

SANCTUM SECORUM

Episode #30

Sign of the Labrys

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RPG**

Sanctum Secorum Podcast

Episode #30 Companion

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Campaign Tools

Magical Workings

There are times when those who wield arcane magic wish to draw directly upon their connection to the raw phlogiston of the universe for impromptu effects rather than for use in greater magic. Doing so requires advanced understanding of magical energies and this is not something practiced by mere apprentices.

Occult actions are rolled much in the same way as a warrior's Mighty Deed of Arms, and are accompanied by a basic spell check roll, with the wizard (or elf) having a "workings die" equal to their level. Performing a successful working requires a minimum result of 12 on the spell check and a 3 on the workings die. No luck may be spent as a part of this roll, as workings are a matter of pure skill – not blind chance. Since no Luck may be spent on this roll, only wizards of level 3 or higher may even attempt magical workings.

Amplification

Used specifically as a part of ritualized magic, this working carries additional risk as failure disrupts and taints the entirety of the ritual magic being performed, causing a -1 casting penalty at the conclusion of the rite. This working may be performed multiple times within the casting of a ritual spell, ignoring identical results.

Workings Die	Amplification Result
3	The amplification of the ritual magic increases the upper ritual magic threshold from +10 to 10+CL.
4	The caster's efforts to magnify the magical energies of the ritual grants a +1d3 bonus to the final spellcasting result.
5	When the spell check is rolled, the primary caster may roll a number of times equal to the number of mages involved +1, keeping only the highest die roll and ignoring all lower results.
6	The wizard forces the circle's magic to attune, granting a +1d spell check bonus.
7+	The magical energies are attuned and charged to the point where the value of all prior spellburn performed for the rite is doubled.

Dampening

With their highly attuned understanding of magical energies and phlogistonic flows, wizards are sometimes capable of dampening the mystic energies around them. Doing so makes spellcasting in the area (CLx10') difficult as casters must expend more effort simply to perform the simplest of spells.

Workings Die	Dampening Result
3	The wizard reaches out and manages to drain a small portion of the latent magical energy from the area, causing arcane spell checks to be made at -1 for the next round.
4	By tugging at nearby ley lines, the wizard manages to funnel magical energies away from his immediate vicinity, causing arcane spell checks to be made at -2 for 1d4 rounds.
5	By briefly wresting control of the local phlogistonic energies, the wizard dampens all arcane spellcasting attempts by -1d for CL rounds.
6	By focusing magical energies into the aether itself, the wizard dampens the available phlogistonic energies, causing a -CL penalty to all arcane spell checks, including his own, for 1d6 rounds.
7+	The wizard grounds out the magical energy of the immediate vicinity, causing all spell checks (including his own) to be made at -2d for the next turn.

Fortification

By infusing their bodies with mystical energies, wizards may (temporarily) stave off death. This sort of working is generally a final attempt to overcome one's foe before dying, potentially leaving surviving wizards as drained husks. If any attribute loss from use of this working brings a wizard's current attribute below three, the wizard crumbles to dust.

Workings Die	Fortification Result
3	The wizard reinforces his life energies, granting a -1 bonus on his Luck check for "rolling the body" in the next round.
4	Draping his life force with phlogistonic energies, the wizard gains a -2 bonus on his Luck check for "rolling the body" for the next 1d4 rounds. If successfully recovered from death, this power causes the wizard to incur two points of stat loss rather than one.
5	The wizard's form sparks with raw magic that fortifies his soul. The wizard gains a -3 bonus on his Luck check for "rolling his body" and doubles the number of available rounds in which his body may be recovered. This effect remains in place for 1 turn and, if called upon, permanently costs the wizard one of each physical attribute in addition to the normal loss when recovered.
6	For the next CL rounds, the raw chaotic energies of the universe infuse the caster's body, granting CL temporary hit points and a -1d bonus on his Luck check for "rolling the body" for the next 1d4+CL rounds. At the expiration of this effect, the caster permanently loses hit points equal to the temporary hit points so gained.
7+	Should the wizard fall within the next turn, he receives a -3d bonus on his Luck check for "rolling the body". This power greatly taxes the wizard's soul, costing him 1d3 of each physical attribute and leaving him permanently reduced to one action die per round.



Yeast Plagues

By Daniel J. Bishop

The future of Margaret St. Clair's *Sign of the Labrys* was the result of yeast plagues, which had been released intentionally. There are two primary varieties of yeast plague: pulmonary and neurolytic. Both are contracted via spore contamination, and can spread aerially through ventilation shafts or close proximity.

Pulmonary yeast plagues take 1d3 hours to fully manifest, although coughing and difficulty breathing begin after an hour, caused by the yeast cells multiplying in the victim's lungs. Once the plague has fully manifested, the victim takes 1d5 points of temporary Stamina damage each minute. This damage is due to asphyxiation, but even if the plague is somehow neutralized, the temporary Stamina damage heals normally as the plague spores are expelled from the victim's lungs. Otherwise, the plague continues until the victim dies. Victims of these plagues are identifiable by their bloated corpses, which sometimes move due to escaping gasses. Fort save (DC 15) avoids.

