

The Crypt of St. Bethesda

by James Macduff

Not all threats lurk in the wilderness, and not all dungeons lie far from the realms of man. The gravest threats appear in the heart of civilization, hiding beneath harmless veneers and waiting for the moment to strike.

You and your friends find yourselves in a large and prosperous city, with coins in your pockets and time to burn. You spend an evening engaging in revelry – drinking, gambling, dancing – then stumble back home in the wee hours of the morning. Your path takes you through a dark area of the city: the cemetery district, where fields of graves jostle against ancient churches and family crypts. Off in the distance somewhere, you hear a scream, but there's no way to tell where it came from, so you ignore it. Rounding a corner soon after, one of you stumbles over something in the dark.

At first, you think it's just a pile of garbage, but a closer inspection reveals something much grislier: a human corpse, its face frozen in a rictus of fear. Several stab marks ooze fresh blood from its belly, and its flesh is marred by what appear to be acid stains. The skin is warm to the touch, and some of the injuries still smoke. He's not been dead for more than a few minutes.

The body shifts slightly as you examine it, and for a moment, you think the victim may still be alive. Then the truth reveals itself: Small, sinewy worms, colored a strange lavender, twist and writhe within his clothes. They number less than 20 and seem to cluster near the acid burns. A faint trail of slime leads from the body to an open grate in the street, dotted with more of the strange, lavender worms. The building above it, a towering wreck of a cathedral dedicated to someone named St. Bethesda, has been boarded up for years, but if you listen closely, faint noises can be heard beneath it.

"Halt!" The clink of mail, and the sound of running feet break up your examination. A squad of city guardsmen – several blocks away but closing fast – flash their lanterns in your direction.

"Murderers!" the cry goes up. "Halt in the name of the watch!"

This doesn't look good.

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Requires the use of the **Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition**, published by **Wizards of the Coast®**

Crypt of Bethesda is a d20 System adventure booster designed for 5-8 characters levels 2-4. It can be played as a stand-alone adventure or dropped into any ongoing campaign setting.



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How to Use This Product

This adventure is designed to be easily dropped into your existing 3rd edition D&D campaign. It can be run in a single session, and makes for an excellent evening's gaming. To prepare yourself to run it, you should read it completely at least once to familiarize yourself with the material, and you may wish to photocopy the map in the center of the book for ease of use as well. The text on the back of the book can be read to your players in order to introduce them to the adventure. After that, you're ready to begin. Good luck!

Dungeons and Dragons®

This module requires the use of the Dungeons and Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast.® You won't be able to run this adventure without it.



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DM Background

As stated in the player background, the party has stumbled onto a murder that they now stand to take the blame for. With the watch bearing down on them and an obvious trail leading to a nearby basement grate, they have little choice other than to enter the opening and find the killer.

The man was killed by a wormwraith, a hive-mind bundle of sentient worms hiding beneath a human shell. This particular specimen is growing old and wishes to pass on its seed before it dies. It emerged from its lair beneath the city, hid in a nearby alley, and killed the first passerby to wander along. It would have planted its seed (a small cluster of worms designed to grow within the victim), but the heroes happened along before it could finish. It quickly slunk back to its lair, where it hopes to wait until the ruckus has died down, then complete its work.

Unfortunately for the wormwraith, the heroes have uncovered the creature's lair.

The wormwraith resides in an extended series of catacombs beneath an abandoned cathedral. The cathedral originally belonged to the Order of St. Bethesda, a cult dedicated to rest and spiritual healing. Once very popular, the order suffered from steadily declining membership and eventually abandoned the area altogether. The years have not been kind to their former home, and the structure now stands as a dilapidated eyesore. It also holds an extensive series of underground crypts, which some of the city's predators (human and otherwise) have used as a rallying point.

Troubleshooting

Some players aren't going to want to take the obvious path here, either because it honestly doesn't occur to them or out of sheer stubbornness.

