fire damage. Simply glimpsing the ghost causes 1d4 damage and potential fear (DC 12 Will save to resist). A frightened creature runs away for one hour; if cornered, it fights at a -4 attack penalty.

Area 2-4 – Ectoplasmic Cotillion: *This large ritual space is dominated by two things. First is the massive crystal, throwing off colored sparks, clearly continuing from the chamber below and rising upward through the ceiling. More disturbing are the skeletal figures, clad identically to the statues below, which are shuffling and twirling around the room in a 3/4 rhythm, almost as if dancing. A metal staircase winds its way upward along the outside of the crystal. From above comes a pulsing green light that beats in time with the movements of the revenants.*

The revenants are completely unaware of the presence of the PCs unless directly approached or molested. They merely twirl, jerk, and move in time with the pulsation of the ring above. If directly interfered with, the revenants awaken as one and will attack the party. Otherwise, they will remain here until summoned by the ring.

This room is subject to the enhancement powers of the crystal (see Area 1-4 sidebar).

Revenants (7): Init +0; Atk skeletal claw +3 melee (1d5); AC

9; HD 1d6; hp 6 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, independently animated, cursed regeneration, half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C; U/d6.

Revenants regenerate 1 hit point per round, and if reduced to flying bone shards, reform in 3 rounds. They may only be put to rest after their souls are rejoined to their physical forms. The bones are animated independently of the revenant; when reduced to 0 hit points, the revenant collapses into shards of bone that continue to attack as it reforms. The shards have 1d6 hp and attack with a slash at +0 melee (1d3).

Area 3-1 – Grand Ritual Chamber: *Here, at the uppermost portion of the laboratory, is a chaotic scene out of nightmare. Lit by strobing green light coming from a small coffer against the west wall, and the multicolored sparks that are being ejected from the crystal impaling this room, is a whirl of motion. A horror comprised of a jumbled mass of bones is engaged in combat with three ectoplasmic spirits, wearing the visages of Ottnica, Phubach, and Wizbal. The spirits seem intent on keeping the ossuarial horde away from the coffer. Lying on the floor near the door is the bleeding form of a man, still barely alive.*

Despite any prior encounters with the ossuarial horde prior to this room, the creature will not attack the party, instead engaging the hungry ghosts intent on preventing it from reaching the ring of revivification. Upon the party's arrival, the ring's consciousness will extend itself to summon the revenants and the other hungry ghosts in an attempt to protect itself. It takes the revenants 1 round to arrive (once they have reformed, if necessary), and available hungry ghosts will arrive in 3 rounds. If the PCs move to within 5' of the coffer, they are able to determine that the ring is the source of the green strobing light.

This room is subject to the enhancement powers of the crystal (see Area 1-4 sidebar).