Neurolytic yeast plagues cause 1d4 points of permanent Agility, Intelligence, and Personality damage each round as the yeast spores interfere with the conductivity of nerve cells. Victims can literally die in an instant, as if struck by an invisible force. Apart from a green, frothy slime which escapes from the corpse's lips (and possibly other orifices), these plagues leave no mark on their victims. Fort save (DC 7) avoids.

(Pulmonary yeast plague victims are far more common than those of neurolytic yeast plagues, and the Fort DCs to avoid these plagues reflect that.)

These plagues have modified strains, either developed purposefully or due to evolution. Such strains may have lessened effects, longer incubation periods, or be even more gruesome than their original forms. For instance, one version of the pulmonary yeast plague took weeks, rather than days, to manifest.

Whether opening some lost technovault under a broken moon, escaping space pirates from Yuggoth, or seeking to plunder a long-forgotten tomb, these plagues represent a hazard that adds an element of horror and danger to a *Dungeon Crawl Classics* campaign. The initial appearance of the yeast plagues may itself be played out as a funnel; with the hapless zero-level PCs trying to stay alive as the world they know comes to an end.

To make such a scenario more playable, the judge may rule that the yeast plagues mutate into less lethal forms after a short period, or that the survivors become immune to that particular danger. There is no need to tell the players that, of course. They can discover it through play, when they come across victims of the yeast and yet live to tell the tale!



Featured Adventure

Interlude: The Vault of Future Past

An open level adventure

by Ari-Matti Piippo

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Arthur C. Clarke

Introduction

The Vault of Future Past is a short interlude for the time between dungeon adventures, suitable for bringing some excitement to wilderness travel. It contains no combat or pronounced risk of death, although skilled players will certainly be able to kill off a few characters in the plasticrete bowels of the Vault.

The adventure plays around with the idea that most of the fantasy worlds we adventure in are simply post-apocalyptic locales, where the inhabitants have forgotten their vaunted technological past, and consigned its wonders to the realm of magic and superstition. Why else would the wilderness be full of deep tunnel complexes and wandering hybrid monstrosities?

The Vault is also suitable for use as an option for the usual post-funnel shopping run: the Stockroom (Area 5) can be expanded to include the basic tools of an adventurer's trade and the Canteen at (Area 4) can easily fill a group's need for iron rations before high adventure once again sweeps the delvers off their feet.

Area 1A: Entrance Chute

As you cross yet another clearing in the rocky wilderness, you spot a strange sight: one of the boulders seems to have been cleaved cleanly in half, with the top flipped open like the lid of a box of jewelry.

Closer inspection reveals that the boulder is a concealed entrance, with a chute leading underground from its center. The top is actually a hinged hatch, with a metallic wheel on the inside acting as a locking mechanism. Rungs have been bolted to the side of the chute down.

The chute leads down 90' (30m), and is 3' (1m) in diameter. The rungs of the ladder are made of an unknown alloy; this is obvious to any dwarves inspecting them (the alloy contains no iron). The construction seems sound, although very strange: detailed inspection reveals that the walls of the chute seem to have been poured or molded in place rather than cut into the stone. Faint carmine

light can be seen at the bottom of the chute.

The chute is an entrance to a small apocalypse shelter, built during the previous cycle of civilization. It has been recently abandoned by most of its inhabitants, as an earth-shift damaged its power generators, forcing the vault into back-up power and damaging many of its systems.

The walls of the chute as well as the rest of the facility are durable plasticrete, a material similar to concrete, although much more advanced and sturdy.

If a character with a suitable occupation examines the clearing it is easily apparent that five humanoid creatures recently vacated the area. Unfortunately their tracks are soon lost in the surrounding rocky terrain.

Area 1B: Entrance Chamber

The first thing you notice as you climb down the chute is the stabilizing temperature as you descend. The still air settles to a comfortable indoor level in the lower reaches of the chute. The air is dry and odorless: this is truly a strange cave you've entered.

The ladder ends in a small oblong room, with bare, uniform walls of the same material as the chute itself. On the south-eastern end of the room a heavy, metallic door stands ajar. Atop the door, a fist sized red gem flashes with carmine light.

The cavern is quiet, although it seems apparent that something dramatic happened here recently.

The small room is roughly 10'x30' (3m x 9m). It is completely bare apart for the door and the flashing warning light atop it. There are no handles or other implements on the door as it is controlled by the shelter's master computer. It's readily apparent that when closed it is an airtight barrier. The door leads to a small corridor with another similar door in the far end. This is a purification chamber combined with an airlock, designed to keep outside contaminants out of the shelter.

There are cleverly designed sensors and nozzles in the ceiling and the walls, for spraying entrants with purifying agents. These can easily be

mistaken for traps if the room is searched, but all of the equipment is inactive.

The warning light on top of the door is blinking because the bunker is running on backup power, and will soon fill itself with quick-dry cement foam, to hide the vault and its technological marvels from unwanted delvers, as the original occupants of the shelter have recently left.

Area 2: Cryo-Pod Command Bridge

Passing the strange corridor and the heavy doors, you enter a large octagonal chamber, with five doors along its walls. Pearlescent half-globes set into the ceiling illuminate the chamber with a soft, peaceful light. Above each of the doors is a flashing red gem, similar to the one you saw earlier.