If the heroes want to turn and fight the guards, you should point out to them the foolhardiness of such a plan. Not only are the guards well armed and armored, but there are many more of them than there are of the heroes. Additionally, more guards can be summoned in a matter of moments, and the heroes would likely find themselves quickly surrounded and captured if not killed outright for resisting arrest.

If the heroes try to run, they quickly find that the watch is closing in on them from every angle. No matter which way they turn, they find guards closing in on them, encircling them and naturally forcing them back toward the scene of the crime.



If, for some reason, the guards capture the characters – whether the heroes are subdued in the course of arrest or are simply foolish enough to throw themselves at the mercy of the watch – the PCs are detained as suspects in the murder. Pointing out the acid burns or the worms on the body is enough to plant doubts in the minds of the guards, but they're more concerned with providing their bosses with a suspect than in catching the real killer.

The leader of the watch decides to offer the heroes a chance to redeem themselves and save him and his men a good deal of work and potential risk to their lives. He agrees to let the heroes follow the trail of slime down into the open grate that leads under the cathedral. If the heroes can manage to find the killer and produce evidence that clears them, he'll let them go. Otherwise, they can rot in the city's dungeons for as long as it takes for their crime to make its way through the city's backlogged court system – where they'll likely be convicted and sentenced to death for lack of a better suspect.

The leader of the guard informs the heroes that he's going to post a watch around the entire cathedral area until the next morning. If the heroes aren't back by dawn, the entire city will be alerted to their crime, and they will find themselves wanted fugitives. Worse yet, the watch will be sent down after them. The city's guards absolutely hate dealing with things beneath the streets of their home, and they're not likely to be in a forgiving mood when they finally find the heroes.

The Cathedral's Depths

As the PCs enter each room, read the boxed text to them aloud. The rest of the information is for you.

1. The Cathedral Basement

Entering the grate, you find yourselves in a large room containing all manner of discarded furniture. Pews, chairs, candelabras, and low tables lie in jumbled piles, full of cobwebs and wood rot. This seems to be the basement for the abandoned cathedral above. A rubble-choked stairway can be seen to your left, and two empty doorways yawn at you from the far wall. The trail of slime ends here, fading beneath the filmy dust on the floor. Behind you, you can hear the footfalls of the approaching watch.

With the guards still hot on their heels, the heroes should feel the need to hurry through this area, but curious characters may want to poke amid the furniture for hidden treasures. A monstrous centipede lurks in the wood. It does not reveal itself unless disturbed, but anyone who sticks his hand in the furniture gets a nasty bite. The centipede flees after it bites the intruder, scuttling up the rubble-filled stairway and disappearing among the fallen rocks.

The stairway is entirely blocked by the rubble. Any efforts to clear the rubble result in a cave-in. This causes 2d6 damage to anyone within 10 feet of the stairs. Any PC with Stonecunning automatically spots the rubble's instability.



2. Storage Cellar

This small, cramped room contains crates of moldy hard-tack and a row of huge wine casks against the far wall. Signs of giant rats can be seen amid the debris: droppings, tracks, and pieces chewed out of the rotting food.

There are no giant rats currently living here, although the evidence is overwhelming that they did at one time. A wine cask in the far, right-hand corner has been made into a nest, which looks like it has been abandoned for some time. A hole has been dug in the wall behind it, large enough for the party to get through. It emerges into a stone corridor on the other side, leading deeper into the catacombs.

3. Library

The doorway into this room opens into a spacious stone chamber filled from top to bottom with a series of bookshelves. Tomes and scrolls, swollen with mildew, pack the shelves, some spilling out onto the floor. Most of them seem to be hymnals and religious texts dedicated to St. Bethesda. Several shelves are completely bare, standing out like missing teeth. A large, stone door can be seen in the far, left-hand wall.

