

The Incandescent Grottoes

Session 4 20-7-23 Leverage

Next Session 25-7-23

Loitering in the room with the four levers and the shimmering blue portcullis the explorers take their time to consider their options. The scintillating, floating pink bubbles seemingly contained by the portcullis draw some attention and the group are able to perceive that there is another similar portcullis behind the bubbles with a room beyond. Angus and Vlad carefully search the room but don't find any secret or concealed features. They do notice that the levers are made of a sturdy cast iron and examining them closely see that each one has a rune stamped into it.

Lever 1 (west) a lightning bolt

Lever 2 (centre west) an open door

Lever 3 (centre east) an open door

Lever 4 (east) a cylindrical container - a vat

As they discuss what to do, Vlad points out that there are two other directions as yet unexplored back in the corridor but the others seem more interested in trying things here first. Angus selects lever 4 and pulls it down with a satisfying clunk but otherwise they don't notice any particular effect as a result. After a brief discussion they decide to pull the lightning lever and Vlad is the brave volunteer. It switches with an agreeable thunk, dispelling the blue shimmer around the portcullis, which was apparently containing the pink bubbles because they stream rapidly into the room coalescing into a large multiple bubble entity that lashes out at them with two stinking ammonia streams of scintillating bubbles. It strikes first, the bubbles splashing over Angus causing toxic chemical burns. Reme is also targeted but manages to avoid the writhing bubbly tentacle. Vlad steps up and swinging the mighty sword of Sir Chyde cleaves into nearest stream of bubbles causing many of the globes to pop, obviously damaging the bubbly monster which draws back from the weapon, seemingly gathering its resources for a more determined attack. Angus stabs into the main body of the creature but it writhes away from his shortsword. Fenella's Faerie Fire spell goes off, illuminating the entire entity in a bright green aura that will make it easier to hit (+2). With this advantage, they take the initiative and strike again, Reme cleaves hard into the nearest "bubblacle" bursting more of the bubbles as Vlad again swings through the nearest tentacle and is delighted to see the bursting, popping bubbles caused by his attack cascade throughout the rest of the creature as it splashes harmlessly to the ground disappearing in an acrid ammoniac miasma.

Looking through the now unobscured bars of the portcullis they see a small box room formed by this portcullis and another to the north, through which they see a larger room and from this angle a single large iron framed vat with a ladder resting against it. Angus tries the vat lever again and this time they hear a mechanism operating in the room beyond the portcullis but they still don't observe any change. They decide to try the two open door levers. Fenella suggests maybe opening the one furthest away first which they all think is sensible so guessing that the most easterly is probably the correct one, they throw the lever and indeed the furthest portcullis rises up into the ceiling. Reme gets in on the lever pulling, throwing the second open door control and in satisfaction watches the nearest portcullis rise into the ceiling. Passing the ex-bubble containment area they enter a room with three large glass vats enclosed in cast iron frames with ladders leaning against them. The vat to the west contains a translucent yellow substance and a man dressed in black robes suspended upside down in it. The centre vat contains an orange substance but its iron frame is badly buckled as if something heavy had crashed into it. The eastern vat is filled with a red substance containing just a human skull resting at the bottom. Suspended above it is an iron cage, slowly dripping a viscous red fluid into the vat below. They notice the floor of the room is tiled and features a red ring motif. On the western wall there is another portcullis, humming with contained energy and occasionally sparking across the bars. Beyond is an open area with a lever in the wall on the far side next to the portcullis.

Angus returns to the lever room to try his favourite lever and it does indeed lower and raise the iron cage, fitting neatly around the skull lying at the bottom of the vat. Fenella wonders why there is only one cage as Vlad and Angus ponder the lever on the far side of the portcullis. Vlad volunteers to go around and pull it, prompting Angus to comment, "But Vlad, how will we manage without our strongest and bravest fighter?" Vlad regards him for a moment before saying, "Well, you go then." Grumbling to himself Angus stomps off through the lever room to the T-junction and following the northern corridor does indeed arrive at the other side of the portcullis. Grasping the lever and pulling it down he receives a large electrical shock which throws him away and causes the lever to spring back to its up position. The portcullis remains closed, mockingly humming and sparking. Deciding it's not worth the trouble Angus stomps back to the others, smouldering. To distract himself from the electrical burns Angus muses on trying some experiments with the vats, do they dissolve stuff for example? Fenella comments at least they know that iron is safe in the red one. Examining the upside down figure Angus notes that the robes are the same as the ones they have seen ("borrowed") before, also that the suspended man is perfectly preserved. Vlad has concluded that they're in the recycling centre and noting the absence of any portable valuables begins to lose interest so they depart the vat room, following Vlad's suggestion to close the portcullises behind them.