At the center of the room is a solid octagonal table, with rectangular glass panes set into the table itself.

The larger pane along the north edge displays rows of symbols, with the symbols on the bottom row of the inscription changing before your eyes. The other panes are dark.

Along the walls, you see six coffin-like beds. Five of them are open, but the sixth stands shut, its odd glass lid cracked and singed.

This is the main area of the bunker, acting as a command center for the master computer (set inside the solid table at the center of the room) and containing the Longlife Cryo-Pods, where the people of the past spent most of their endless aeons in the vault.

The Cryo-Pods are medical marvels, capable of extending the user's life indefinitely, renewing their cellular structure and replenishing their life force through the marvels of lost technology.

Apart for the items described above the room is sparse and barren, and most of the amazing technology has already been deactivated by the automated emergency systems, but there are two things of interest here.

First, the main command console contains the following message, written in a long-forgotten language of the marvelous past (message can be deciphered with *Comprehend Languages*):

"Emergency evacuation protocols initiated. Exit the SafeCell Shelter™ in an orderly fashion. Please contact system administrator for additional information. Foam spray system will be deployed in: 5-4-3-2-1"

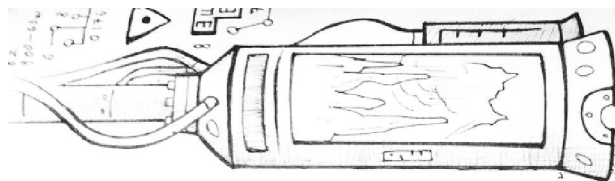
The second item of interest in the room is the malfunctioned Cryo-Pod, and its inhabitant. The recent earthquake caused a power spike in the

bunker's energy systems, and the Cryo-Pod burnt up the woman from the past inside. Her body was partially fused to the interior of the bed, but some of her features are still apparent.

The woman of the past is a lithe creature, with wispy body hair, smoothed out facial features and large, lidless eyes. She is wearing a self-cleaning body sock, designed to integrate with the life-prolonging Cryo-Pod. The lower parts of her body are burnt up and fused into the container, but her upper body is mostly undamaged.

Intrepid delvers can scavenge some of the strange material her suit is made of. It can be used to make a set of padded armor +3, if a craftsman of suitable skill can be found. Characters can communicate with the corpse with *Speak with the Dead*. If this is done, the lady can give the characters the location of another similar time-shelter (of the Judge's own design, or the DCC module #79 *Frozen in Time*).

The earthquake also destroyed most of the shelter's self-generating energy complexes, which forced the people of the past to flee from their safe haven. The group of survivors disappeared into the wilderness some six hours ago (finding them can obviously act as another story hook, if the Judge so wishes).



Area 3: Med Bay

The northern door leads to a small room, with two chairs bolted to the floor. The chairs have a number of strange appendages protruding from the sides, and the floor and the ceiling around them.

The northern wall has a large windowed cabinet built into it, with an empty slot below it, along with a set of buttons.

The space smells clean, and a quiet whirring can be heard from somewhere near the chair on the west side of the room.

This is the medical bay and dispensary of the shelter. There are a number of dumb things that exploring delvers can do here. After the characters use any device in this room there is a 65% chance that the emergency power supply for this area runs out, and the room goes dark.

The chairs are Automated Seats. They are designed to provide users with everything from brain surgery to psychoanalysis to haircuts and pedicures. The chair on the right is a fully

functioning machine, operated by voice commands in the language of the past.

When an individual takes a seat, they will be subjected to a basic check-up, and the machine will take appropriate steps to repair any damage it finds. It will also make sure that the appearance of the user fits protocol, providing shaves, dry-showers and haircuts as needed. The chair will heal all HP or stat damage the user has, and make them clean and shaven as per official protocols of the past (Judges should feel free to describe the outlandish fashions of the past in great detail here). After each use of the chair, roll whether power goes out in the room. *Comprehend Languages* may be used to require other services at Judge's discretion.

The western chair is malfunctioning. Consult Table 3a if it's used; the same 65% likelihood for running out of power after each use applies here as well.

D7	Effect
1	The chair's euthanasia protocol kicks in, and it attempts to end the user's life in a quick and painless fashion. The user may roll a LCK check (aiming to roll below stat) in order to realize this), and normal body recovery rules apply.
2	The chair attempts to apply extensive massage therapy to the user. They take d10 STR damage.
3	The system attempts to fix the user's joints and ligaments, with a combination of lasers and chemicals. They take d10 AGI damage.
4	The medical system administers aggressive steroid therapy to the user. They take d10 STA damage.
5	The chair decides that the user's appearance does not conform to regulations, and applies copious amounts of plastic surgery. The user takes d10 PER damage.
6	The scanners determine that the user's mental state is extremely unstable, and attempts to fix this with psychotherapeutic rehabilitation. The user takes d10 INT damage.
7	The automed doctor deems that the user requires karmic readjustment in order for the vault to function efficiently. The user suffers an alignment shift to a new one.

