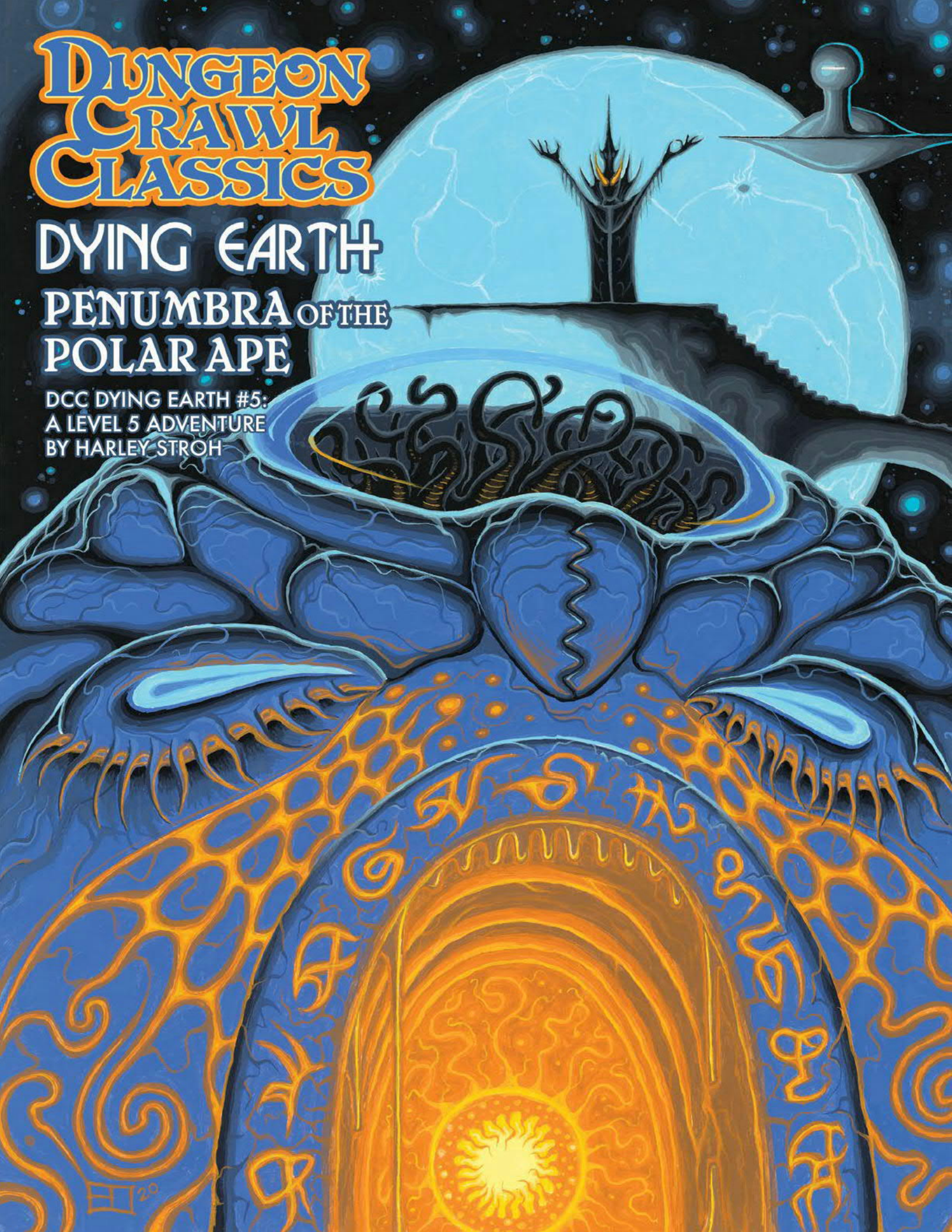


# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

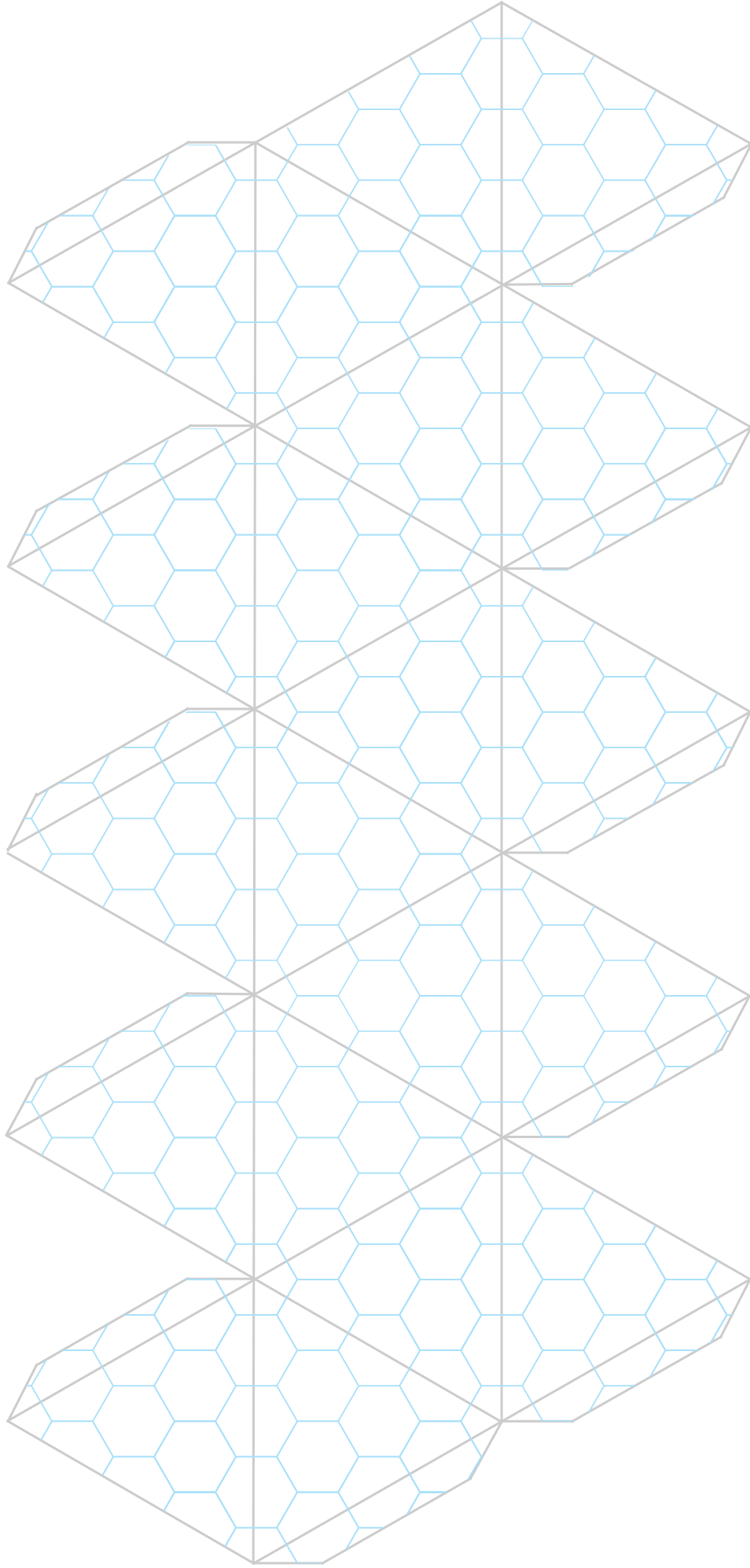
## DYING EARTH PENUMBRA OF THE POLAR APE

DCC DYING EARTH #5:  
A LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE  
BY HARLEY STROH

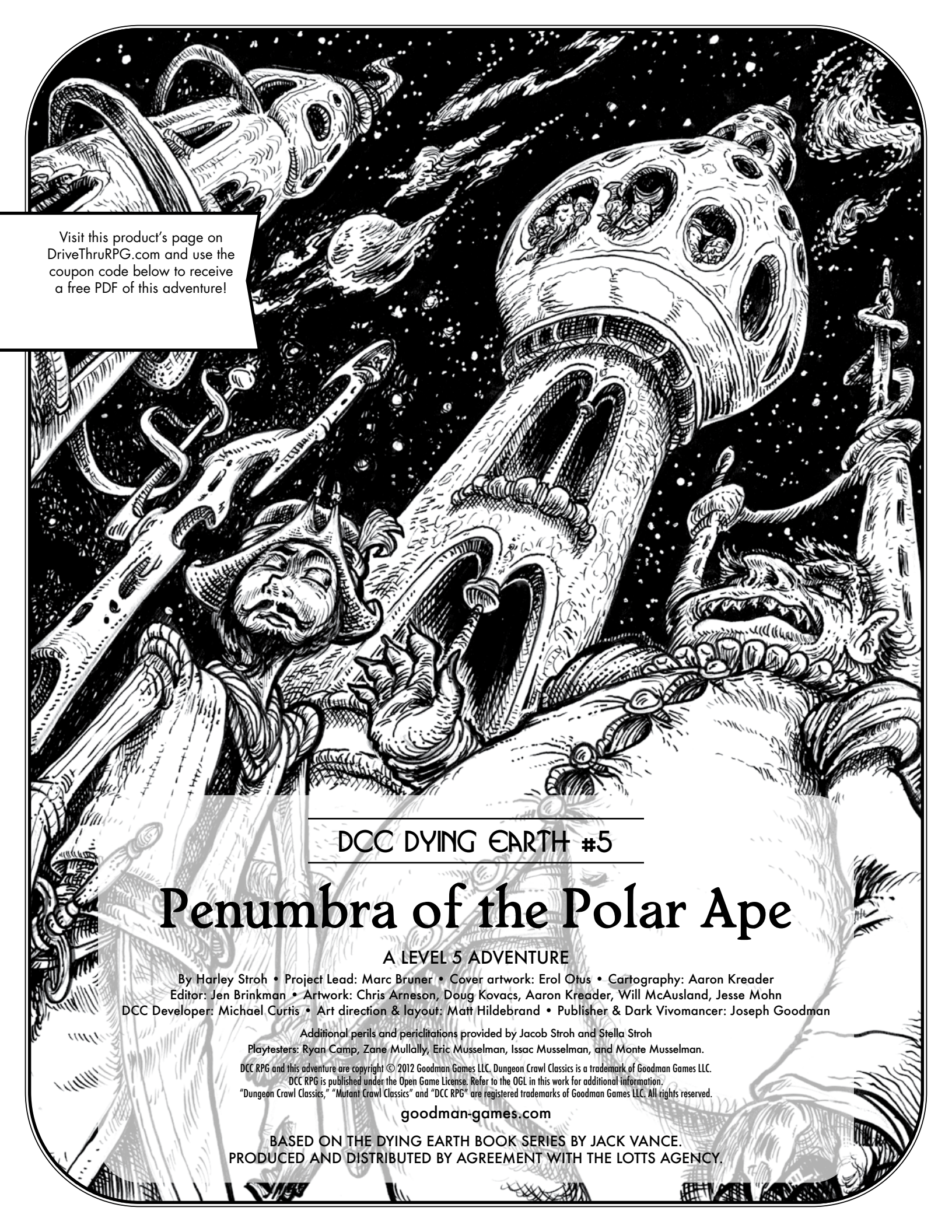




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## DCC DYING EARTH #5

# Penumbra of the Polar Ape

### A LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE

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BASED ON THE DYING EARTH BOOK SERIES BY JACK VANCE.  
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# INTRODUCTION



Welcome to the world of the Dying Earth, a multifarious setting that evokes the distant twilight of Earth as a dim red sun sheds its last life; a world filled with the whimsical and the curious, the evil and monstrous, where magic and science are one and the same. Based on the singular works of the Dying Earth novels by Jack Vance, DCC Dying Earth gives players and judges new adventures inspired by the Dying Earth stories. With these instruments, you can play in Cugel's and Rhialto's world, seek the mighty Pandelume, or fall to an indifferent grue while searching for scintillant baubles among the ensorcelled remains of the ancient Earth!