The ghouls (see #6) confiscated the missing books for their nest. A thorough search of the bookshelves (which makes a pulpy mess of more than one text) produces a scroll with an *unseen servant* spell, which is still barely legible. The scroll must be copied by a skilled scribe within 48 hours, or it becomes useless.

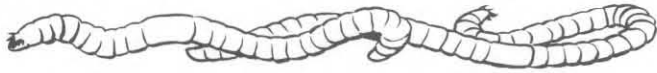
The words "The Honored Dead" are inscribed in common above the stone doorway.

4. Crypt

A row of stone coffins lines the walls of this room, each inscribed with a name and the seal of St. Bethesda. A few bits of lichen grow along the walls, but as a whole the chamber seems remarkably free of the mold and decay that covers the rooms you've seen so far. An opening to the left appears to lead deeper into the complex.

When the wormwraith first took up residence here, it paid a necromancer to animate some of the deceased

Monstrous Centipede (1): CR 1/8; SZ T (vermin); HD 1/4d8; hp 1; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20; AC 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex); Atk: bite +4 (1d3 +5, poison); Face 2.5 ft. x 2.5 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SA poison (DC 11, 1 Dex); SQ vermin; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 1, Dex 15, Con 10, Int –, Wis 10, Cha 2; AL N. Skills: Climb +3, Hide +17, Spot +7 Feats: Weapon Finesse (bite).



Skeletons (5): CR 1/3; SZ M (undead); HD 1d12; hp 6 each; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 improved initiative); Spd 30; AC 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural); Atk: 2 claws +0 (1d4); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ undead, immunities; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11; AL N. Feats: Improved Initiative.

priests. Five skeletons dressed in robes of St. Bethesda wait in the coffins to strike. They rise with a howl and attempt to drive the party back into the library (#3), then bar the door. If they succeed, they then return to their coffins.

The passage to the north was originally intended to house a new series of crypts, but it was abandoned along with the cathedral when the order moved on. The stonework gradually grows rougher as the passageway continues.

5. Dead End

The passageway ends in a solid stone wall.

There is no secret door here. The passage was walled up when the library was built. However, the masonry is weak and could collapse if pushed too hard. Anyone with a Strength higher than 13 and a Dexterity lower than 13 who attempts to search for secret doors brings the wall (and the bookshelf behind it) crashing to the ground. This causes 1d6 damage to the searcher and sends a flurry of dust into the air. Any PC with Stonecunning automatically spots the weak masonry.

6. Ghoul Colony

The door here is a poor fit, built over a seemingly natural opening. Anyone listening at it can hear wet chewing sounds coming from the other side.

The door opens into a rough square of a room. A crude nest of masticated hymnals and chewed coffin wood has been scattered about the floor. Their openings set in the far wall, a series of small warrens and tunnels branch out into the distance. A quartet of emaciated humanoids squat in the center of the room, munching on what appear to be a pair of human corpses. They look up when you open the door, and they instantly rise to the attack.

Ghouls (4): CR 1; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12; hp 13 each; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural); Atk: Bite +3 (1d6+1, paralysis), 2 claws +0 (1d3, paralysis); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA paralysis (DC 14, 1d6+2 minutes), create spawn; SQ undead, +2 turn resistance; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 15, Con -, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16; AL CE. Skills: Climb +6, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Search +6, Spot +7. Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (bite).



A small colony of four ghouls has taken up residence here. They use the warrens to plunder nearby graveyards, then drag the scavenged bodies back here for a messy meal. The wormwraith leaves them alone, since they provide it with added security and an escape route into the cemeteries if it needs one. The party's presence means that they can enjoy some fresh meat for a change.

The ghouls are ready to fight to the death. If slain, they have no monetary treasure, but one of the bodies they were munching on is wearing an antique brooch worth 250 gp. Of course, the party must decide if keeping such an item is ethical, but the former owner's relatives (if found) are willing to pay a reward of 75 gp for the return of the heirloom.