Table 3a: Malfunctioning Automed Seat

The north wall is actually a 3D holographic display, and an automated dispensary. What seems like a cabinet of items is just a projection of past technology. If the display is broken, the machine fails and shuts down. The set of buttons below is essentially a vending machine system: punch in the right code, and get the item displayed.

D10	Item
1	5: A single red pill, which when swallowed will genderswap the user.
2	7: A small vial of synthehol. If consumed, will produce the equivalent effect of a bottle of bourbon.
3	23: A delicate vial of golden pills, with a "K" inscribed on each one. The pills have no apparent effect, but seem very desirable.
4	69: A dropper-vial full of powerful aphrodisiac. If consumed has the effect of a Love Potion (see <i>Make Potion</i> , DCC rulebook pg. 223).
5	86: A set of six acrid tasting tablets. When consumed the medication will remove all negative conditions from the user (including poisons, diseases and curses).
6	101: A single blue pill, which when consumed will give the user a random skill from another class or race (Judge's discretion). They will advance in this skill normally, if applicable.
7	187: A somber vial of fragrant liquid. This is a powerful euthanasia agent: if consumed, the user will die quickly and painlessly. Normal body recovery rules apply.
8	247: Seven yellow lozenges, which taste like bull urine. Consuming one makes the user energetic for 24 hours, canceling need for food or sleep.
9	420: A box of 20 green pills. This substance is a mild recreational sedative, producing a mild stupor. Continued use will affect the consumer's short term memory adversely.
10	999: A vial with 9 emergency healing tablets. When consumed the user will be healed 3d9 HP, and any stats below 3 will be set to 3. If consumed right after grievous injury such as losing a limb the damage will be healed as well.

Table 3b: Dispensary Contents

Not all items displayed are available, due to system malfunctions; consult Table 3b for details. *Comprehend Languages* makes the system easier to understand, and a successful Int check (DC 18) helps characters to connect the dots (if characters understand the function allow them to order specific items from the table). After each order, roll whether the power goes out in the room.

Area 4: Canteen

This small room is furnished sparsely with three tables and six chairs, much like a simple tavern or a bar.

One of the tables is covered in metallic shrapnel and purple goo, another has a backpack-sized contraption built into the top, and the third table has an empty slot on it, where a similar device may have once stood.

There is a windowed cabinet in the eastern wall, with a slot and a set of buttons below it.

This is the canteen of the bunker. The vending machine on the eastern wall is connected to underground replicator equipment, capable of producing many comestibles. The “cabinet” is a 3D holographic projection screen, and if the glass is broken the machine shuts down. *Comprehend Languages* makes the system easier to understand, a successful Int check (DC 18) helps characters to use the system (if characters understand vending machine allow them to order specific items from the table). See Table 4a for details of today’s specials, and after each purchase roll for a 40% chance for the emergency power of this area to run out.

Each of the tables used to have a Survivo Pack™ attached to it. The contraption is designed to use fungal growths inside it to generate a multi-purpose food. The item is designed to be easily transported, and is thus designed to look like a backpack.

The survivors from the past took one of the Survivo Packs™ with them, and another one exploded during the power spike, but the third is still functioning and useful.

The item can be unattached from the table with a successful AGI or Disable Trap check (DC 18). Failing the check disconnects the device, but leaves the extra power generator uncalibrated, causing the pack to only function for 3 months, instead of forever. The pack generates the equivalent of 6 iron rations a day, in the form of purple goo which smells faintly of lavender and elderberry, and has an acidic aftertaste. Using the device is easy, as there is a big purple button on

the top, and the portions are doled out in edible cups.

D6	Item
1	35: A plate of living snakeworms. The correct way to eat this delicacy of the future past is to bite off the head and suck the juices from the tubular treat. If eaten alive the creature will wriggle and expand, suffocating the eater in 10 rounds unless removed somehow.
2	20: A vegan ratatouille. The consumer’s skin will take on a slight green hue permanently if consumed.
3	59: A set of 7 Travel Bars, the iron ration of the future past.
4	54: A large protein shake, tasting vaguely of beans and liver pate. The user will feel a permanent urge to flex their muscles, especially near reflecting surfaces.
5	87: The super feast special! The vending machine will spew outlandish delicacies in rapid succession, after which it will power down for 3 hours. There is enough food for 6 people, and anyone partaking heals one HD worth of HP and will feel motivated and cheerful for 24 hours.
6	115: Birthday cupcake, with edible candle. Consumer will recover 1 point of LUCK and feel very happy for the remainder of the day.

Table 4: Canteen Portions Dispensary Contents

Area 5: Stockroom

This room is completely dark, apart for the odd flashing gem above the door.

It is readily apparent that someone has looted this spacious stockroom with haste. The southern end of the space is collapsed in a mess off rubble, metal and glass. The walls are covered in shelves, with various general tools and equipment sprawled on them.”

This area was extensively damaged by the earthquake, the southern end if the long room is collapsed and covered in rubble. Along the walls are shelves, which contain various utility items. If the characters search for basic dungeoneering equipment, there is a 75% chance that they find it (anything in the DCC rulebook’s equipment list is

included, other items at Judge's discretion¹). Each time a successful search is made, have the player roll a general LCK check (roll below stat): if successful, they also find the Quick Fix Escape Teleporter™.