*Penumbra of the Polar Ape* is an adventure for four 5th-level characters, but can be adjusted for smaller or larger groups. The majority of the PCs should be spellcasters. However, if the party is composed entirely of casters, they would do well to bring henchfolk and hirelings to do their bidding. Opsall the Irredeemable and the moon-mote offer opportunity aplenty to rid characters of their mortal coil.

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure begins with the PCs receiving a missive from Imire the Maugifer, highest among his peers in the esteemed Association of Far Viewers. The Association invites the PCs (renowned wonder-masters in their own right) to petition the Association for membership. Simply being recognized by an association is a great honor; an invitation to join is a rarity unheard of.

Upon arrival at the manse (and after fraught negotiations with Imire's major-domo), the PCs are asked to demonstrate their arcane aptitude by accomplishing a trivial quest: traveling to the furthest reaches of the cosmos and solving a mystery involving the Penumbra of the Polar Ape.

A strange shadow has passed over Kerkaju, the monstrous

red star that is the eye of the asterism known as the Polar Ape. Even more curiously, the shadow seems to grow larger with each passing night. Imire the Maugifer's request is as simple as it is direct: might the PCs investigate, and thereby demonstrate their merit to the Association?

Traveling aboard the Maugifier's wispy flyer, the PCs reach the source of the penumbra—a mysterious small moon that has freed itself from its orbit of Kerkaju and is hurtling toward Earth. Home to archveults, enormous winged serpents, and deadly geysers, the moon is a hostile environ to would-be explorers. Hidden among its scarred, volatile surface are a pair of ancient secrets, turned to tragic ends.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The under-orb causing the penumbra conceals two secrets of note.

First, the Association knows full well the reasons why the moon-mote is hurtling toward Earth (though they are ignorant as to *how*). Aeons ago they imprisoned one of their own, Opsall the Irredeemable, within a stone cyst on the moon via the notorious *Spell of Forlorn Encystment*. Aided by a simple magical gewgaw and the magician's own fierce will to power, Opsall painstakingly carved his way free of the cyst. He emerged from the prison only to discover to his horror that, in the Association's haphazard casting of the spell, they had also caught his young family within their area of effect.

In a desperate bid to protect his spouse and children from the madness that must always follow encystment, Opsall transformed them to stone. Then, over the course of centuries, he lovingly carved them free, hoping to one day reverse his own spell and free his family.

In the end, his enchantment was too strong, and Opsall was unable to rescind the spell. Having failed to save the lives of his own family, the grieving magician set about ending those of his exilers.

In doing so, he discovered the satellite's second secret: the moon is not a moon at all, but rather an egg. Beneath the violent geysers and writhing fields, down through the scabbed surface and its bubbling pools, beyond the violet, corrupting albumen, lies an embryonic star-dragon.

In the normal course of events, it would be several more eons before the star-dragon hatched free of the moon at the edge of the cosmos.

Opsall has brought that maturation to a head. Enlisting the service of the archveults and enslaving devotees who once worshipped the star-dragon, Opsall has drilled down through the surface of the moon-mote, opening a shaft to the egg's albumen. For the last century, he has fed the star-dragon a steady diet of IOUN stones and cosmic rays.

Simultaneously, Opsall has cast an astral line to Earth, and has begun drawing the moon-mote through the cosmos, back to his vile gaolers.

Soon the magician's dark labors will come to fruition. The moon-mote will darken the sky above the ruinous Earth

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

**Opsall the Irredeemable**, magician, spouse, and father, imprisoned along with his family by the magicians of the Association of Far-Viewers

**Imire the Maugifer**, first among peers in the Association of Far-Viewers

**Antepode** (also **the Witherling**), vain major-domo in the service of Imire the Maugifer

**Noemis the Pilloried**, last surviving devotee of an order of stylites

*Lesser Members of the Association of Far-Viewers:*

Agymox of the Green Marshes

Belawor the Bellwether

Foshd'ar the Licentious

Reffulo of the Redolent Cube



just as the star-dragon emerges from its shell. And Opsall (now Opsall the Destroyer) will watch on in black glee as his hated foes, the magi of the Association, suffer as he has suffered, and death will grant a mutual release from their shared torment.

**A note on player handouts:** In the course of their characters' adventures, the players may elect to map Opsall's moon-mote. For simplicity, the map and its handouts are rendered as icosahedrons more familiar to players as twenty-sided dice. Each of the faces are numbered, with the encounter area notation matching the face. For example, Area 3-1 falls on face 3, and Area 17-2 is on the seventeenth face.

A blank players' map (**Handout A**) can be shared with players desiring to fold and assemble the model to help them visualize the under-orb and its environs. In this instance, judges should also provide a second, blank moon map that can be also laid flat and detailed during exploration.

Odds are excellent that the PCs will attempt flight in an effort to better survey the map. In anticipation of this, judges are encouraged to make a copy of **Handout B** and cut each of the faces. If the PCs gain sufficient elevation to survey the face, award the players with the cutout of that specific face, speeding their efforts to accurately map the moon-mote.

Finally, judges will be well served by using two copies of the annotated judge's map: one folded into an icosahedron and the other laid flat for reference.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

This adventure is best suited for parties with at least one magician who is not already a member of an association. It should be well known by PCs that joining an association is considered the epitome of culture and rank, and is a goal toward which most magicians strive.

For parties with multiple magicians, the invitation hints at the potential for rivalry, while encouraging all to apply.

And for even those parties not wishing to join an association, the opportunity to step inside a rival's manse and partake of its wonders (and perhaps leave with some of the same) is not to be squandered.

The invitation plays to the PCs' vanities, lauding their mastering of magic and all things arcane. It recognizes the PCs as fantabulists and wonder-makers worthy of great esteem and posits that the Association can serve as a tool on the PCs' behalf, elevating their stature even further.

## VANCIAN GLOSSARY

**Asterism:** a prominent pattern or group of stars, typically smaller than a constellation.

**Chalaza:** twisted membranous strips joining the yolk to the ends of the shell, viz., chalaza-channel, chalazoscope.

**Chorion:** the outermost membrane surrounding an embryo.

**Concameration:** vaulted construction, as a roof or ceiling.

**Cozening:** tricking or deceiving.

**Infarcted:** dead tissue caused by inadequate blood supply (necrosis).

**Fenne-adder:** a dragon-snake.

**Floating collimator:** a small telescope fastened horizontally on a flat iron float which is made to swim on mercury.

**Loricata:** a creature having scales (e.g., a dragon).

**Miasma:** a highly unpleasant smell or vapor.

**Penumbra:** the shadow cast over an area experiencing a partial eclipse.

**Starn-shot:** a shooting star, meteor.

**Stellascopes:** an astronomical telescope.

**Stylite:** an ascetic living on top of a pillar.

**Tenebrous:** shadowy, obscure.

**Trunk-glass:** a telescope.

**Under-orb:** the moon.

# STARTING THE ADVENTURE

*You and your companions arrive at the manse of Imire the Maugifer: a thicket of towers that wind around one another with strange and distinct concamerations. The stones of the tower are polished to a bright sheen, so that the manse seems to glisten with evening dew.*

*Languid insects, their broad wings awash with a rainbow of iridescent colors, rest heavily on the broad fronds surrounding the base of the tower. Stirred by your approach, they scatter a few feet, then settle back into stillness.*

*A portly manikin waits at the grand gate in a velvet waistcoat, shining the coat's brass buttons with his moisty breath. The witherling major-domo surveys – and dismisses – you with a quick glance, then returns to his preening.*

Imire's major-domo answers to the name of Antepode the Witherling. Vain to a fault, the major-domo disdains any visitors that he deems to be of insufficient rank. It falls to the PCs to negotiate passage.

Antepode is immune to bribery, but immensely susceptible to flattery, especially if the petitioner compliments his garb. The Witherling fawns on the first PC to offer praise, according the character no shortage of respect, but then is immediately suspicious of other PCs who try to imitate the first.

Failing this, petitioners are subjected to an exhausting series of questions before the Witherling agrees to escort them to his master: their names and sobriquets, their business with his master, their areas of magical expertise, the rising and falling zodiacs of their birth, and so on. Antepode continues on in this vein, punishing the PCs until he feels they have accorded him sufficient respect.

The Witherling can be goaded or threatened into performing his duties, but this causes the Witherling to seek out his own pretty revenge as the PCs travel to the Kerkaju. See Interlude, below, for details about Antepode's revenge and rewards (for perceived slights and compliments, respectively).

**Antepode the Witherling:** Init +0; Atk knife +2 melee (1d3); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 8; MV walk 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +6; AL N; Crit I/d8.

Wary parties note that they are being discretely watched from a high tower window. The other magicians in Imire's Association envy the PCs' ascendant star and take the opportunity to haze the newcomers. Egged on by his fellow magicians, Reffulo of the Redolent Cube casts *Ewydion's Emotive Effluvium*:

The entire party must attempt a DC 20 Will save. PCs who succeed break into a harmless (though effusive) sweat that passes in 1d3 rounds. Those who fail sweat their emotions for 1d10 hours, and emit the following odiferous auras:

- Anger: brimstone and molten rock.
- Fear: tears and rust.
- Sadness: embalming herbs and moth-eaten mourning veils.
- Hope: the heady scent of fresh rainfall on a summer's day.

- Joy: puppy breath and freshly baked bread.

Judges and players are encouraged to discern their own unique scents for other emotions. The smell of each effluvium is overpowering, and can be readily detected up to 30' distant.

PCs may suspect Antepode, but the Witherling has no idea of Reffulo's antics.

Later, when the Association is called to order, the magicians cruelly mock the PCs for their scents, doing their best to taunt the characters into a heady mix of brimstone and rust.

If the PCs all make their saving throws, or somehow counter the *Emotive Effluvium*, it only doubles the ire and envy of the Association.

**The Halls of Manse:** Once the PCs succeed in either coercing or convincing Antepode the Witherling to grant them to passage, read or paraphrase the following:

*The major-domo leads you down the curving halls of Imire's resplendent tower. The walls and ceiling glow with an immaterial sheen, contrasted against the thick, dark-hued rugs that run the long halls and winding stairs. Open doorways beckon from either side, hinting at strange salons and studies, collections of oddities and ephemera from another age. The Witherling leads you unerringly through the manse at a brisk pace.*

*At last you reach the peak of the highest tower. The Witherling bids you toward a grand doorway, upholstered in blue velvet set with gemstone pins.*

**The Observatory:** Venturing inside, the PCs discover a glass-domed chamber set with scores of scopes:

*The glass-ceilinged chamber is host to a bewildering array of far-viewing relics: brass stellascope, crystal trunk-glasses, floating collimator, and the like.*

*Lining the walls are a series of low pedestals topped by carved stone busts depicting aged men and women. One of the six pedestals is curiously empty. At the back of the chamber is a raised dais set with six opulent thrones.*

There are two key clues that PCs can glean from the chamber as they await the arrival of Imire the Maugifer:

- Gazing through any of the far-viewers reveals that they have all been turned toward the Red Eye of the Polar Ape; in each, with varying degrees of magnification, a strange shadow threatens to eclipse the red globe. Magicians and their ilk immediately recognize that this is due to respective distance – the object occluding the Polar Ape is drawing nearer to Earth. Show players **Handout B**, but take the handout back once Imire and the Association enter the chamber.
- Characters noting the missing bust might initially mistake it for an open place in the Association. (Characters are, after all, applying for membership and may hope to see their own busts adorning the pedestals.) Closer



## ROGUES IN THE HOUSE

It runs counter to the spirit of DCC to demand that the PCs blindly follow Antepode's lead. Some PCs (and their players) will certainly desire to explore the manse, and no knave worthy of the company of Cugel could resist the impulse to filch a curio or three.

Detailing Imire's expansive manse would require a tome many times this size; of that, only a fraction would ever be put to use, and even less would be entertaining. In lieu of that wasted ink we offer the following table to inspire judges when PCs slip into larceny.