The warrens in the back of the chamber can be followed, though it's a tight squeeze for anyone over five feet tall. All of them lead to plundered graves in the nearby cemetery. A good digging at the terminus opens the warrens up to fresh air.

7. Giant Spider

A vast cavern lies beyond this doorway, covered with stalactites and stalagmites. The walls vanish into shadow, and the ceiling cannot be readily seen. Your lights illuminate a dozen ghostly shapes hovering in midair at various locations about the cavern. They quiver and shift in the flickering light.

The answer to what happened to the giant rats in the storage area (#2) can be found here. The ghostly figures are actually the cocooned corpses of the beasts (along with a waylaid ghoul), hung from an enormous spider web. Webs festoon every corner of the chamber, but they cannot be easily seen in the dim light. Anyone entering the chamber and failing to detect the webs (Spot, DC 20) is caught in the sticky strands.

Getting caught in the web also alerts the giant spider lurking near the ceiling. The spider quickly descends with frightening speed and attacks anything within the room, starting with characters caught in the web. While the arachnid is horrendously large, it's also much too big to fit through the door, so retreating characters can probably escape it easily.

The cavern itself contains no treasure to speak of, but a small sack containing 150 gp is cocooned with one of the rats. Several holes in the far wall lead to the ghoul colony (#6).

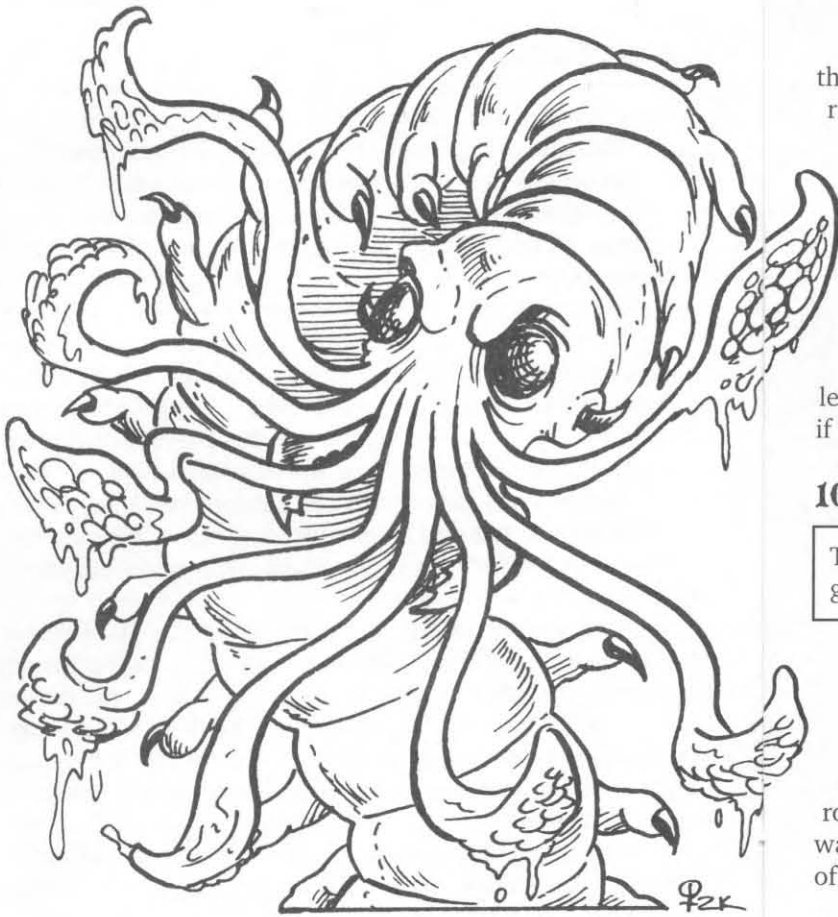
Giant Spider (1): CR 2; SZ L (vermin); HD 4d8+4; hp 22; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30, climb 20; AC 14 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +2 natural); Atk: bite +4 (1d8+3, poison); Face 10 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA poison (DC 16, 1d6 Str), web (Escape DC 26, Break DC 32, hp 12); SQ vermin; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 17, Con 12, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2; AL N. Skills: Climb +14, Hide +6, Jump +2, Spot +7.