The wondrous marvel of the future past is a lithe 10"x10" (25cm x 25cm) box with a red indentation in the shape of a hand on the top, and instructions written in the language of the past on the bottom. It will teleport the user and anyone touching them to Area 1B, from anywhere in the multiverse (alternately, it will lead to a sparsely equipped backup bunker somewhere, Judge's discretion). The Quick Fix Escape Teleporter™ is one use only.

The Judge should let the player's look around this area as much as they like. If this interlude is ran as a re-equip sequence after a funnel, Judge's should allow the characters to find some weapons and armor as well, along with any and all dungeoneering tools the players come up with.

Area 6: Rec Room

The room you walk into is very cozy. The walls are covered with soft padding, and there are six comfortable chairs bolted to the floor, facing the west wall, which is a large, dark glass pane."

This is the recreational area of the bunker. The plush chairs have built in voice recognition controls, and the edutainment system will provide the users with various holofilms with useful information combined with entertainment value.

If characters sit in any of the chairs, a soft female voice will inquire them about their needs and desires. Roll a LCK check (below LCK) if the characters try to communicate with the voice: if successful, the screen will light up and display a survival holoshow from the past. *Comprehend Languages* can be useful here as well.

Anyone sitting in a chair during this performance gains a permanent +1d to checks related to wilderness survival in a strange future unknown to the man of future past. This is the only holofilm the system will perform at this time, as all of the shelter's systems are slowly shutting down and everything runs on emergency power. After performing the show the system shuts down.

If the room is searched, there is a low chance that the character's find the Carry-On-Holo-Projector™ (DC 20 Luck check, add the elven bonus for finding secret doors and other possible bonuses from skills) in a small hidden cabinet near the screen.

The item looks much like a modern remote hand-held video camera, and can produce voiced holographic illusions if operated correctly. It has an eternal battery, and its utility can be deciphered with *Comprehend Languages*, or through extensive research (a patron may explain the use of the item as well, for a suitable price, but *Detect Magic* is useless). The projector can be used to reproduce the effects of *Cantrip*, *Ventriloquism*, and *Phantasm*, using the character's INT modifier and level as a bonus for the spell check, but without the option for spellburn.

Ending the module:

The automated self-destruct system of the shelter will fill all areas apart for 1a and 1b with quick dry cement foam. Once the players have explored all areas, or when the Judge feels that the game should move on, read the following:

A screaming note fills the air, and a calm feminine voice speaks out of nowhere. Acrid gas starts to bleed into the room, crawling into the room you're in.

Incorporeal arrows appear along the floor, directing you toward the chute you climbed earlier.

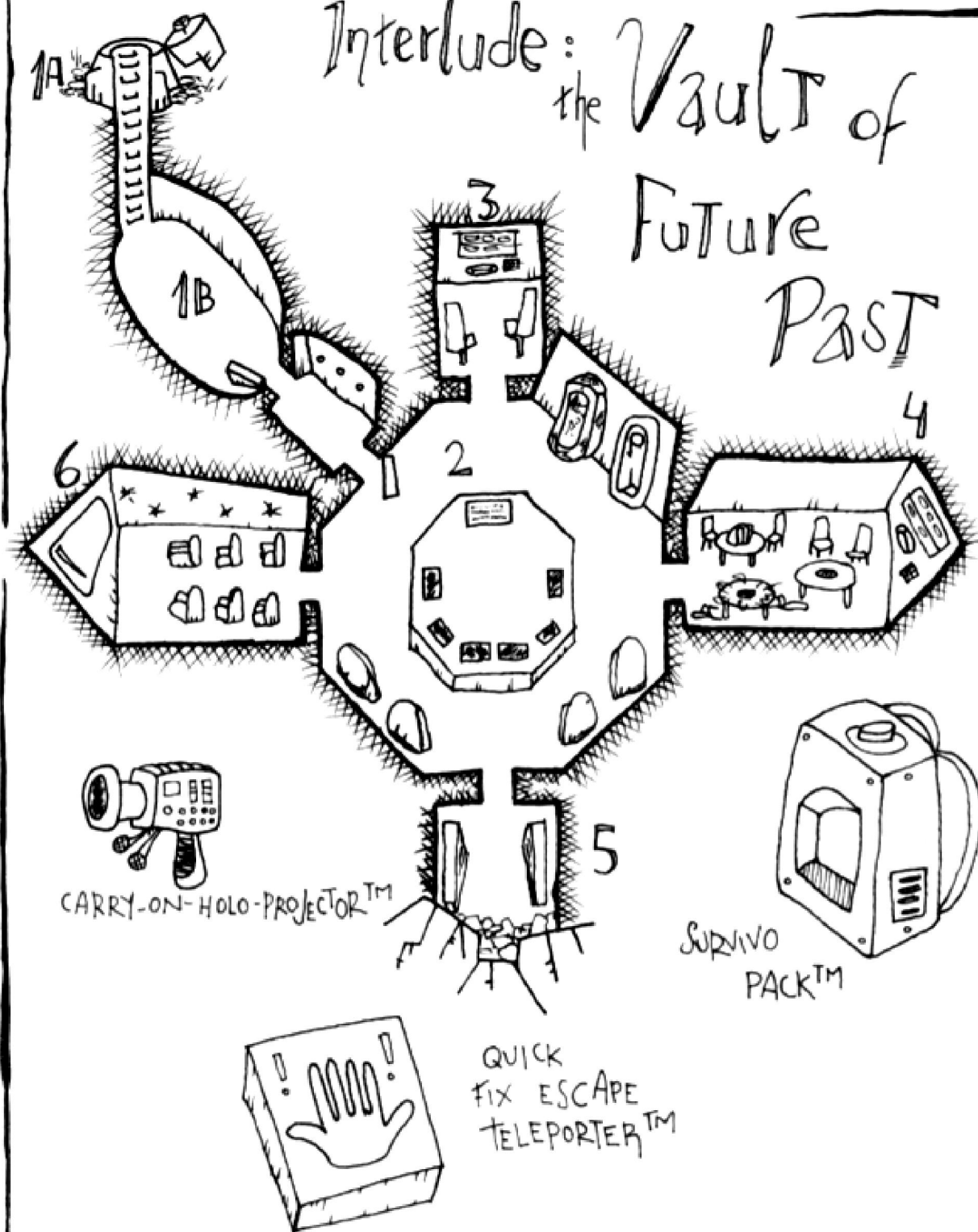
This should be enough to direct characters to the exit. Judges should dramatize this escape as much as they can, calling for AGI and LCK rolls, but only punishing fumbles and unnecessary dallying. Extremely unlucky or stupidly stubborn characters will die as the concrete foam fills the complex, and their bodies are unrecoverable.