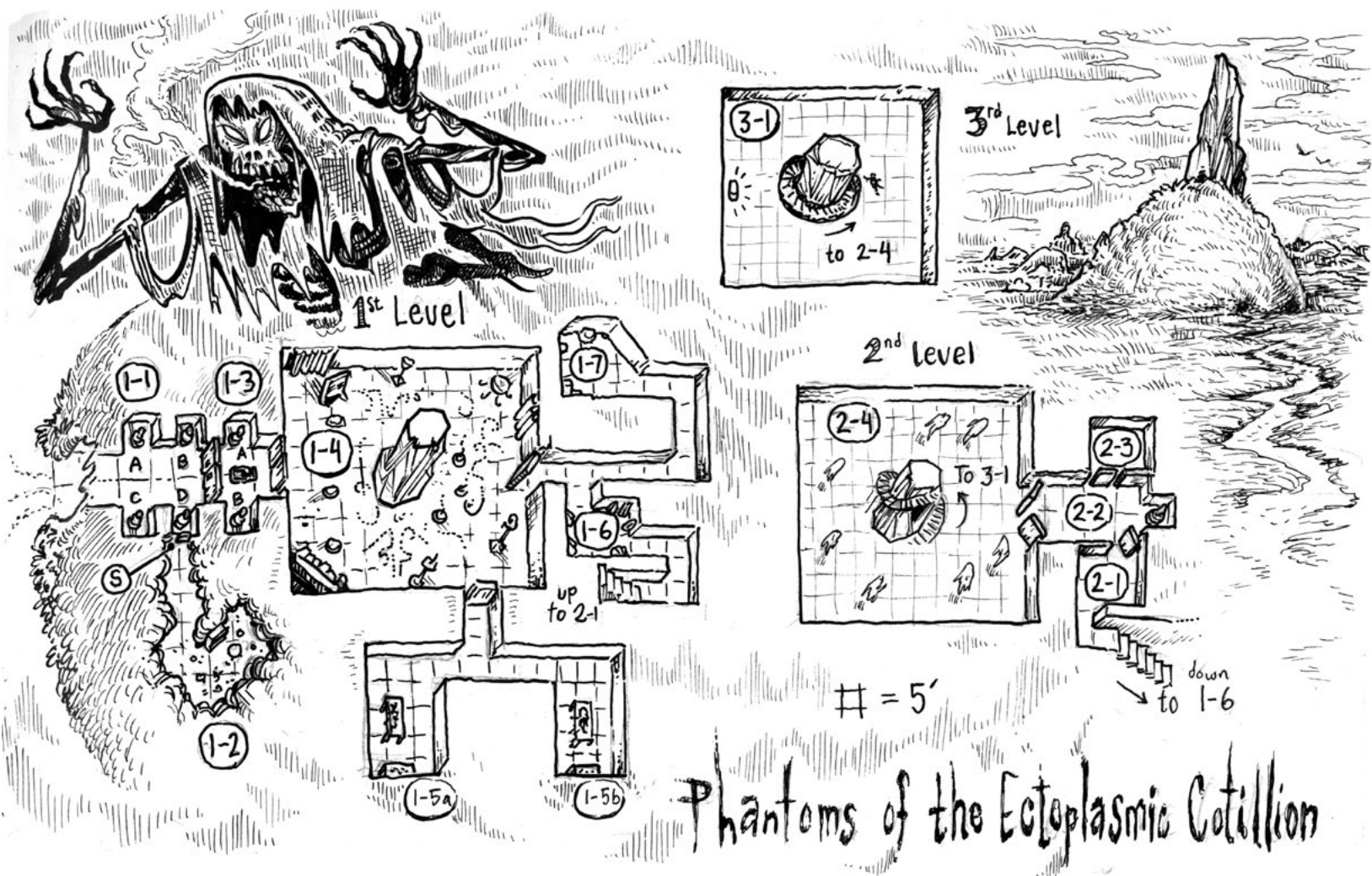
This is a room where a prolonged combat does not go in favor of the party, they must strike fast, and quickly gain possession of the ring. The bleeding man is Noxonmedes, and will expire in 3 rounds.

Ossuarial horde: Init +0; Atk bone fragments +3 melee (1d5 plus engulf) or shard spray +2 missile fire (1d3, range 20'); AC 9; HD 4d6; hp 24; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, attacks count as magical, half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +4; AL C; Crit U/d10.

Engulfed creatures automatically suffer 1d3 damage each round, and the target may be held in place (opposed Strength check vs. Strength 16). Intangible creatures, such as the hungry ghosts, cannot be held.

Ottnica Mundmedes (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk paralyzing touch +6 melee (1d4 hours paralysis, DC 14 Fort save negates); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, immune to nonmagical weapons, paralyzing touch, telekinesis, turn invisible, ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1d3 turns); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Phubach (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk special; AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, immune to



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THE RING OF REVIVIFICATION

Sequestered away in the upper level of the mound is a small casket containing the greatest discovery of this magicians' conclave, the *ring of revivification*. This is the object that Noxonmedes hoped to find in the mound, and it is the presence of the ring that has granted the current state of un-death to the magicians interred within the mound.

This simple looking ring, in appearance to be made from the ring of bone at the center of a slice of ham, is loosely wound with silver and gold wire which, in turn, hold a pulsing green crystal. One, two, three...one, two three, it pulses near like the beat of a waltz.

Placed on the finger of a corpse, this artifact temporarily returns them to life, allowing them to complete any unfinished business. On the first day of renewed life, the raised must succeed at a DC 1 Will save. Each subsequent day that the subject remains ambulatory, the Will save's DC increases by +1 (no upper limit). A failed Will save indicates that the corpse is no longer capable of containing the revivificational energies. They die once again, crumbling to dust, never to rise again.