To port or not to port

Returning to the corridor they head south following the corridor as it turns sharply to the east, emerging after about 40 ft into a room of similar size to the vat room, also featuring the red circled tile design on the floor. On the eastern wall there are four silver discs, laid into the floor. On closer examination they notice that the discs are engraved with tiny magical symbols and a larger inscription in a magical script. Although not an Arcanist by calling, Fenella is nonetheless extremely bright and well-read so she is able to decipher the meaning of each.

From north to south...

1. Overworld
2. Altar
3. Sacrificial Bridge
4. Crypt

Angus blurts out, "Teleporters, let's step on them!" leading Fenella to add, "But none of them sound much fun." so they pause a moment to discuss the matter. They seem convinced that the creator of these discs must have been an decent and honourable person who labelled the discs accurately for the convenience of their fellow beings, this often being a feature of obscure hidden cults who just want visitors to be able to use things easily and effectively. So, assuming that the discs are in fact teleporters and that they are labelled correctly... hmmm, how to test without risk... "Put a thing on one!", exclaims Fenella. So Vlad takes his thinly beaten iron dreamcatcher owl from the Winter's Daughter adventure and places it on the Altar disc, where it immediately disappears. Hmmm... what did that show? The Altar disc might be a teleporter? It might also be a disintegrator? How to tell the difference? Put an item on one of the discs that emerges in a location they haven't yet visited?

Or is there possibly some other strategy that would yield information???

Finding this all a bit much for now, they (eventually) recall some of the other unexplored exits in the underground complex, indeed there were two leading from that mushroom grotto, weren't there? So passing the disinterested jelly skellies they return to the large mushroom grotto and head through the east exit. They emerge into a cave of rough rock walls and floor that looks to have been carved out of the solid rock. Above is a scintillating crystalline ceiling of pale pink and white crystal. To the east is a stairway exit leading down into darkness. To the south of the cave is a weird statue carved from another crystalline material except in orange with green striations. It is a representation of a mass of human limbs, intertwined in a globe of around 5ft diameter, the overall effect of which is vaguely unsettling. Angus examines it more closely and seems to fall into a daze for a while, eventually confessing to the others that he saw his face for a moment in that bizarre tangle of limbs. Fenella tries the experience too and indeed does see her face fleetingly represented but doesn't find it particularly worrisome, it's her face after all she comments brightly.

Into the Dark

Finding the dark stairway somehow more appealing Reme and Fenella light up torches and they head cautiously down the stairs, descending into a corridor with alcoves in the walls, containing copper urns with the lids slightly ajar. There is an acrid nostril burning stench wafting from further to the east as Angus mutters beneath his breath, "I saw... my... face".

Turning their attention to one of the urns they can hear a soft grinding, whining sound from within. Opening it they are suddenly attacked by vile slippery worm-like creatures with ghastly human baby-like faces, ravenous for flesh, tentacles extending from their wildly staring eyes. A frantic melee breaks out with six of the creatures swarming them, wriggling frantically for exposed flesh all the while grumbling and whining disgustingly. The adventurers react quickly and stab and slice at the creatures with Vlad killing one outright which then explodes in a burst of acidic goo, causing him some damage. Reme manages a slight cut on one as Angus and Fenella hit empty air. Swarming over Angus and Reme the ravenous creatures bite and chew damaging both the Rangers. Fighting back, Vlad kills another as Fenella stabs one to the wall with her spear, both exploding and squirting acid. Reme and Angus fight theirs off and soon there are only six vile corpses evaporating in acid and four bashed up adventurers. "And that was just one urn", complains Vlad.

Retreating hurt they head back to the surface and trek wearily back to the forestry camp, gratefully accepting the hospitality of the workers (2 gp each per night) and the travelling cleric. Staying for two nights they take it easy and fully recovered except for Angus (still sporting a few cuts and bruises) they are ready to head back to the Grottoes at first light!