8. Carrion Crawler

This room contains a variety of trash and garbage: rotting bones, slime-encrusted mulch, and rusty equipment. A series of holes can be seen in the ceiling, and as you watch, something falls from one into the rotting pile below. Two other doorways can be seen in the walls.

The room is used as a garbage dump by the inn directly above it. The people there toss their trash down the holes and assume it goes into the city sewer system. (There's no one at St. Bethesda's to tell them otherwise these days.) The wormwraith discards its victims in here too, hiding the bodies amid the other debris. (Sadly, none were fresh enough for it to use as a host.) In addition, the pile has become the home of another nasty critter.



Carrion Crawler (1): CR 4; SZ L (aberration); HD 3d8+6; hp 19; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30, climb 15; AC 17 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural); Atk: 8 tentacles +3 melee (paralysis), bite -2 (1d4+1); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; SA paralysis (DC 13, 2d6); SQ: scent; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 1, Wis 15, Cha 6; AL N. Skills: Climb +10, Listen +6, Spot +6. Feats: Alertness.



As soon as the party enters the room, the trash in the middle explodes outward, revealing a small but territorial carrion crawler. An open grate in the corner of the room leads further down into the city sewer. The carrion crawler uses it to come and go, and it retreats down the grate if hard-pressed. A silver bowl valued at approximately 200 gp is buried amid the trash near the grate.

9. Abandoned Altar

This room is far cleaner than the remainder of the crypt. A few moth-eaten tapestries hang on the walls, but other than that, it seems remarkably clear of trash. Even the stone seems to gleam from beneath the years of dust. A large altar has been carved out of a single rock in the center of the room. The sigil of St. Bethesda can be seen on its surface.

This area once housed a secret meeting chamber where the high priests of St. Bethesda conducted their most private rituals. It looks very threadbare (everything of value was taken when the order moved on), but the altar remains intact. A pair of hinges have been cunningly inserted underneath its top (Search, DC 21). If the top of the altar is swung up and open, it reveals a thick stone knob that radiates strongly of magic. Turning the knob deactivates the statue (#13), allowing the party to get the drop on the wormwraith.

A secret door (Search, DC 20) is hidden in the left-hand wall. The catch which turns it can only be found if the altar top is closed.