Comprehend Languages will inform the caster that the female voice says the following:

"Cement foam spray system will be deployed shortly. We thank you for choosing SafeCell Shelter™ as your apocalyptic survival option. After this message, all warranties are void and no refunds will be issued."

¹ For an expanded list, check out:
<https://knightsinthenorth.blog/2017/08/19/equipment-improved/>

Interlude: the Vault of Future Past



**THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING
SAFECELL SHELTER™**

AMP★



Fiction

The Blood-Drinking Box

Part 6

Nekros' Inner Sanctum

At the base of the bridge the dwarf stood a resolute guard as Rappi sat, cross-legged facing the dim light of the bridge's span. Sevoi was resting to take the watch from Blacyn.

Rappi has been speaking quietly into the darkness and anyone who will listen, "I don't understand how something could be worth this much trouble. I'm sure whatever this could be'd never, ever find enough at market to cover my own death. Or, your death Blacyn, surely you don't want to die?"

Blacyn grumbled, "If it removes an evil, yes I will die."

Rappi did not find the dwarf's view agreeable and scowled into the darkness below where he could faintly see the liquid swirling. He stood and moved closer to the cavern wall, not wanting to become food for whatever lay below.

Blacyn heard a few falling pebbles from the rough-hewn, stone stairwell. He looked onward up the stairs, fearing within his heart, the hairless cats from before. A shadow of movement caught his eyes, and he said calmly to Rappi, "Halfling, wake Sevoi...we will need his arm."

Rappi responded without hesitation and barely touched Sevoi before the war-priest was on his feet, folded net in hand.

Growls from the tirgefrabs preceded their appearance as they stalked into view, three abreast on the stairwell. The dwarf stepped before Sevoi and Rappi, his shield at the ready when the tirgefrabs let loose with streams of toxic vomit.

Two streams splattered off of Blacyn's shield, but the third found Sevoi in the rear and the toxins of the vomit went instantly to work draining Sevoi's strength. However, his resolve to bring down these vile creations persisted.

Sevoi growled, "Allow them to advance, they must not be given the high-ground."

Blacyn hefted one of his throwing axes and sent it toward the center cat. The axe found a solid target in the shoulder of the large cat and it let out a scream of protest.

Rappi's anxiety brought his screen of force up before him, and pulled his sole dagger; shaking but ready should one of the magical beasts to get too close.

Sevoi let fly his net at the cat nearest the edge of the stairwell, and despite his weakened state, entangled the horrid cat.

The outside cat walked further down to the bridge group. Rappi dropped back a step. The ring of the bridge platform they stood upon had already been explored and the small group found that the walkway ran the complete circumference of the caverns diameter.

The two free moving tirgefrabs projected another volley of vomit. One stream of puke landed squarely against the flank of Blacyn. He grumbled, feeling some of the weakening effects, "Ugh, damnable beast!"

Sevoi pulled hard on the fouled net. The tirgefrab strained in protest against the nets restriction to no avail. Sevoi released the net for the entangled tirgefrab to fall into the golden water below and the waiting maw of the beasts within. A quick scream of protest sounded from the drowning cat as colossal leeches latched on to the ugly cat with circular jaws.

Blacyn waded into the two remaining cats with his warhammer swinging wild finding no purchase.

Sevoi drew his dagger and ordered, "Attack!"

Rappi, taken by the sudden order, pushed away his nervousness and carefully stepped in looking for a place to jab his dagger. He began swinging wildly.