However, a cautionary aside and reminder: magicians in the party will be desirous of impressing Imire and winning a place in his Association. Allowing one's companions to scamper about the manse, thieving from their host, is bad manners to say the least. If the rogues are caught, Imire will certainly demand that the Law of Equipoise be enforced, and that double or even triple damages are paid. Expulsion from the manse will be the least of the PCs' worries.

Roll 3d6	Common Manse rooms and their furnishings & treasures
3	Calefactory: a warming room set with several iron pots around a fire of coals. Tongs rest nearby so that visitors may add coals to the pots before wrapping themselves in thick wool blankets and indulging in the various cones of sweet (and possibly magical) incense.
4-5	Executionary: contains dozens of queller's tools, ranging from the simple (headsman's axe) to the elaborate (self-actuating iron maiden).
6-8	Servant's domicile: a simple room set with several beds of varying sizes and footlockers to match. If looted, determine contents by rolling on Table 4-4 in the <i>Player's Libram</i> .
9-12	Drawing room: a richly appointed hall. The chamber is dominated by a long oaken table surrounded by finely carved chairs. The walls are paneled in dark wood, hung with various mounted trophies.
13-15	Larder: a side chamber overstuffed with an endless array of foodstuffs and liquors of dubious provenance. Inquisitive characters should dice on the table delectables found in Appendix P: Provisions & Viands in <i>Intimate Anatomy of Several Creatures and Personages of the Twenty-First Aeon</i> to determine the nature of their discoveries.
16-17	Sacristy: a simple disused chamber long lost to dust and cobwebs. An elaborate wardrobe is filled with voluminous robes, braided belts, and gold-stitched half-cloaks. Characters insisting on searching the sacristy closely are permitted a roll on the Thaumaturgical Curios table, found in Appendix A of the <i>Player's Libram</i> .
18	False aerary: the door to this chamber is banded in iron and set with an elaborate lock that has been thrown into the closed position. However, while "locked," the door stands ajar and is easily pulled open. Inside are shelves laden with 12 strongboxes. All of the strongboxes are curiously unlocked, and each contains a mix of coins: 1d100 groats, 1d50 terces, and 1d30 golden centums stamped with a diabolic face.  The aerary is a clumsy attempt by Imire to catch his servants pilfering from their master's coffers. Anyone carrying but a single stolen coin appears to Imire as if lit by blue flames, unless the coin is concealed in a lead-foil pouch or wrap. Careful characters who manage to apprehend the enchantment can turn this to their advantage by secreting the coins on foes.

inspection reveals otherwise: traces of stone dust can be found atop the pedestal and stone chips found on the rug. Even more revealing is the lack of name plate adorning the pedestal itself: it has been chiseled away in an effort to expunge the name. A quick *mending* spell or the like is sufficient to reveal the name, "Opsall the Irredeemable".

Imire the Maugifer arrives after 1d5+1 minutes, followed by a train of four fellow magicians (including Reffulo of the Redolent Cube, incanter of *Ewydion's Emotive Effluvium* a scant while earlier). All are quickly moved to shock and then anger if they discover that the PCs have been toying

with their precious instruments.

Imire is a bald, portly man dressed in luxurious crimson robes. He sports a braided mustache and iridescent blue eyes. However, these details are difficult to make out due to Imire's maugery; PCs attempting to look at Imire directly find their gaze violently shunted away.

Imire's maugery is not as strong as Makke the Maugifer. Imire has mauged in but three of the cardinal directions, so that with mental effort (a DC 20 Will save), PCs can gaze upon his visage. Similarly, a PC must succeed on the Will check before attempting to target Imire with line-of-sight spells, and melee and ranged attacks suffer a -2 penalty.

## Role-playing Imire and the Magicians of the Association:

After commenting on any smells lingering in the room, **Imire the Maugifier** welcomes the PCs. He apologizes for the temperament of Antepode, and commiserates with the PCs over the difficulty of finding good help, here at the end of time. (The Witherling, standing outside the chamber, can hear every word.) He offers his guests smoked oil-fish paired with vervain tea, concluded with a tipple of silver hyssop.

**Imire** is laughingly cruel toward his servants, taking every opportunity to mock them even as he complains about the quality of their efforts. The other magicians do the same, calling for wine and tipples while deriding Antepode and his staff. They fully expect the PCs to join in the cold-hearted derision. Indeed, if the PCs fail to join in—or worse, are so audacious as to defend Antepode—their kindness is rewarded by awkward glances and concerned looks.

Easily bored, **Agymox of the Green Marches** is quick to take the counterpoise in any discussion, just for the sake of the argument. The enchanter garbs himself in pale white robes which highlight his brilliantly-colored tattoos.

Broad of shoulder, bald of pate, **Belawor the Bellwether** is impulsive in action and thought. Belawor wears his long gray beard braided with burning incense to ward off devils.

A vile mole of a man, **Foshd'ar the Licentious** dresses in exotic furs and delights in all things cruel. He is easily distractible, and demands that others restate their arguments in the service of process. Foshd'ar is blatantly insulting to any outside of earshot—or to servants *within* earshot.

Perpetually late, **Reffulo of the Redolent Cube** is always quick with an excuse or lie, never recalling or admitting to past fabrications. Tall and thin, Reffulo sports long, greased hair and favors ill-fitting purple robes.

Judges are encouraged to play the despicable magicians without remorse. Will the PCs join in the heartless cruelty in the hopes of winning their way into Imire's good graces, or take a stand in the face of social pressure? Take note, as the PCs' response has a material effect on the second part of the adventure (see Interlude, below).

If, perchance, the PCs elect to assault any of the Association, the members immediately withdraw from the fray. Wized from countless conflicts, each learned long ago to engage in combat only when the odds are overwhelmingly in their favor. Judges should feel free to retaliate on behalf of any of the Association with the *Spell of Forlorn Encystment* at a rote check result of 26, enveloping all PCs and releasing them but moments later, to illustrate just how futile a battle is.

**The Plight of the Far-Viewers:** Once all present are comfortable, Imire the Maugifer explains why he has summoned the PCs to his manse:

*Your host, 'guised by the strange, obscuring enchantment, beckons to his fellow magicians: "My associates, respected incanters one and all, have each apprehended the same curiosity: a mote – as it were – in a god's eye.*

*"Is it a moon, perhaps, shorn from its predictable orbit? A great ur-*

*meteor, streaking through the evening sky? And to what purpose, this unerring starn-shot? For all our combined wisdom, we know not. All we can aver is that the phasm is rapidly approaching this sphere we call Earth, and growing closer with each passing day.*

*"Concurrent to this curiosity was the impulse, too, to bolster our ranks with fellow wonder-masters and sorcerists. But how does one assess the true merit of an applicant? An open call would surely bring petitioners from across this world of ours.*

*"And yet – and yet. When taken together as pole and antipole, each challenge presented the other's solution. And surely no coincidence can occur without cosmic intent. The elegance alone is deserving of applause.*

*"This we pose to you and your companions: hie thee to the distant moon-mote, and divine what draws it hither. No doubt a slight task for such worthies as yourselves, yet full sufficient to vett your place amongst an Association of peers."*

*Imire pauses, nearly bursting with pride at his proposal. The observatory goes quiet, each present hanging on your response.*

The PCs are free to ask any questions they like, though the answers are frustratingly few – and immediately countered and questioned by Agymox, while the distracted Foshd'ar makes repeated demands that the arguments be restated in the service of conversational hygienics.

This much may be shared:

- "How will we reach this moon-mote?" The PCs will travel to the moon-mote aboard Imire's gossamer aeronaut. The PCs will be taught mastery of the flyer and the use of speed incense by Antepode the Witherling. Unfortunately, there are scarcely enough accommodations for the PCs; otherwise, of course, Imire and his companions would join them.
- "What do you know of the Red Eye of the Polar Ape?" Imire and the Association claim to know nothing of consequence of the Polar Ape. However, this is a cozening deception. The Far-Viewers exiled one of their own, the Opsall the Irredeemable, to a moon orbiting Kerkaju, as punishment for outdoing Imire in an exhibition of arcane mastery. If pressed, the Association does not deny the possibility that the moon-mote is home to arch-veults, but beyond this, they reveal nothing.
- "May we study the moon-mote through the far-viewers?" This request elicits an immediate and vehement response from each member of the Association. Each far-viewer is unique to its magician-creator, and to share their secrets runs the risk of intellectual theft. And besides, the Association argues, there is nothing that can be seen that the PCs won't soon witness first hand.
- "What resources can the Association share?" The magicians refuse to surrender any IOUN stones or the like. Imire notes that sharing magical resources would invalidate the test proposed by the Association. In order for the PCs to win acceptance into the ranks of the Association, they must succeed on their own merits. (This argument is patently false, as Imire is providing his flyer, but he brooks no discussions of hypocrisy.)



# INTERLUDE

## PASSAGE TO THE POLAR APE

Imire's gossamer flyer is fully prepped and ready to be boarded. The larders of the ship are stocked with sufficient meat and drink for both the journey to the moon-mote and back again.

Despite all the hurdles introduced by Imire and his peers, the Association is more than willing to provide the PCs with any mundane gear they request, bidding Antepode the Witherling to retrieve whatever items the PCs request. Magical aid, however, is not forthcoming.

The Witherling demonstrates to the PCs how, when plied with speed incense, the flyer will guide itself to their destination. Antepode makes brief mention of the helm and wheel, but assures the PCs that manual steering of the vessel will not be necessary. A second application of incense will send the flyer gliding back home. Antepode hazards a guess that the PCs will have 1d5+5 days in transit, allowing for ample time to make any final preparations.

During their tutelage, the PCs have ample opportunity to interrogate the Witherling. Previously arrogant and dismissive, Antepode is cringing and retiring, doing his best to avoid the PCs' ire. If the characters can win his trust (offering rare and exotic cloth is always an entry point), the Witherling does his best to answer the PCs' queries.

Specifically, if the party asks about Opsall, Antepode can share that the magician was a former member of the Association who bested each of his peers in feats of wonderment. Envious of Opsall, Imire and the organization conspired to cast the *Spell of Forlorn Encystment* to imprison the wizard and his mundane family. (Antepode has no idea that the cyst in question was located on the moon-mote.)

**Trove of the Witherling:** If the PCs were kind and refused to join Imire and the Association in tormenting Antepode, the preening major-domo offers the PCs a gift as they embark on their journey: a single IOUN stone, stolen from his

master. (Stone is dormant until bonded and imbued; refer to Chapter III of *Intimate Anatomy of Several Creatures and Personages of the Twenty-First Aeon* to determine stone color.)

However, if the PCs were passive, or worse, joined in the cruelty, Antepode does nothing of the sort. Instead, the major-domo waits for the PCs to pass out of sight, then flees into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

**Moonfall:** As the flyer approaches the moon, the PCs feel tremors as the diaphanous vehicle is rocked by the egg's outsized gravity. Any PCs who aren't anchored or otherwise tied down must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be

hurled violently across the deck, slamming into the opposite rail for 2d6 damage. (Simply holding onto the railing is insufficient to combat the flyer's shaking, but clever spells, like a well-placed *feather fall*, can mitigate the damage.)

The flyer hurtles moonward at a sickening pitch. It shifts 1d5 times more (requiring the same checks for all un-anchored PCs). If a PC takes the wheel and succeeds on a DC 10 Strength check, or comes up with some clever stratagem to cushion moonfall, reduce the number of violent shifts by -1d. Any number of PCs can attempt to assist in this manner, but unless they are somehow also harnessed in, granting aid

risks suffering full damage during the raucous descent.

*Example: Two PCs spring to the helm, and both succeed on their Strength checks. The number of times the flyer is rocked is reduced from 1d5, to 1d3. If two more PCs had successfully aided the effort, the chance of the flyer rocking the PCs would have been eliminated altogether.*

The specific location of descent is random. Upon moonfall, the judge rolls 1d20 to determine the face of the moon-mote, then 1d3 to determine the specific hex of the flyer's landing. The flyer only lands in the central (full) three hexes of a face. To illustrate: a d20 roll of 5 and a d3 result of 3 places the downed flyer in map face 5, hex 3.