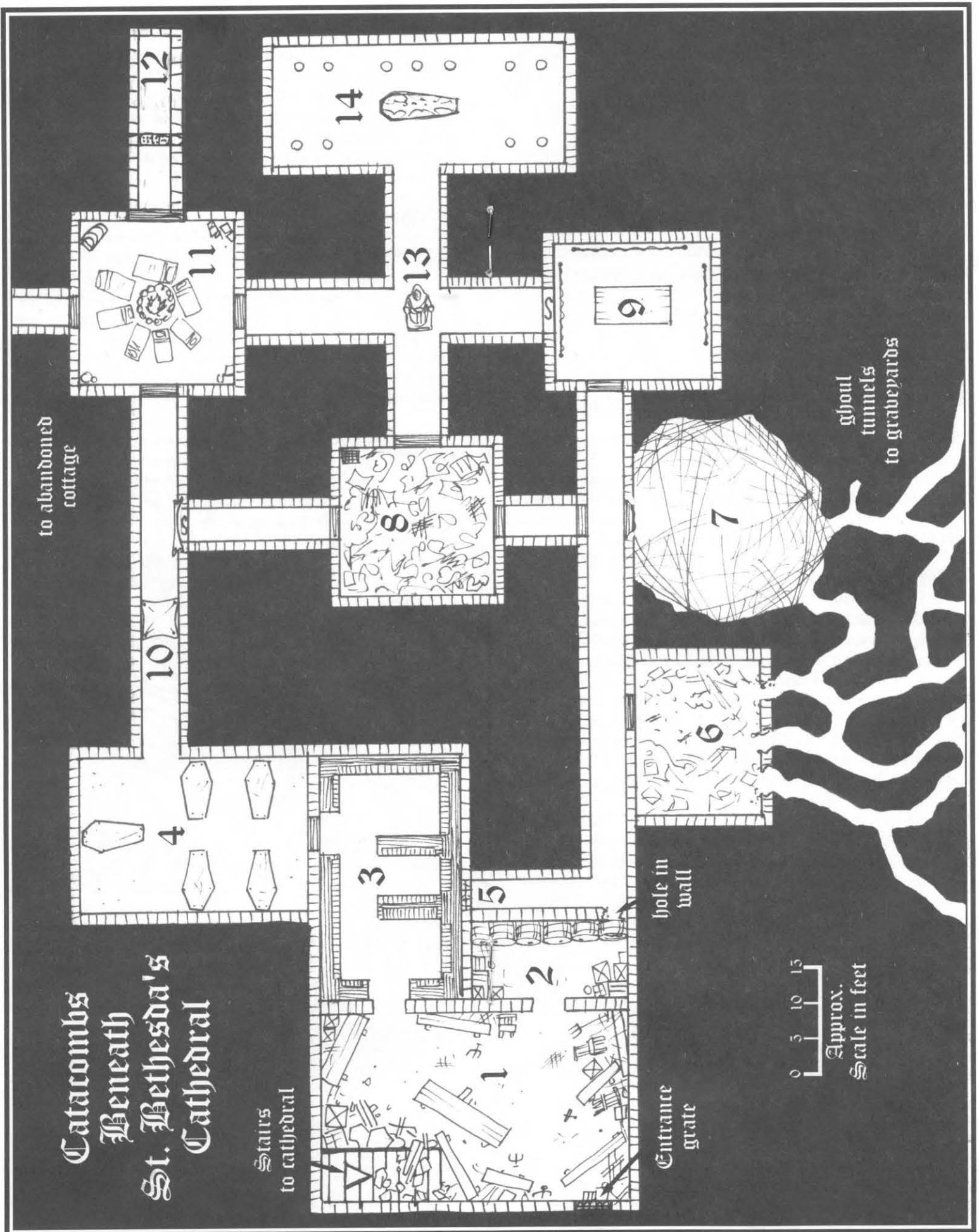
10. Pit Trap

The passageway here slopes gently downward, gradually growing rougher as you proceed.

Fifty feet into the corridor lies a pit, 20 feet deep and lined with broken sword points, tips up. The pit is rather shabbily concealed by a gray-painted tarp stretched over the dungeon floor, but it's difficult to spot in the dark. The robbers (#11) set it for their own protection. They didn't want any of the minions of the "necromancer" – as they think of the wormwraith – to pay them an unexpected visit.

Beyond the trap lies a concealed door the bandits disguised much the same way they disguised the pit. It requires a Spot Check (DC 17) to notice. The robbers never use it, and it creaks loudly on its hinges if opened, alerting both Gunge (#11) and the carrion crawler (#8).

Pit Trap: CR 2; no attack roll necessary (2d6), +10 melee (1d4 spikes for 1d4 +2 points of damage per hit); Reflex save (DC 20) avoids; Search (DC 15); Disable Device (DC 20).





Bandits (6): CR 1/2 (Reimar 1); SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d8 (Reimar 2d8); hp 4 (Reimar 10); Init +0; Spd 20; AC 14 (+4 scale mail); Atk: longsword +1 (1d8); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; AL NE. Skills: Listen +1, Spot +1, Search +1. Feats: Point Blank Shot, Weapon Focus (longsword).

