

# The Incandescent Grottoes

## Session 5 25-7-23 Stinks, Statues and Coffers

Next Session 3-8-23

A rumour, heard at the forestry camp, "An Imperial Prismist entered the grottoes a few months past and never returned."

A fresh bright morning finds our heroes returning to the grottoes. Moving with moderate caution they wander past the disinterested skeletons and this time using the southernmost exit, enter the dark-stone, u-shaped passageway where the magically-sealed door lies. Now they are actually standing before it they realise they don't really have a plan for getting inside so with a dismissive, "we'll be back" look they continue through the corridors to take another look at the silver discs. Considering that they don't know for certain yet if these are actually teleporters they decide to try a test with a potentially observable result so Angus places a marked torch onto the Overworld disc. Trooping up to the surface they do indeed see the marked torch lying in the clearing so they conclude it seems to be ok for objects. "But", says Fenella, "what if it's not safe for people?". Angus immediately volunteers to test this and disappears back into the grotto to appear magically before them about 10 minutes later. Ok, so it's safe for Angus but what about for people? The usual jolly hilarity ensues. As they descend back into the grotto, Angus expounds eagerly on his plan to step on the Altar disc but the others are not too keen to split the party and also not at all keen to follow him using the disc so they decide to instead re-visit level 2 of the complex and their newly found friends, the Slugbabies... quietly re-visit them... and tiptoe past them... quietly. Enroute, passing through the mushroom grotto Angus points out excitedly, "look, there's another exit to the north!", "yes, we know", reply the others as they lead on towards the stairs. Looking wistfully over his shoulder Angus rejoins them, descending the stairs to the alcoved corridor. They notice the same strong acidic odour from the east and the ambience of soft mumbles and ghastly chewing as they creep quietly past the remaining 3 undisturbed urns.

### **The Acidic Grid**

The short corridor emerges into a large vaulted chamber with a muted gloomy light issuing from its pock-marked darkstone surfaces. It is a large rectangular hall 50 ft north to south and 20 ft east to west. Along the north south axis stands a line of five columns, covered in many candle sconces, thick with the remains of ancient burned down wax. The floor consists of a dark metal grid with a 1 inch gauge through which can be seen a noxious lake of liquid below from which issues the acrid acidic stink of this area. Angus immediately wants to place a torch into one of the column sconces and bravely volunteers to be the first onto the forbidding metal grid. Placing one foot then another he feels a very slight give in the metal floor, as if the whole thing is somehow moveable but it supports his weight without any problem. Vlad and Reme join him and leaving Fenella standing uncomfortably close to the quietly masticating urns, they go to the pillar and place a lighted torch in a sconce which brightens the hall a little. Angus is keen to put out more torches until Vlad asks him why would he want to do that? Angus is not entirely sure why but in the meantime spots another corridor corresponding to the one they entered from except in the eastern wall. On closer examination they discover a short dead end corridor with similar alcoves and more copper urns from which a quiet chewing and grumbling sound can be heard. Back in the other corridor Fenella has decided standing on a possibly moveable grid over a lake of an unknown noxious liquid seems to be preferable to being near the creepy, unnerving chewing sounds of these vile urns so she steps down and joins the others. They all want to leave the Slugbabies behind them but Angus does find himself wondering about treasure to be found around these ghastly urns so bears them in mind for a later repeat visit to what he has decided must be The Sacrificial Bridge referenced on one of the silver discs. For now they head north across the disconcertingly mobile floor observing a short corridor to the north and a door at the end of it. Also they notice a shaft in the vaulted ceiling leading up into a gloomy space above them but it is out of reach and they can't discern any detail. Continuing to the north they step up from the grating and search the corridor around the door for any concealed features but find nothing. The door at the end is stuck but a smirking Vlad is ready with his crowbar. Unfortunately for him the heavy door resists his mighty efforts and he has to rest for 10 minutes before he can try again... without smirking. This time he manages to gain the leverage he needs and the door is forced open with a loud cracking noise that echoes around the stone chambers.

They enter into an unlit east west corridor of crumbling sandstone quite different from the dark pockmarked stone of the areas they had been recently exploring. Scattered stones and dust debris litter the corridor and they note a pile of scraps of cloth and some human bones to the left of the door. There are 5 other ajar doors in the corridor and at the western end of the corridor a flight of stairs leading upwards. They discuss where they might be vis-a-vis the rest of the complex. Vlad is interested in making a reconnaissance, seeing if the stairs join up to anywhere they have already visited and the others agree that this is a good idea before beginning to explore the doors. They also notice that the stench of the acidic fluid is much reduced as they cross into the corridor and they can hear fast rushing water in the distance in a vaguely northerly direction.