# THE PENUMBRA OF THE POLAR APE

The moon-mote is not wholly anathema to human life. The air is breathable, albeit slightly acrid to the lungs. The temperature is chilly, raising the hairs on PCs' arms and stinging the eyes. The gravity approximates that of Earth. The moon seems to reside in perpetual twilight; the sole sources of ambient light are stars above, and a deep violet glow which radiates from within the egg.

## THE HUNT FOR OPSALL THE IRREDEEMABLE

Opsall is an active actor and a dangerous foe who can be encountered nearly anywhere on the moon-mote as he performs the necessary rites and vigils to guide the starn-shot to Earth.

When the PCs make moonfall, roll 1d20 and count across the faces of the moon to determine Opsall's starting location. Roll a second time, again counting across the faces, to determine the goal of Opsall's trek. Finally, roll 1d3 to determine the number of days he spends at his destination once he arrives. Choose the most habitable hex on the face to determine Opsall's specific location.

For simplicity, each time the PCs move into a new face of the moon, Opsall does the same, slowly advancing on his journey. Arriving at his destination, he sets up a simple camp with his retinue and begins the arcane ablutions and other strange rituals for the appointed number of days. Once completed, roll 1d20 and 1d3 anew to determine his next destination and the time necessary to complete the next ritual.

All this changes if the PCs and Opsall cross paths, or when the PCs make their presence known to the archveults in Areas 10-1 or 17-1. Opsall and his attending archveults break camp and immediately travel to the PCs' last known location and begin their own hunt.

The size of his party makes it easy for the PCs to take note of Opsall's traveling camp. Simply entering the same face is near enough for the party to spot the campfires and to hear the incantations and invocations.

If the PCs take pains to remain hidden, Opsall's company passes by. If they make themselves known, or if Opsall and his archveults succeed in tracking down the PCs, the magician does his best to capture the PCs and then feed them to the star-dragon via the chalazascope in Area 17-1c.

Said encounters need not involve combat. Opsall first attempts to use guile and deceit to lure the PCs into his clutches. Failing that, he and his archveults have no qualms about taking the party captive by force. Captured characters are interrogated as to their mission, before being fed to the star-dragon through the chalazascope. See Area 17-1c for more details on the fate befalling the PCs.

**Opsall the Irredeemable:** Init +3; Atk dagger +3 melee

(1d4-1) or spell; AC 13; HD 8d6; hp 37; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP memorized spells (as CL 8, see below), *Ring of Null* (adds +5 to saves vs. spell effects; see below), *force of will* (16 Personality); SV Fort +2 (7), Ref +5 (10), Will +5 (10); AL L; Crit I/d12.

Rote memorized spells: (level 1) *charm person* [18], *magic missile* [25], *magic shield* [20]; *sleep* [25]; (level 2) *mirror image* [24], *monster summoning* [23], *scorching ray* [25]; (level 3) *dispel magic* [23], *fireball* [30], *fly* [20], *turn to stone* [25].

*Ring of Null:* On his right hand, Opsall wears a gaudy ring set with a large emerald-colored crystal. The fabled ring nullifies all magic it encounters, and grants its wearer a +5 bonus to saving throws against spell effects. The ring's benefits can only be used by wizards or magicians. See sidebar below for full details of the ring's powers.

**Archveult champions (5):** Init +1; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4+1), galvanic touch +2 melee (3d6), glaive +1 melee (1d10), or spell; AC 13; HD 7d5; hp 30 each; MV 60'; Act 2d20; SP conductive aura (incoming damage is reflected doubly to all in 50' radius, DC 15 Ref save for half), galvanic touch (1/turn), spells (+8 spell check); SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; AL N; Crit III/d10.

Spells: (level 1) *color spray*, *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *sleep*; (level 2) *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *scorching ray*; (level 3) *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *fly*.

**Camp slaves (15+1d12):** Init -1; Atk fist -1 melee (1d3-1); AC 10; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d16; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -3; AL N; Crit I/d6.

## NAVIGATING THE MOON

Each hex is one mile across. The curvature of the moon-egg and the persistent gloom is such that PCs can only see into adjacent hexes.

The massive dragon egg—or smallish moon, depending on one's perspective—is replete with a number of features that imperil travelers. There are three principal challenges to explorers: terrain, random encounters and events, and fixed encounter areas (see Overland Map, below).

### TERRAIN

Except where noted, the surface of the moon-egg has a rough, scabbed appearance, indicating where the surface crust has broken in the past, then cooled and hardened. Unmarked on the map, these ubiquitous crusted folds present no inherent threat to the PCs. However, much of the remaining surface is neither stable nor safe, as noted herein.

**Tenebrous Marches:** The swards are taken over entirely by gray-green tendrils that wave in the faint solar wind. The tendrils are fine dragon hairs that have grown upward from within the egg, and threaten to draw characters down to their doom.



## THE RING OF NULL

The fabled ring appears as a gaudy gewgaw set with a large emerald-colored crystal. Prior to donning the ring, a character one can feel a strong pull as the ring attempts to draw in their soul. It is left up to the PC to decide whether or not to carry through with the act.

Any character attempting to wear the ring must succeed on a DC 25 Will save or lose 1d5-1 levels. A PC whose level is reduced below 0 is slain.

The ring grants its wearer a +5 bonus to saving throws against spell effects. However, the ring's primary and most awful power is nullifying all magic it encounters. This anti-magic is limited to only what the ring itself touches. (Note that the wearer, having survived the initial level drain, has mastered the ring and is personally immune to the effect. This indemnity does not extend to familiars, sandestins, or other magical extensions of the caster.)

**Enchanted objects:** Contrary to the beliefs of layfolk, enchanted objects are not merely mundane items with magic laid atop them. Rather, their entire molecular structure is infused with—and transformed by—the act of enchantment. To wit, drawing the ring across an enchanted item leaves a furrow of ash, ruining the item.

An item may receive a DC 15 saving throw to resist the ring's effects, receiving a +1 bonus to the roll per level of enchantment, or as adjudicated by the judge.

**Spell effects:** The ring cannot protect its bearer from area effects (apart from the +5 saving throw bonus). A fireball still sears the wearer even as the ring remains unaffected. A focused ray effect can be blocked by the ring, if the wearer succeeds on an attack roll equal to or higher than the spell check. Attempting to interpose the ring and failing means the wearer is automatically struck by the very ray they were attempting to nullify.

**Enchanted creatures:** At the judge's discretion, creatures brought to life through enchantment (though not, for instance, supernatural creatures) suffer grievously when struck by the ring, taking 1d7 damage per HD of the wielder. Sentient enchanted creatures will do their best to escape, but if escape is impossible, they do their utmost to destroy or dismember the magician bearing the *Ring of Null*.

The hairs flail blindly at the slightest hint of motion, whether it be a character trying to cross the field or coin pitched into the fronds, drawing grasped objects down into the grasses to be consumed.

Characters must make a DC 20 Reflex save any round they are within reach of the 5' tendrils. Those failing the check are grappled and must succeed on DC 20 Strength checks or be drawn down into the darkness, where they are rent limb from limb for 1d20 damage each round. In order to escape

the tortuous void, a PC must succeed on a DC 20 Strength check, or be freed by an ally either succeeding on the check or dealing 5 points of damage to the fronds in a single round. (Treat the tendrils as having AC 10; on a missed roll, the attacker mistakenly stabs or bludgeons the trapped PC.)

The pilgrims (see Random Encounters & Events, below) have developed rituals and techniques for crossing the marches. By taking but a single step each hour, and maintaining a constant, droning chant, they are able to slowly traverse the marches on their ceaseless circumnavigation.

**Infarcted Wastes:** These pockmarked, bubbly plains appear very much like the scabbed surface of the moon, save for an iridescent sheen that glosses the scores of blistered mounds. The surface crust here is weak and hot to the touch.

For every hex of the wastes crossed, each PC must attempt a Luck check. On a failed roll, the crusty surface gives way beneath the PC, pitching them down into darkness. Those within 30' must make a DC 20 Reflex save or follow their companion into the abyss. Characters fall 1d5×10', landing in a superheated pool.

The fall is the least of the PCs' concerns. The superheated fluids deal 1d14 heat damage per round (DC 15 Fort save for half), and work their strange magic on any unfortunate soul bathing in the befouled waters. Roll or pick from the table of effects to determine the pool's specific qualities:

### Roll 1d10 Effect of the Deeps

1	Poison! Character must attempt a DC 5 Fort save each round spent in the fluids or perish.
2-3	Ooze. Viscosity of the pool makes it nigh impossible to swim. DC 15 Strength check each round to stay afloat.
4-7	Noxious fumes. All characters inside the pit (not simply submerged in the pool) must make a DC 10 Fort save or begin to "drown" due to asphyxiation (lose 1d6 points of Stamina per round; PCs die when Stamina reaches 0).
8-9	Mineralization. For each round spent submerged in the fluids, the PC must succeed on a DC 10 Will save or see a body part turned to stone. Roll 1d6: (1) left leg; (2) right leg; (3) left arm; (4) right arm; (5) torso (death in 1d10 rounds); (6) head (death, no chance of recovery).
10	Disintegration! The waters quickly begin to eat away at the PC, devouring flesh and bone. Character suffers the permanent loss of 1d5 points of Stamina per round. If reduced to 0, a character's body is entirely dissolved. Obviously, the character is slain and cannot be recovered.

Climbing free of a moon-hole is no small matter. The walls of the pits are covered with mineral crust that readily gives way under weight. Those hoping to escape the pools by

climbing must succeed on DC 20 Climb Sheer Surfaces or Strength checks.

The threat of the sinkholes and moon-pits are readily overcome with the simplest of magical or mundane precautions. It falls to the PCs (or the players) to come up with solutions, but simply roping the party together and spreading the PCs 30' or further apart ensures they can traverse the wastes without fear.

**Geyser Fields:** Flecked with mounds of hardened minerals and wreathed in thick clouds of steam, these hexes are home to scores of geysers that gout steam and superheated amniotic fluids.

The geysers are extremely difficult to predict. Worse, even if the predictions are accurate, they offer the PCs little in the way of respite. The towering plumes release a foul miasma which is borne about by the winds and threatens even those nowhere near the original eruption.

For each hex mile of the wastes crossed, the PC with the lowest Luck score must attempt a Luck check. Consult the following tables for results.

Luck check was...	Geyser Effect
Passed	A series of geysers erupt beyond the horizon, giving the violet gloom a reddish haze.
Failed by 1 point	A geyser erupts a few hundred yards distant to the (roll 1d4): (1) north; (2) south; (3) east; (4) west. The sickening cloud drifts toward the PCs. The party must continue their march if they hope to evade the cloud, but may choose the direction of their travel. If the PCs plunge deeper into the geyser fields, they risk a second eruption (call for a second Luck check to determine whether a second geyser erupts).
Failed by 2 points	A trio of geysers erupt nearby, and the drift clouds encircle the PCs, forcing them to march 1d3 miles to safety. The sole route to safety is (roll 1d4): (1) north; (2) south; (3) east; (4) west.
Failed by 3 points	A geyser goes off nearby. All PCs must attempt a DC 10 Reflex save or suffer 1d12 damage. Characters within 60' of the unluckiest PC are caught in the plume (see below).
Failed by 4+	A geyser goes off directly adjacent to the PC. They — and all characters within 30' — are blasted for 3d16 damage (DC 20 Reflex save for half). Everyone within 60' suffers the effects of the plume (see below).

If the PCs are caught within a plume or drift cloud, roll 1d5 to determine the cloud's effects. The clouds can be readily dispersed with clever magic and wind-like effects. Other-

wise, the clouds pass after 1d7+3 rounds.