During this period of renewed vigor, the wearer of the ring cannot truly be killed, although they can suffer egregious physical inconvenience. While revived, the subject automatically succeeds at all attempts to recover their body, but they still suffer the permanent Stamina loss that accompanies such recoveries. In addition, once the revived's Stamina is reduced to 3, their Agility begins to fade, and then finally their Strength. It is very possible for the undying subject to be an immobile pile of paralyzed flesh, simply waiting for the ring's magic to fade. Unfortunately, the subject must still attempt the daily Will save — they are unable to simply return to their eternal slumber and are subjected to the horror of lying dead yet awake. It should also be noted that the dead are no longer favored by the celestial powers and are unable to spend Luck.

Normally incapable of raising the dead, when worn on the hand of a living person, the ring provides a -1d bonus to the Luck check when rolling over the wearer's body.



EPILOGUE

Ending the adventure (and surviving) requires breaking the curses ensorceling the ring. The easiest way to do this is to allow Noxonmedes to perish and place the ring on his finger, although any whole corpse will do, including that of a revenant (requiring a successful attack roll, followed by a DC 10 Reflex save to slide the ring on its finger). This will "reset" the ring, channeling all of its over-accumulated power in one burst. The eruption of excess energies will literally achieve what the Cryptoacademia hoped to bring about and, this one time, will permanently return the subject from the dead.

As the ring resets, the players experience the following:

The pulsing of the ring ends with a near-blinding flash of viridescent light. The hungry ghosts of the dead wizards are dragged toward their revenantial forms, overlaying and merging with them. The ghostly faces, superimposed over bare skulls, take on a sense of awareness and, in the following moment, seem to understand what is happening to them. The ghostly shades fade away as flesh regrows over their skeletal forms, bringing them back to a semblance of how they appeared in life...as they finally achieve death.

Whichever corpse is wearing the ring is brought back to life, whether Noxonmedes, one of the Cryptoacademia, or the party. It is left to the judge to determine appropriate stats for any NPC brought back to the land of the living. Members of the Cryptoacademia will need a great deal of time to adjust to the "modern" world but having such a powerful magician as a future ally may be beneficial, just as having Noxonmedes as a contact could lead to all sorts of future discoveries.

Finally, for managing to put the Cryptoacademia to rest, each PC should be awarded 2 additional points of Luck (to a maximum of 18).

nonmagical weapons, banshee scream 3/day (1d4 sonic damage plus DC 14 Fort save or 1d4 hours deafness; 100' radius), chill aura, horrid appearance, telekinesis, ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1d3 turns); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

Wizbal (hungry ghost): Init +2; Atk +6 melee paralyzing touch (1d4 hours paralysis; DC 14 Fort save negates); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 24; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, immune to nonmagical weapons, paralyzing touch, telekinesis, turn invisible; ectoplasmic form (cannot be permanently destroyed, reforms in 1d3 turns); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C; Crit U/d8.

APPENDIX A: PLAYER HANDOUTS

SABBARD'S JOURNAL

GARWIG HAS COME TO ME WITH CONCERNS SHE FEARS THAT THE ENERGIES OF THE CRYSTAL WILL INTERFERE WITH THOSE OF THE RING, AND WILL BUILD UP TO DANGEROUS LEVELS. SHE HAS GONE SO FAR TO CLAIM THAT THE UNWORN RING MIGHT MERELY INTERFERE WITH LIFE, CREATING A STATE OF UN-DEATH UNTIL THE ENERGIES ARE RELEASED.

GARWIG'S JOURNAL

I am uncertain of the nature of the artifact which we have crafted. There is great power, and one can nearly see the dimensional eddies and trans-substantial fluctuations coursing around it. Still, I fear that, if too greatly empowered, it could have unintended effects which are impossible to foresee. Sabbard has waved aside my concerns, calling them unfounded and absurd, but I have had visions of a cloud of jet blackness pierced by a pulsing light...its beat... one, two; three, one, two; three...

WIZBAL'S JOURNAL

After a discussion with Sabbard, I had grown concerned about his dismissing Garwig's fears. Studying the fractures within the hill's crystal formation, I have noted that they align in such a way as to not only enhance the phlogiston energies of spells, but that there is a potential for buildup of interfering energies within artifacts of power. However, it appears that such a thing would take a great deal of time within the aura of the crystal. So long as the ring is able to discharge the energies through use, it should pose no problem.



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