The two remaining tirgefrabs turned back up the stairwell and bounded out of sight. The three shipmates drew back to each other and Sevoi ordered. "How do we fare?"

Rappi was quick to answer, "Fine, I think."

Blacyn responded, "Disgusted."

Sevoi nodded, "Be aware, mates, lest they return. Rappi, tend that torch."

Across the dangerous span, Serak heard the click he had desired to hear. Training with his father and Gamma to pick locks seemed much easier than this. He lifted the smoothed latch and the opaque doors swung easily open. He was glad he could be of some use to the crew, "It was a Chelaxian make, but poor material. Strange for something that appears to be gravely important."

"Indeed, strange," Elvee agreed, her tone hinted at a concerned mind.

The crew walked into a chamber shaped like a five-pointed star. A large pentagram of inlaid silver adorns an obsidian floor with a pentagram stepped platform in the center. Atop the platform is an ivory-white cylindrical container roughly three-feet in height and diameter. Its outside caged with a fine network of copper tubes radiating like spokes from a central open reservoir, which received drips of blood from a pipe descending from the ceiling. The pipe flowed from ceiling to wall, attached to a series of sixteen metallic closets, all measuring six-feet in height that surrounded the room; these closets were connected by tubes to one another.

The crew looks about at the startling and grizzly feat of engineering in a deafening quiet.

Serak broke the silence, "Asmodeus, figures a shrine to him would be shrouded in excrement." He wrinkled his nose.

Madis added, motioning his hands to hush everyone, "Listen."

The dripping of blood into the reservoir slowed as a raspy breath was exhaled and inhaled with a halting rhythm, filling the chamber.

Serak asked the obvious, "So, Elvee, would that be our box?"

Z alerted, "Damnable demon, where did it go!"

All the small crew turned around to find Z without the troublesome quasit. A short frantic search ensued for Elzemon, who had appeared to simply disappear.

Unbeknownst to the crew, Elzemon, after receiving his initial silencing from Z had feigned his own unconsciousness in order to heal. Once able, he transmuted his form into something small enough to crawl away from the group that certainly appeared more powerful than he for the moment. Fruitlessly the crew searched the nearby area, and failed to notice the tail end of a centipede as it crawled under the opaque doors.

Madis exhaled, "Great."

Serak began searching the chamber, perhaps he could forage up some treasure out of this mountain of trouble. Finding nothing much to check, the rogue opened the door to one of the closets. A long face with soul-less eyes looked back at him. Serak had seen the dead before, but they still chilled his spine when he cast his eyes upon them. He mumbled, "Elvee, we have dead. I wouldn't be surprised if all these," he motioned to the metal closets, "have more bodies." He eyed the inside of this coffin, doubting that treasure lay within.

Madis honed in on one closet in particular, carefully listening to the stale and rank air of the chamber.

He opened the door revealing another apparent corpse, until the corpse's eyes fluttered open. The man had small tubes emerging from his wrists, thighs, and neck. His exsanguinated body slumped in its chain restraints. With his dying breath, he raised his head to look at Madis and exclaimed in a weak voice, "Bl...bleed for...the Box, or...or else...it will...escape." The man exhaled his last.

Z knelt nearby and tended to him, "He is gone, whoever he was. Even if he could be brought back he would be incredibly weak." She examined him further and found at the bottom of the closet a wooden holy symbol to Imodiae, The Inheritor. She removed the holy symbol to one of her many satchels, saying a short prayer for the unknown man.

Serak scoffed silently; wooden symbols won't bring much coin.

Elviodia was also looking about the room and soon stopped at a fault in the workmanship of the walls; she smirked and pushed a portion of the wall and it drifted open with ease. "Strange indeed?" Elviodia entered, leaving the rest of the crew in the main chamber.

Madis and Serak looked at one another as they both heard the gurgling noises from the ivory Box. Madis said aloud, "Um, Elvee...?"

Z spoke, "I believe I may know what is needed." The brawler stepped up and drew her dagger across the top of her forearm; the gash quickly oozed blood in a small rivulet. She held her freely dripping blood over the reservoir on the Box and allowed it to fill the reservoir. She knew the original plan was that Blacyn was to be the one who would hold the



diabolic lock; however, the dwarf was not here and the plan needed to be changed.

Madis, Serak, and Frila looked on as Z sat near allowing more blood to drip into the reservoir from her arm.

Z said, "This hellish creation requires the blood of those who adhere to lawful tenants."

Madis and Serak looked at one another again and Frila only nodded understanding.

The other closets were opened and all the rest revealed that their deceased contents had passed on as the others had, drained of blood.

Elviodia walked carefully through the secret room and came to a startling understanding; this was Nekros the Grotesque's private study. It held all of his tools and accoutrements. The whole of the chamber was somewhat Spartan in design, possessing a bed, a desk, and two sets of shelves containing books, scrolls, and all the other items that are of magical note, complete with alchemical substances that were already brewed. On top the plain desk, amidst various pieces of parchment, rests a bucket composed of the same type of glass the door was shaped from. Opening her large sack she began to fill it with what she could find of value. Only one scroll was encased in a scroll case, and Elvee took it. She found three vials, not knowing what they were she tossed them all in her sack. A solid black tooth found its way into her coin purse.