Roll 1d5	Plume and Drift Cloud Effects
1	Poison miasma! Characters caught in the cloud must succeed on a DC 10 Fort save or suffer the permanent loss of 1d7 points of Stamina.
2	The geyser gouts a cloud of searing pyroclastic embers. All characters caught in the fiery rain must succeed on a DC 20 Reflex save or be struck by 1d8 embers, each dealing 1d6 damage.
3	A thermobaric cloud of fire. Characters caught within the cloud must make a DC 10 Fort save or begin to “drown” due to asphyxiation.
4	Flesh to stone. The cloud passes over the party, and each round the PCs spend within the drift they must succeed on a DC 5 Fort save or suffer a temporary loss of 1d12 points of Stamina as their soft tissue hardens. The effects of the hardening end as the lost Stamina is recovered, unless a PC is reduced 0 Stamina, in which case the character is permanently turned to stone.
5	Tendrils of green mist wend through the clouds, devouring all that they encounter. Each PC within the cloud must roll 1d20 modified by Luck. The PC with the lowest result is attacked by several tendrils lashing out of the darkness at once. On a failed DC 10 Will save, the character vanishes. Roll 1d4: [1] the PC returns an instant later, having aged d100 years and gained 1d30 XP; [2] the PC reappears 1d10 hexes distant; [3] the PC returns to the party 1d5 rounds later, having been transformed into the semblance of an archvult (note that the other PCs may not recognize their old comrade); [4] the PC is forever lost.





# RANDOM ENCOUNTERS & EVENTS

Every day spent on the surface of the moon-mote, the PCs risk 1d5-1 encounters or events, timed at the judge's pleasure.

Prior to each encounter, call for a Luck check (roll under) by the PC with the worst Luck. On a successful check the encounter takes place at a distance, giving the party the opportunity to hide and wait the encounter out, withdraw to another hex, or otherwise avoid the encounter.

*A note on flight:* If, during their expeditions, PCs take to the skies, the PC in the group with the worst Luck must immediately make a Luck check. On a failed check, the PCs are spotted and set upon by a flock of 1d7+5 starving jangk harpies. Weak and desperate for easy prey, the harpies fall upon the PCs, attempting to drive at least one character to the ground, to be devoured. Reference the stats for the weakened, starving jangk harpies below.

Once safely aloft, the PCs risk drawing the attention of the starving harpies each time they cross into a new "face" of the moon (defined by the large triangle framing the hexes; see Interlude, above). The exception is if the PCs charm or otherwise subdue one or more of the moon mites and use the giant, winged lizards for transportation. Very little on the moon-mote would dare to threaten anyone daring to ride the massive apex predators.

A character gaining more than 500' of elevation can see (and map) the entire map face.

Roll 2d7	Random Encounters & Events
2	Archveult Stalkers
3	Moon Mite
4	Pilgrimage
5-7	Archveult Workgang
8-9	Jangk Harpies
10-11	Starving Jangk Harpies
12	Crackling Hairs
13	Moonquake
14	IOUN Meteor

Results are listed alphabetically by event.

**Archveult stalkers:** A trio of archveult stalkers trek in search of fallen meteorites (and the precious IOUN stones they may conceal). If they spot the PCs, the stalkers attempt to capture them and return them to Area 17-1c, to be sacrificed to the star-dragon.

**Archveult stalkers (3):** Init +1; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4+1), galvanic touch +2 melee (3d6), glaive +1 melee (1d10), or spell; AC 13; HD 5d5; hp 15 each; MV 60'; Act 2d20; SP conductive aura (incoming damage is reflected doubly to all in 50' radius, DC 15 Ref save for half), galvanic touch (1/turn), spells (+8 spell check); SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; AL N; Crit III/d10.

Spells: (level 1) *color spray, magic missile, magic shield, sleep*; (level 2) *invisibility, mirror image, scorching ray*; (level 3) *dispel magic, fireball, fly*.

**Archveult workgang:** A band of 1d30+15 slaves cross the wastes, en route to the Pearl of the Exiled Seer (Area 10-1). The workers are from a dozen different species, including humans, are dressed in rags and carry shovels and picks. The workgang is led by a single archveult. Clever and stealthy parties can track the workgang back to the Pearl. If attacked, the workgang scatters and the archveult attempts to flee back to his allies.

**Workgang (1d30+15):** Init -1; Atk fist -1 melee (1d3-1) or tool -1 (1d6-1); AC 8; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref +0, Will -2; AL N; Crit I/d6.

**Archveult workboss:** Init +1; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4+1), galvanic touch +2 melee (3d6), club +0 melee (1d6+1), or spell; AC 13; HD 5d5; hp 13; MV 60'; Act 2d20; SP conductive aura (incoming damage is reflected doubly to all in 50' radius, DC 15 Ref save for half), galvanic touch (1/turn), spells (+8 spell check); SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; AL N; Crit III/d10.

Spells: (level 1) *charm person, comprehend languages, magic missile, magic shield*; (level 2) *invisibility, mirror image, scorching ray*; (level 3) *dispel magic, fireball, slow*.

**Crackling hairs:** The ground opens up, and a river of writhing, tenebrous hairs spills from within the moon-egg. The narrow rift is 1d3 miles long and 75 feet wide (mark the appropriate hexes on the map). PCs must succeed on a DC 20 Reflex save each round to scramble free of the writhing green fronds. Those failing the check are grappled, as in the Tenebrous Marches (see Terrain, above).

**IOUN meteor:** A starn-shot, shorn from the heart of a dead star, shrieks across the sky and strikes down a mere 1d5-1 hexes from the PCs. If the PCs go in search of the meteorite, they discover a furrow cut into the face of the moon-egg. At the end of the furrow is a partially-melted mass of stone containing 1d4-1 IOUN stones (dormant and determined randomly per Chapter III of *Intimate Anatomy of Several Creatures and Personages of the Twenty-First Aeon*). If the PC with the worst Luck score fails a Luck check, three archveult stalkers (see above) reach the site at the same time as the PCs.

**Moon mite:** A massive moon mite blots out the stars in the endless night. A winged serpent over 100' in length, the creature is but a pale imitation when contrasted with the embryonic star-dragon. Roll 1d3 for the mite's response: (1) ignores the PCs; (2) attacks, hoping to carry one or more of the characters off to be devoured at its leisure; (3) lands nearby and demands tribute.

**Moon mite:** Init +10; Atk bite +10 melee (1d12 plus poison), wing-claw +6 melee (3d5+4); AC 15; HD 10d12; hp 85; MV fly 120'; Act 3d20; SP poison bite (DC 20 Fort save; see below); SV Fort +9, Ref +14, Will +7; AL N; Crit DR/d20.







## OVERLAND MAP

**Poison bite:** On a successful bite attack, the mite injects poison into its foe. The target must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or suffer the temporary loss of 1d7 points of Stamina. The damage is regained at the rate of 1 point per hour. A character reduced to 2 Stamina is rendered unconscious; a PC reduced to 0 Stamina is slain.

**Moonquake:** The space-dragon shudders, causing the surface of the moon to shudder and twist. Geysers erupt where previously there were none. All PCs must make a DC 15 Reflex save to evade the shower of pyroclastic spray (1d16 damage). Mark and treat the hex henceforth as a geyser field.

**Pilgrimage:** A desperate band of 1d20+10 pilgrims (the remnants of an ancient cult dedicated to the worship of the star-dragon) are on an endless march around the surface of the moon. Many of the emaciated bear massive, inscribed stones on their backs. The pilgrims are happy to share their meager supplies and knowledge of the moon-mote but only if the PCs sit with them and share the weight. Characters agreeing to bear the stones suffer 1d5 damage and the temporary loss of 1d3 points of Stamina. The pilgrims can detail any of the locations on the moon map and speak to the various dangers.

**Pilgrim (1d20+10):** Init +0; Atk fist -1 melee (1d3-1) or tool -1 melee (1d6-1); AC 8; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref +0, Will -2; AL N; Crit I/d6.

**Jangk harpies:** A flight of 1d5+1 harpies pass overhead. They wheel in the sky over the PCs, following them with wide, lazy circles. Each hour that passes, another 1d3-1 harpies join in. So long as the harpies circle above the PCs, it is impossible to surprise Opsall or the archveults. If the PCs pause to make camp or rest (especially after a battle), the harpies descend to make a quick meal of the PCs.

**Jangk harpies (1d5+1):** Init +1; Atk claws +2 melee (1d6) or charming cry; AC 14; HD 5d8; hp 24 each; MV 20' or fly 35'; Act 1d20; SP charming cry (DC 15 Will save; see below); SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +5; AL N; Crit M/d10.

**Charming cry:** The harpies can tune their cries into frequencies audible to a specific target. Once per melee encounter, they can attempt to charm a PC (DC 15 Will save to resist). The charm persists for 1d3 rounds.

**Starving Jangk harpies:** 1d3+2 ravenous harpies dive out of the gloom, attacking the party out of hunger and desperation.

**Jangk harpies, starving (1d3+2):** Init +2; Atk claws +4 melee (1d6+2) or stunning shriek; AC 12; HD 5d8; hp 14 each; MV 20' or fly 35'; Act 1d20; SP stunning shriek (DC 15 Will save; see below); SV Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N; Crit M/d10.

**Stunning shriek:** The starving harpies can tune their cries into frequencies audible to specific prey. Once per melee encounter, they can shriek at a target (DC 15 Will save to resist). On a failed save, the target suffers a -1d penalty to all action dice for 1d3 rounds. Multiple harpies target the same prey, rendering it senseless and unable to defend itself.

**Area 1-1, 6-1, 9-1, 11-1, 15-1 – Shattered Aqueduct:** A towering arch rises some 100 feet above the grasping fronds. The massive stone legs are cracked, and in places entire blocks have crumbled and fallen away, littering the base with rubble. The arch is topped by a platform of worn stone.

An aqueduct once ran the breadth of the moon, but remnants of the arcade are all that remain. The legs are pitted and crumbling and, as a consequence, easily scaled by most characters. (Only call for DC 10 Climb Sheer Surfaces or Agility checks if the PCs are attempting to climb while under duress, such as in combat.) The aqueduct is tall enough to be seen from two hexes away.

The platform offers a welcome respite to weary travelers—a fact readily confirmed by campfire scars scarring its surface. PCs can camp here safely, without fear of the tenebrous tendrils or the archveults. Even the moon mites and harpies give the monument a wide berth when it is occupied, for fear of being drawn down into the hungry tendrils below.

PCs taking the time to study and examine the old stonework discover a set of runes chiseled into the aqueduct. The fragments can be deciphered with a DC 17 Read Languages check (vat-things may attempt this with a d16), or a *comprehend languages* spell check result of 12 or higher. Roll 1d5 or use the following as inspiration for text specific to a monument:

- 1 by her divine order  
we raise this monument  
in honor of the Destroyer and her Starn-Shot  
may she leave naught but devastation in the wake of  
the fenne-adder

---

- 2 then there came to them a crier, asking, Where are the  
Crowns and the Crowns and the Citadels?  
And the shades answered plainly:  
long time they ate and drank; but now, after pleas-  
ant eating,  
they themselves have been eaten

---

- 3 upon this stoney slab have dined a thousand one-  
eyed Kings  
and a thousand Kings each sound in both eyes  
for fear of the Rampant Queen all to a man have quit-  
ted the world

---

- 4 O son of Man,  
knowest thou not that the chalice of death will be  
filled for thee,  
and that in a short time thou wilt drink it?  
Look then to thyself before entering thy grave  
the Adder Queen shall suckle all in time

---

- 5 they raised stone, but their towers availed not  
hoarded treasure, but their jewels could not save  
them  
prepare good meat and drink, that thou mayest savor it  
for every dweller in this house shall depart



**Area 3-1 – Step Well:** *A wide pit, squared on the sides, plunges down into the scabbed face of the strange moon. Steps line the walls, spiraling down into darkness. The stink of rotten eggs and staid water waft from below.*

*A gang of humanoids squat around the pit, heavy yokes and buckets hung around their necks.*

The pit is a stepwell, one of the few sources of water on the moon-mote. The workgang is tasked with retrieving water for their archveult masters and Opsall the Irredeemable. The well – poisoned by the star-dragon embryo – exudes a green gaseous miasma that sickens anyone spending more than a few minutes in the well (DC 15 Fort save or suffer a -1d penalty to all actions for 24 hours).