### **The Corridor of Doors**

Climbing the stairs brings them into a north-south corridor constructed from the familiar pock-marked dark stone with a heavy wooden door in a curved archway rimmed with green tiles opposite them to the west. Looking behind them they see a similar green-tiled design at the top of the stairs. Looking to the south they see a corridor with 7 alcoves in the eastern wall, each alcove containing, thankfully not copper urns but a pile of smashed bone and wood in each, spattered with a dark brown residue, probably dried blood. About halfway down the west wall is an exit to the west and wasting no time the reconnaissance party head down to it, passing through into a rough hewn cavern carved from the solid rock with a scintillating crystalline ceiling of white and aquamarine. There are exits to the south and north and at the western end of the cavern on an engraved black marble plinth stands a statue of a globe of staring eyes spanning 5 ft in diameter. Immediately to the south is a curious sight, an exquisitely detailed group of small statuettes a few inches tall...

7 creeping troglodytes, 2 identical women in wizard robes with prism-topped staves, 5 kobolds with spears and nets, 1 ogre carrying a large chest, 3 dwarf warriors with mining equipment, 2 knights, 1 female elf warrior, 1 hooded figure, 3 soldiers.

As they examine the statues they notice a disturbance in the sandy floor in front of them as grinding from the floor 4 new statues emerge, depicting... themselves! Just as if a sculptor had carved them from life! Somewhat unsettled they ignore the eyes statue and go south, hoping to connect up with a familiar area while Fenella mutters something about "them" trying to freak people out and having better things to do than freaking out! They arrive in a similarly formed cavern with the same type of crystalline ceiling. There is an exit to the south but their eyes are drawn to the 8 ft high statue of human skulls standing on a black marble engraved plinth at the western end of the chamber. The statue is carved from a dark grey stone but also around the statue are scattered a number of skulls and from a brief look, these appear to be real bone, not carved stone. Some of the statue's skulls glint with dark gemstones in their eye sockets. Daubed on the sandy stone floor next to the statue in bright purple paint is some writing but unfortunately none of you understand the language. Taking the southern exit they are relieved to emerge in the familiar mushroom grotto, which appears positively wholesome after the somewhat disturbing areas they have explored recently.

With the reconnaissance plan achieved the adventurers return without incident and with barely a shudder as they pass the unsettling statues, to the corridor of ajar doors. This time they are sure they hear the sound of rushing water in the distance more clearly behind the second door on the left as they pass by from the west. Angus and Vlad search the eastern dead end of the corridor and don't find anything concealed so they open up the first door to the north revealing an immaculately clean rectangular room with a sealed stone coffer standing in the centre. Angus and Vlad check for traps but there aren't any so Vlad lifts off the lid. The coffer is filled to the brim with neatly stacked human skulls, mummified human hands and black candles and there is a scrap of parchment with a note written in an elegant hand. "Could even the wight of the priestess be forced into submission?". "It's all a bit culty, isn't it", comments Fenella as they leave.

Moving onto the next door in the corridor and opening it they see a similar room, also with a coffer except leaning listlessly against the wall, dressed in shabby ill-fitting black velvet suits are two humanoid figures. As the party enter they animate and pick up the brooms that are propped nearby and stand ready... apparently to clean, perhaps explaining the well dusted coffer rooms. Since they just stand there Angus begins to check the coffer for traps which causes the Zombie janitors to raise their brooms and spring to the attack but the adventurers were well-prepared so they get in the first blows.

Following the usual party routine, Angus swings his battle axe mightily and misses as Reme stabs the same Zombie hard, damaging it badly, Vlad following Angus's example hits empty air even with the marvellous magical sword as Fenella's quiet chanting raises to a cry, unleashing her Faerie Fire spell on the creature, lighting it up a treat (+2 to hit). The Zombies wave their brooms menacingly, trying perhaps to tidy the party to death as Vlad takes a glancing blow from the blunt end of a broom. Fenella turns her attention to the second Zombie as one of Angus's mighty swings connects, cleaving the first Zombie into component parts and really bringing the 'dead' to the un-dead as Reme elegantly skewers the other one for another greivous wound. With a black eye from a broom handle Vlad is no longer playing around and quickly finishes the second creature as Fenella's spell lights it up most delightfully, the two defeated Zombies forming a pleasant luminous display in the small room. Feeling extra tough and masculine, Vlad attempts to casually toss aside the stone coffer cover but is lucky not to strain his back as he catches hold of it in just the wrong way. Angus steps in to heave it off easily with a smug look that soon disappears as they regard the ghastly contents of the coffer. Dismembered human female legs (3), arms (7), heads (2), and a torso, all tattooed with magical preservation (apparently) sigils.

Standing in the awful scene but so very beautifully lit, they consider their next move.