She moved to the desk. Not taking the time to check for traps, she ignited the trigger below the desk. Everything erupted in a fireball, severely burning the elfen marksman and dropping her screaming to the floor.

Madis was first to react and dashed across the pentagram-shaped room to find the smoldering remains of the parchments atop the desk on fire. He also found the writhing form of Elviodia. She had been badly burned.

Serak and Frila were soon behind.

Frila made her way to the elf looking over her burned, but still alive, body. "We must get back to Rappi. He has the healing solutions from Druma."

Madis nodded and looked to Serak, "We must head back. The Box is what we've come for, Master Serak. What are your orders?"

Serak looked around and realized, yes, he was in charge. He was who Captain Gault had placed in charge as their financier. He needed to take these reigns before they were taken from him. Clearing his mind he said calmly to Madis, "Take everyone out into the chamber. I'll continue the search in here and be there shortly."

Madis nodded and helped Frila carry Elviodia out.

Serak set about looking over the desk, the obvious source of the explosion of flame. A quick investigation told Serak there were no more traps. He quickly rifled the desk finding cases containing scrolls for the cylindrical artifact out in the chamber, dubbed Yarafad's Box. Another was a folded parchment; it detailed the dealings with a quasit named Elzemon and its weakness to lead substances. Finding the solid lead pipe nearby, he grabbed. Serak was about to leave when he turned and saw the glass bucket.

Not really seeing much value in it, the roguish-merchant shrugged, returned and snagged it from the desk. Someone may find it pretty.

Returning to the group he noted Z and Elviodia. Serak began "Madis, you carry the Box." motioning to the largest member of the party. Frila, you tend the wounded should they need it until we reach the base of the bridge. Follow me. I recall the way Elvee brought us here." And he did indeed recall with clarity the entire route, complete with troubles. "Once we reach the bridge we will set our new heading and methods."

The orders were clear, and the crew departed the huge mound of refuse without any word of contest from the others. Master Serak, though young, gave efficient tasking.



Monsters

Cryo-Fungus

Cryo-fungus is a extremophile organism that thrives in the presence of low temperatures, explosively growing towards sources of ice and cold within range. Once in contact with its preferred environment, it blankets the nearby area in beautifully delicate and icy-white crystals shaped like frost flowers, clustering on and clinging to all sources of cold.

Cryo-fungus: Init +5 (surprise); Atk frostbite +5 melee (1 cold damage plus hallucinate); AC 10; HD 5d8; MV 5' plus special; Act special; SP gradient movement, attack all targets within 10' of a source of cold, half damage from non-area attacks, hallucinate (DC 15 Fort save or random behavior; DC of save increases by 5 for each subsequent encounter); SV Fort +0, Ref +8, Will +0; AL N.

The fungus is highly volatile, and can penetrate most forms of protective clothing. When touched, the fungus is extremely cold, burning and stinging any bare skin that it comes into contact with. In addition, creatures coming into contact with the fungus or inhaling its crystalline spores are subject to a strong hallucinogenic effect that grows with subsequent exposure. The fungus gives off a sweet scent as a by-product of its metabolism that is a precursor to its effects.

Cryo-fungus cannot survive outside of its native low temperature environment for more than a few turns. If released, it will noiselessly proliferate in the direction of any source of below freezing temperatures within 60', slowly at first, and then spreading with growing speed. Its movement rate starts at 5' and doubles each round, only stopping once there are no more sources of cold within range. Thus, after one round it will have moved 5', after two rounds 15' feet, after three rounds, 35', etc.

When spreading, the cryo-fungus is completely silent and causes surprise 50% of the time, receiving a free 1d20 attack against all targets within 10' of any source of below-freezing cold. Regardless of whether the contact inflicts damage or not, creatures in the affected area must make a save or be subject to the spore's highly-psychotropic effects. Each time the target is affected, roll on the table below hallucinations manifestation, combining the results for the amalgamation of the illusion. Creatures that are affected by the hallucinations coming into contact with cryo-fungus in the future find the spores to be much more difficult to resist as their neural pathways carry residual effects from previous attacks:

d10	Hallucination
1	A leaping horde of green scorpion-things the size of weasels.
2	A grand ball where the target proceeds to be led into a dance of three galops, a triple-polka and a kind of a strutting cake-walk where the victim is obliged to raise one leg high in the air, jerk his elbows, throw back his head, then repeat the evolution with all briskness, using the other leg.
3	The target proceeds to attempt a variety of calisthenics: push-ups, skipping rope, chin-ups on a non-existent horizontal bar, etc.
4	The target perceives nearby creatures as monstrous humanoid forms. Roll 1d10 for subtype: (1) eagle; (2) spider; (3) eel; (4) goat; (5) bat; (6) lion; (7) dragon; (8) chicken; (9) wolf; (10) lizard.
5	Sparkling, dancing lights surround the target, circling in elliptical orbits.
6	Surrounded by friends. The target sees all enemies as a comforting image from the past (e.g., their kin, loved one, favorite pet, etc.).
7	Surrounded by foes. The target attacks the nearest ally.
8	The target starts spinning dizzily like a dancing mouse.

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