The workgang is drawn from a number of strange species, many unknown in the current aeon. Broken in spirit and mind, they pose little threat to the party, keeping their distance and merely watching the PCs with wary eyes. If queried, the workgang offers mumbling answers, the slaves doing their best to avoid the PCs' ire. If threatened with violence, they silently point the direction of the Pearl of the Exiled Seer (Area 10-1).

The step well descends four flights to a shallow pool of grayish water that reeks. The water is a mere 8 inches deep. Characters taking the time to dredge the foul water discover a trio of IOUN stones fused to the stone at the bottom of the well.

However, the shell of the star-dragon is very thin here and easily punctured with a modicum of force or by a sharply pointed object. Piercing the shell releases a flood of hungry tendrils (as the Tenebrous Marches; see Terrain, above) that spill out from below, filling the entire stepwell.

The stones can safely be removed with a DC 20 Disable Trap check (vat-things may attempt with a d16). On a failed attempt, the thief releases the grasping tendrils of the space-dragon, as above.

**Workgang (13):** Init -1; Atk fist -1 melee (1d3-1) or yoke -2 melee (1d5-1); AC 8; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d16; SV Fort -1, Ref +0, Will -2; AL N; Crit I/d6.

**Area 4-1 – Crown of the Stylites:** *A dozen narrow columns, each rising 100' or more into the air, stand in a circle around a raised stone courtyard. Tattered ropes, worn with age, hang from the tops of the pillars. Wooden buckets remain tied to a few of the ropes, swaying softly in the solar wind and clattering against the stone.*

The pillars were once home to saints who dedicated their lives to the contemplation of the significance and meaning of the star-dragon.

Only a single stylite remains at his post: Noemis the Pilloried. The devotee has trained his body to subsist on the mere fumes of the moon-egg and the occasional offerings from the workgangs. It has not gone well. The stylite has the appearance of a shrunk, desiccated corpse, and is readily mistaken for a skeleton.

His prayers distrubed, the stylite demands tribute (food

and drink). He heckles and cajoles anyone refusing to feed him, resorting to the basest and most foul taunts imaginable (raising doubts to his claims of holiness). Nothing can prompt the ancient to descend from his perch, and – after centuries of defecating from the same – brave are the souls who would climb the befouled pillar to him.

Appeased, Noemis can wax poetic about the qualities and true nature of the moon-egg ("ovum of the under-orb"), and the star-dragon ("the loric in the lamp"), its geography, and how the lunar ovum is being drawn through the cosmos toward the dying Earth. Characters capable of summoning the patience to listen to the old gibberer can learn the honest answer to nearly any question regarding the moon-mote and the star-dragon.

However, Noemis has no insight into the motivations of Opsall the Irredeemable. Noemis knows *what* and *how*, but not *why*.

If the stylite is slain, poppies grow wherever his blood falls. If ingested by a curious PC, a poppy heals all wounds and afflictions. A total of 1d7+3 blossoms can be collected before the remainder crumble into dust.

**Noemis the Pilloried:** Init -3; Atk fist -2 melee (1d3-2); AC 6; HD 1d4; hp 2; MV 25'; Act 1d16; SV Fort +2, Ref -3, Will +5; AL L; Crit I/d5.

**Area 10-1 – Pearl of the Exiled Seer:** *A mighty orb dominates the horizon, like a titanic pearl dropped from the gorget of the gods. The iridescent globe seems to catch the starlight, making it difficult to know where the ebon sky ends and the orb begins.*

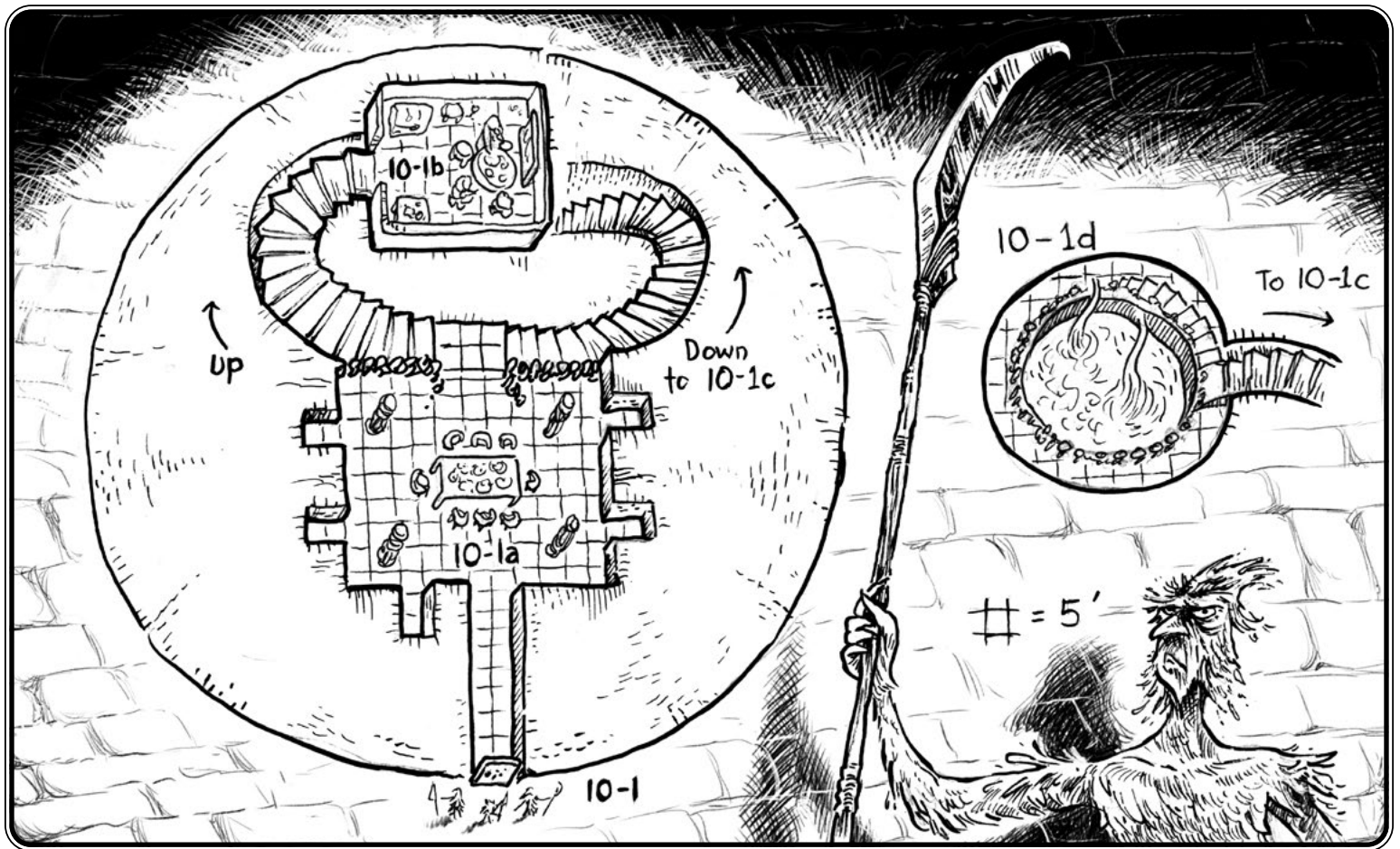
*A single, simple portal sits etched at the base of the orb, the sole soilure on an otherwise perfect sphere. A trio of brightly-feathered humanoids lounge outside the doorway, leaning heavily on their glaives.*

The great pearl was once the encystment of Opsall – prison to the magician and his family. He has bitterly worked the cyst into a manse, cutting out material using the *Ring of Null*, with the intent of transforming it into a tomb once the moon-mote reaches Earth.

The exterior of the manse is impermeable to magic. Any spell cast at the orb splashes off the iridescent surface, spilling down to the base. Characters within 150' of the manse must make a DC 15 Reflex save or suffer 1d5 damage per level of the spell that was dispelled.

**The Portal:** A trio of archveult sentries ward the entrance, dozing lightly throughout the day. In the rare moments they awaken (usually only to squeeze a few more drops from their wineskins), they bitterly debate the merits of their assignment. They bid any PCs to be gone (noting that they shouldn't attempt to apprehend the PCs, because it isn't good for honest souls to parlay with dishonest knaves). If bothered further, they accuse the PCs of being drunk and encourage them to sleep off their binge, so long as their snoring doesn't disturb the master.

Pressed into combat, the acheveults retreat inside the manse, locking the portal behind them. If the PCs make it through



the door, it devolves into a running spell battle with the sentries backpedaling through the manse.

The portal is readily opened with a DC 10 Pick Lock check (vat-things may use a d16; other DCC Dying Earth PCs may use a d10). Failing this, it can be burst with a DC 20 Strength check. However, apart from these or more clever solutions, the door is impervious to magic and mere weapon damage.

**Archveult sentries (5):** Init +1; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4+1), galvanic touch +2 melee (3d6), glaive +1 melee (1d10), or spell; AC 13; HD 5d5; hp 15 each; MV 60'; Act 2d20; SP conductive aura (incoming damage is reflected doubly to all in 50' radius, DC 15 Ref save for half), galvanic touch (1/turn), spells (+8 spell check); SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; AL N; Crit III/d10.

Spells: (level 1) *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *sleep*; (level 2) *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *scorching ray*; (level 3) *dispel magic*, *haste*, *fly*.

**Area 10-1a – Tomb of the Magi:** Pillars carved in the likeness of wailing magicians support the high, airy ceiling. The walls are set with carved recesses, as if a tomb in anticipation of bodies. Curiously, the crypts stand empty.

In the center of the chamber is a table, carved from stone and set into the floor. Around the table are several stone chairs decorated with skull motifs, similarly situated in the floor. A half-eaten meal of sickly vegetables and strange meat rests in simple clay platters on the table.

A curving staircase exits the chamber, chased by a long bannister carved in the motif of a series of bones.

Opsall has fashioned the chamber as a crypt for his old rivals, and eagerly anticipates interring their bodies into the recesses. It doubles as his dining room.

Because of the shortage of wood on the moon-mote, the furnishings were cut directly from the cyst-stone, and remain embedded into the stone floor from which they were carved.

Each of the crypts is inscribed with a magician's sobriquet. The script is in a dead language, and requires a DC 10 Read Languages check or a *comprehend languages* spell check result of 12 or higher to translate. Decoded, the names on the crypts correlate to the magicians of the Association as follows:

- Agymox's Final Say
- Belawor and his fattening Corpse
- Foshd'ar and his Lies
- Reffulo the Worm Dowser
- Imire who was Seen

Immediately following each name is a brief, three-line epitaph, detailing each magician's arcane weakness or antipathy. If decoded, as above, the knowledge grants the PCs a +1d bonus to casting when engaged in spell duels against the same—should the party decide to face off with the Association if and when they return to Earth. While the specific abilities of the members of the Association are outside the scope of this adventure, each is a master magician in their own right, and it is left to the judge to determine what powers and spells they can command in any conflict with the PCs.



**Area 10-1b – Familic Chamber:** *The stairway opens into as strange a chamber as any you have ever witnessed. A woman in a simple peasant's dress stands above a humble table, serving her two children stew from a large bowl. The children's heads are thrown back in laughter and delight.*

*The entire scene is carved from pale stone. A disturbing melancholy hangs over the joyful scene.*

The stone bodies belong to Opsall's family. Rather than watch them lose their minds, trapped within the encystment, he transformed his family to stone. However, the great magician has been unable to unwind his own enchantment to return them back to flesh.

(Scholars' note: the transformation of mere muscle and bone to stone would not have prevented the victims' madness. Indeed, it might have hastened the process. If Opsall had been able to return his loved ones to flesh, it surely would be an even more tragic affair.)

As with the previous areas of the Pearl, Opsall painstakingly carved out the chamber and his family with his enchanted *Ring of Null*.

Characters exploring the chamber find a king's ransom in treasure: gem-studded crowns, chests overflowing with coins, elaborate tapestries, rich fur rugs, and the like—but all of it is rendered in pale, white stone. None of these trappings are true to Opsall's former life; he has instead added them while carving free his family, desperately wanting to believe in the illusion of opulence and life.

**Opsall's family:** While incredibly unlikely, it is not impossible to imagine that the PCs might have both reason and resources necessary to accomplish what the magician could not: rescuing his family. This is no small feat, requiring attentive PCs (and players), clever spell use, and excellent rolls. If the PCs succeed in bringing back Opsall's family, the players deserve to be rewarded for excellent play.

The enchantment can be dispelled or otherwise reversed with a correlating spell check result of 34 or greater. This renders the family flesh once more, but their minds have long since succumbed to madness. Each of Opsall's family then needs to be granted 4 HD worth of healing in order to return their minds to sanity.

Should the PCs accomplish this full restoration, Opsall will have boundless gratitude for the PCs for their accomplishment, honoring them with lavish gifts and grand fetes. However, none of this abates Opsall's mindless fury. Once the celebrations have passed, Opsall returns to his mission of guiding the moon-mote back to Earth so that he can exact his revenge.

**Area 10-1c – Hazy Descent:** *Stone stairs wend down through a misty emerald haze that thickens into a sticky, green miasma. The haze sears the nostrils and thickens the lungs, until your breath grows shallow and ragged.*

Characters pressing further down the steps must succeed on a DC 20 Will save or suffer a -1d penalty to all subsequent actions and saving throws. Additionally, any time a

PC in the miasma (Areas 10-1c and 10-1d) rolls a natural 5 or less on an action die, the PC suffers a temporary loss of 1d3 points of Stamina (recovered at the rate of 1 point per hour).

The stairs descend 30' and are devoid of railing or holds. It is easy to safely descend the wide steps, but the absence of a railing could prove hazardous if the PCs attempt to climb free of battle (Area 10-1d).

**Area 10-1d – Cauldron of Despair:** *The stone steps descend through the thick green haze to a circular pit, some 25 feet across and ringed by an 8-foot-wide catwalk. The pit is filled with a roiling violet ooze. Enormous bubbles claw their way through the ooze, surface, and then break, exhaling the foul green mist that hangs in the air and sears your lungs.*

*Set about the lip of the pit are scores of crude, half-carved statues, resembling small, partially formed humanoids.*

Before Opsall set upon his plan to draw the star-dragon back to the dying Earth, he first attempted to undo the spell that had transformed his family to stone. Failing that, the magician then set about experimenting with ways to render stone pliable, and trying to find a suitable vessel for life. He carved rough figures from stone with the *Ring of Null* and then submerged the statues in the exposed chorion.

In the end, all his attempts proved insufficient—driving the grieving incanter further into madness—but not before Opsall had brought scores of creatures into a torturous half-life.

Bereft of the sense of touch or warmth, the stone creatures hunger for the solace of human connection. They swarm the PCs like misshapen puppies, pulling at clothes and armor, and grinding their stone gums.

Emotionally immature, the stone souls are easily vexed. If PCs fail to somehow ameliorate or distract the creations from their pain, the stone creations lash out in frustration and anger. Individually, the creations pose little threat to the PCs, but fighting on the catwalk or stairs is fraught with danger.

**Stone souls (23):** Init -2; Atk pinching claw +0 melee (1d5+5 plus held); AC 17; HD 3d4; hp 5 each; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref -2, Will +3; AL C; Crit I/d14.

On a successful attack, a stone soul clamps its maw or half-formed fist upon a PC, dealing 1d5 damage. The stone soul must be torn or shaken loose, requiring an action and a DC 10 Strength check or Fortitude save (player's choice). At the end of each round, any held PCs must attempt a DC 5 Reflex save or tumble into the pool. Increase the DC by +3 for each additional stone soul attached to the PC. (Judges are reminded to apply any saving throw penalties from Area 10-1c.)

Physical attack misses against attached stone souls risk striking the held PC. On a miss, call for a second attack roll, targeting the held character's AC.

The stone souls harden in 1d5 rounds if they venture free of the mist. Consequently, they will follow the PCs up the steps, but never beyond Area 10-1d. Freeing a PC from a hardened stone soul deals 1d7 damage.

*The Pool:* The violet ooze is the albumen of the nascent star-dragon. In addition to the risk of downing, objects (including PCs) immersed in the ooze risk a radical transformation. For each PC immersion (DC 15 Fort save to resist), roll on or use the following table for inspiration. Modify the roll with a cumulative -1 for each subsequent immersion.

Roll 1d5 + Luck mod	Albumen Corruption
1 or less	Character's bones turn to jelly. PC begins to asphyxiate beneath the weight of their own flesh.
2	Character's body is horribly seared and scarred, causing a permanent reduction of 1d3 points of Agility.
3	Character's skin turns violet wherever it was immersed in the ooze; PC suffers 1d16 damage from the searing pain.
4	Character suffers a -1d penalty to all saving throws and action dice for the next 24 hours.
5	Character gains +1d5 hit points.
6	Character gains +3 to a random ability score.
7	Character gains sufficient XP to place them 1 point short of their next level.

**Area 16-1 – Astral Anchor:** *A wide stone pillar, some ten paces across, rises thrice as high, plunging toward the deep violet sky. An impossibly thin silver ray stretches from the top of pillar and out into the black of the cosmos, to be lost amid the distant stars.*

Parties scaling the side of the pillar discover an enormous silver hoop cemented into the top of the pillar. The scintillating ray is spooled around the loop.

Characters closely inspecting the reel and the astral line can discern movement as the sparkling line is quickly drawn down into the anchor.

The astral tether is drawing the moon-mote back to Earth, reeling itself Earthward like a whaleboat being drawn through a black sea of stars. (Dynamic elongation of the astral line means that the relatively slow spool-rate of the line does not reflect the incredibly rapid speed of the moon-mote hurtling toward Earth.)

Scaling the pillar draws the attention of three moon mites. The trio has been enchanted to defend the pillar and the line.

The enormous flying snakes cannot perceive invisible creatures, but are immediately alerted if something or someone attempts to damage the line. Additionally, the moon mites are dramatically hampered by their wingspan. If PCs remain close to the reel, the mites land and claw their way up the pillar, reaching over the lip with their long, serpentine necks. Following a successful bite attack, a mite can use its next action to cast the target to the ground 90' below for 9d6 falling damage (DC 20 Fort save or Strength check to resist by clinging to the pillar or the mite's head).

**Moon mites (3):** Init +10; Atk bite +10 melee (1d12 plus poison), wing-claw +6 melee (3d5+4); AC 15; HD 10d12; hp 85 each; MV fly 120'; Act 3d20; SP poison bite (DC 20 Fort save; see below); SV Fort +9, Ref +14, Will +7; AL N; Crit DR/d20.

*Poison bite:* On a successful bite attack, the mite injects poison into its foe. The target must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or suffer the temporary loss of 1d7 points of Stamina. The damage is regained at the rate of 1 point per hour. A character reduced to 2 Stamina is rendered unconscious; a PC reduced to 0 Stamina is slain.

**Severing the astral line:** The tether and spool are immune to non-magical damage. Additionally, the speed of the line's retraction causes it to readily saw through flesh, bone, and nearly all mundane materials, dealing 1d50 damage per round to objects (or PCs) pressed against the astral line.

The line can be instantly severed by Opsall's *Ring of Null*, or may be dispelled by a *dispel magic* spell check result of 25 or higher.

The pillar itself—while incredibly large, and anchored deep in the moon-mote—is not magical. Dealing physical damage to the pillar causes the stone to spiderweb with cracks. If 250 points of damage (or a sufficient, cinematic effort, as deemed by the judge) is accomplished, the pillar explodes into a shower of shrapnel as the reel and several tons of stone are hurtled into the yawning sky-abyss. Characters atop the pillar take falling damage, and those within 100' must make a DC 15 Reflex save or be struck by flying shrapnel—suffering 1d12 damage for every point of a failed save. For example, a magician rolling a 13 in an effort to dodge the flying shards would fail the saving throw by two points and thus suffer 2d12 damage.

Severed from its astral tether, the moon-mote is no longer a threat to Earth. The under-orb rockets blindly through space, heedless of its destination.

**Area 17-1 – The Chorionial Abyss:** *A wide sinkhole is cut into the face of the moon-mote with the precision of a razor. The depth of the gulf is impossible to gauge in the gloom – the sheer walls plummet down into inestimable violet gloom.*

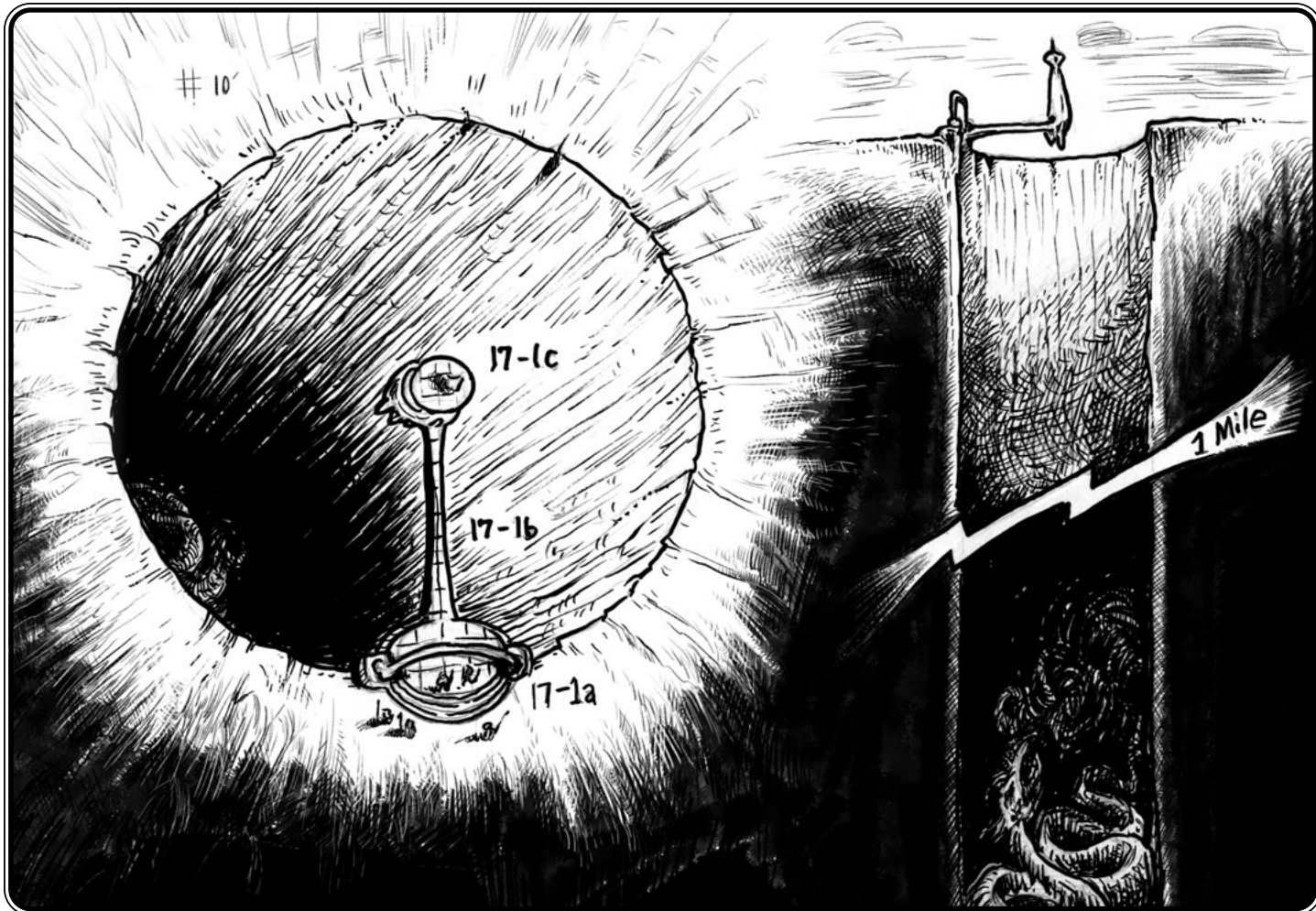
*A slender catwalk extends out over the heart of the pit, ending at a strange half-tower or turret suspended over oblivion.*

While the pit is not bottomless, it is incredibly deep, descending a mile through the chalaza-channel to the core of the lunar orvum. The chalaza holds back the sickly violet albumin, anchoring the embryonic star-dragon in the heart of the lunar ovum.

There is nothing to prevent PCs from using flight to reach the tower or to plumb the depths of the gulf. However, woe to the magician caught in the open air when their magical flight is dispelled. Baring arcane or divine intercession, death is certain.

Characters safely reaching the base of the chalaza come face-to-face with the star-dragon (detailed in Area 17-1c).

**Area 17-1a – Guardians of the Chorion:** *A series of steps rise to the lip of a stone platform, framed by a stone arch seemingly carved from a single enormous ruby.*



A trio of humanoids, arrayed in iridescent black plumage, stand atop the platform, surveying the encrusted land. All three carry long polearms topped with spiny hooks and have short leather cases belted at their hips.

Unlike some of their peers on the moon-mote, the trio of archveult guardians are attentive to their duties and keep a close watch on the rough plains surrounding the chalaza.

Just inside the arch, resting in twin nooks are an additional two archveult champions, bringing the total to five. While the pair isn't as watchful as their companions, they can ready themselves in a single round, then launch surprise attacks upon inattentive foes whilst hidden.

The guardians are tasked with defending the platforms and escorting slaves bearing troves of IOUN stones across the catwalk (Area 17-1b) to the half-tower (Area 17-1c). If set upon by overwhelming foes, the guardians to the chalazascope (Area 17-1c) in the hopes of attacking PCs as they are lured across the catwalk.

**Guardians of the Chorian (5):** Init +1; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4+1), galvanic touch +2 melee (3d6), glaive +1 melee (1d10), or spell; AC 13; HD 5d5; hp 15 each; MV 60'; Act 2d20; SP conductive aura (incoming damage is reflected doubly to all in 50' radius, DC 15 Ref save for half), galvanic touch (1/turn), spells (+8 spell check); SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; AL N; Crit III/d10.

Spells: (level 1) *color spray*, *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *sleep*; (level 2) *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *scorching ray*; (level 3) *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *fly*.

**Area 17-1b – Catwalk:** A narrow stone catwalk, scarcely two feet in width and polished from the tread of a thousand steps, spans the gulf to the half-tower.

Battling atop the catwalk is a fraught undertaking. Any character struck by a foe for 5+ points of damage must attempt a DC 10 Reflex save or be knocked from the catwalk. Even those succeeding on the save are forced to their knees to catch hold of the ledge. (At the judge's pleasure, characters carrying two-handed weapons or objects may risk dropping them into the void.)

Those knocked from the catwalk have but 5 rounds to reverse their fall. Those failing to do so are slain on impact and then plunged into the embryonic fluid of the star-dragon (see Area 17-1c for details of their fate).

**Area 17-1c – Chalazascope:** A turret holds a single vaulted chamber supported by wondrously carved pillars depicting magicians writhing in torment. You and your companions readily recognize members of the Association, rendered in stone, cut into the faces of the pillars.

In the center of the chamber is a circular pool, some 8 feet across. Reflected in the pool is an enormous glassy eye, violet in hue, and terrible to behold. The great orb tracks you and your companions with terrifying alacrity.

The pool is a scope aimed at the heart of the moon-mote. Physical objects less than 8' in width can pass back and forth through the pool. Functionally, the scope serves as a portal to star-dragon at the base of the pit.



Opsall uses the pool to quicken the maturation of the star-dragon. IOUN stones and the like are fed through the chalazascope to the star-dragon; in this instance, “and the like” also refers to spellcasters.

Captured characters are marched down the catwalk and then forced into pool, vanishing through the lens of the chalazascope.

**Through the Pool:** The star-dragon blindly attempts to consume anything that passes through the lens of the chalazascope.

Vast in size—even in its embryonic state—it is not possible to combat the star-dragon in the conventional sense. Like mosquitos on the hide of an elephant, there are few actions the PCs can take that would antagonize the creature. (And, verily, there is little cause to do so.)

However, a good foe is seldom left unchallenged, and few are the players who can restrain themselves from yanking on the tail of a god. For those parties insisting on going round for round, we offer the following rough guidelines:

Characters or objects passing through the lens are immediately set upon the star-dragon’s embryonic fluids. The fluids strip the target of magic, including the intangible condition of life. Roll on the following table each round a character spends submerged in the fluids.

Roll 1d5 In the Dragon’s Eye	
1	Mineralization. The PC must succeed on a DC 20 Will save or see a body part turned to stone. Roll 1d6: (1) left leg; (2) right leg; (3) left arm; (4) right arm; (5) torso (death in 1d10 rounds); (6) head (death, no chance of recovery).
2	Disintegration! The fluids quickly eat away at the PC, devouring flesh and bone. Character suffers the permanent loss of 1d12 points of Stamina. If reduced to 0, the body is entirely dissolved. Obviously, the PC is slain and cannot be recovered.
3-4	Anti-magic. The PC must succeed on a DC 20 Will save or be partially stripped of all magic. Henceforth, all spell checks suffer a -1d penalty. If the die is reduced to lower than 1d3, the character is stripped of all magic and life and is forever slain.
5	Miraculously, the PC suffers no ill effects, and may attempt a DC 20 Fort save to claw their way free of the chalaza and back to Area 17-1c.

Physical damage dealt to the star-dragon, whether by blade or spell, has no material effect. The eye may occasionally blink, or briefly withdraw, but there is no damage done.

Transformative damage (e.g., *turn to stone* or *polymorph*) succeeds, but only on a spell check result of 40 or greater.

Finally, as one judge to another, we exhort you to make the combat as dramatic and memorable as possible, as it will likely be the conclusion of the campaign.

**Quickening of the star-dragon:** Potent wonder-makers are to the star-dragon as speed incense is to Imire’s flyer. If the dragon succeeds in consuming more than 15 hit dice worth of spellcasters, it breaks free of its egg—severing the astral tether—and is freed to roam the universe at will.

It is Opsall’s intent to awaken the dragon just as it reaches the dying Earth but the PCs can subvert his plans by prematurely awakening the star-dragon, fueling its transformation with archveults and possibly even Opsall the Irredeemable.



# EPILOGUE

## THE LONG WAY HOME

Depending on the characters’ actions they might easily find themselves stranded on the moon-mote, desperate for a way home. There are a number of ways this could play out, but all require some thought on the part of the judge.

If the astral tether (Area 16-1) is shorn, the moon-mote collides (days, weeks, or months later) with another heavenly body of the judge’s choosing.

If the PCs defeat Opsall, or somehow slay the star-dragon, but the astral tether remains, the moon-mote continues to be drawn Earthward, entering the planet’s orbit within 1d50 weeks.

If the PCs were exceedingly kind to Antepode, the Witherling has a pang of guilt (exceedingly rare for an NPC in any setting!) and guides a second flyer back to the moon-mote to offer his aid.

If all the PCs’ efforts fail—yet the characters have somehow shirked death—the Association of Far-Viewers send a second party of would-be associates to investigate the moon-mote. The PCs are left with the predicament of how they deal with these newcomers to their moon.

Finally, if and when the PCs succeed in returning to Earth, they discover that the Association has quit Imire’s manse. Antepode has been replaced by an inexperienced miniscule, and the master of the house has not been seen for many a month...



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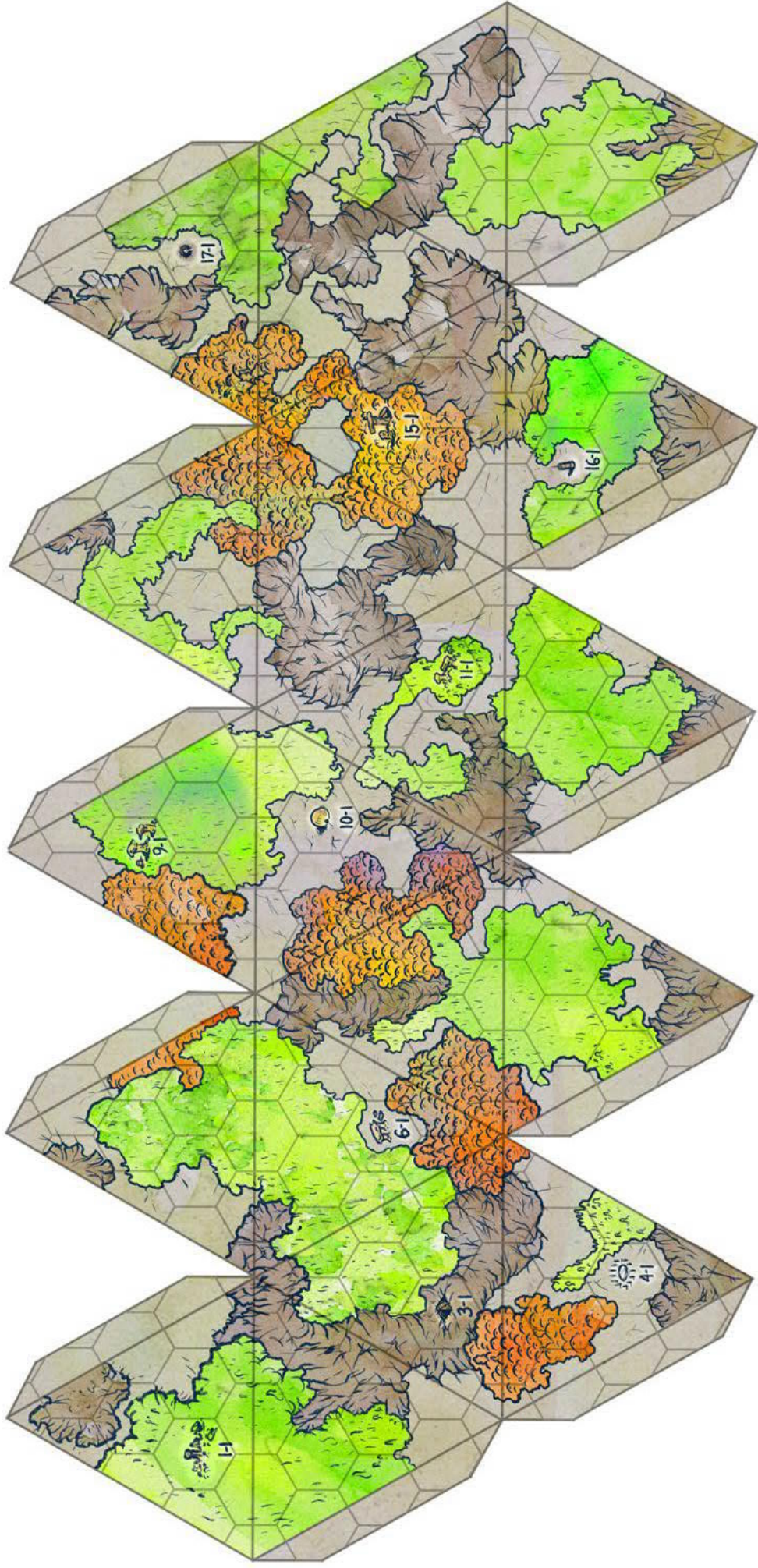
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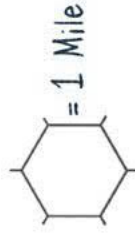
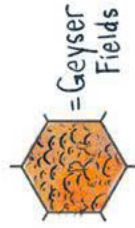
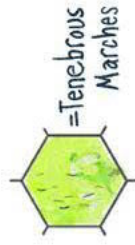
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