11. Robbers' Lair

This small chamber looks clean and reasonably well cared for. Each wall holds a closed wooden door, and a fire smolders in a stone circle in the center of the room, the smoke rising through a hole in the ceiling. A series of bedrolls are arranged around the fire, though none of them are occupied. A sealed chest sits in the corner, and a rough-looking man leaning on a spear sits atop it. The man's eyes are closed, and he's snoring loudly.

The sleeping man's name is Gunge. He belongs to the bandit gang that makes its hideout here. The rest of the gang is out on a raid, and Gunge fell asleep while standing guard over the lair. The PCs can move on without incident if they wish, but they won't be able to get the chest open without waking Gunge up.

If the party lingers here for longer than a few minutes (DM's discretion), the bandits return from their night's work and are not happy. There are five of them, plus Gunge, led by a nasty half-orc by the name of Reimar Broken-Tusk. If more than half are killed, they flee. Captured bandits can tell the party about the trap to the north (#12), but know nothing about the remainder of the crypts. They claim that a "necromancer" (the wormwraith) allowed them to establish this hideout as long as they agreed to stay out of the rest of the catacombs. Reimar is smart enough to keep the others from disobeying.

The chest is locked (Open Lock DC 25). It contains 500 gp, a *potion of healing*, and a rare gem worth 50 gp. Reimar has the key on his body, which the PCs can easily find if they have enough fortitude to search his smelly hide. Another robber carries a large satchel containing tonight's haul: 35 gp, 75 sp, and a tin necklace set with paste jewels (2 cp).

12. Trap

The corridor beyond the robbers' lair extends far into the distance in front of you.

The bandits (#11) carefully set up this trap to deal with any interlopers. The corridor here ends in a blank stone wall after 30 feet, although the wall has been painted to look like a continuation of the corridor (Spot DC 20).

The last 10-foot section of the corridor conceals a pressure plate. When this is stepped on, it releases a stone slab 20 feet back down the corridor. The slab causes 20d6 damage



Falling Slab Trap: CR 7; +10 melee (20d6); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 25). Note: Damage only applies to a character under the slab when it falls.

to anyone caught underneath it, but it's only three feet thick and may be dodged (Reflex save, DC 20). Those caught in the dead end when it descends, however, make a nasty discovery. The slab conforms perfectly with contours of the corridor, cutting off the air supply. The slab remains shut for 18 hours, after which it resets itself. Those caught by the trap will suffer as per the suffocation rules in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Lifting the slab requires a combined Strength of 35. It takes a combined Strength of 50 to hold it up long enough to allow someone to escape. Otherwise something must be wedged between the slab and the floor to hold the slab up.

13. Magical Statue

A pair of corridors meet here, extending in four directions. A white stone statue of St. Bethesda – a beautiful, matronly woman dressed in a hooded robe – stands in the crossroads.

(Read the next sentence only if the party did not turn the knob hidden in the altar in Area 9).

As you approach, the statue booms at you in a loud voice: "Welcome, brethren! And may the healing balm of St. Bethesda ease your suffering."

Though quite loud, the statue is harmless. The voice comes from a permanent *magic mouth* spell.

The statue was originally used to begin ceremonies in the cathedral above. It was too heavy for the priests to move, so it remained behind when the church was abandoned. The wormwraith managed to drag it down here, and it now uses the statue as an alarm. Assuming the heroes did not deactivate the statue (see #9), its voice alerts the wormwraith of their presence.

14. Lair of the Wormwraith

This chamber opens up in a wide hallway. The slime trail you noticed up above on the street reappears here, as do the strange, lavender worms. These coat the floor throughout the hall and seem particularly thick around the exquisitely carved wooden sarcophagus in the center of the room.

The wormwraith awaits the party in the sarcophagus, actually a *chest of preservation* (see New Magic Item). The chest was originally one of the cathedral's most sacred magical items. When the order departed, it entrusted safe

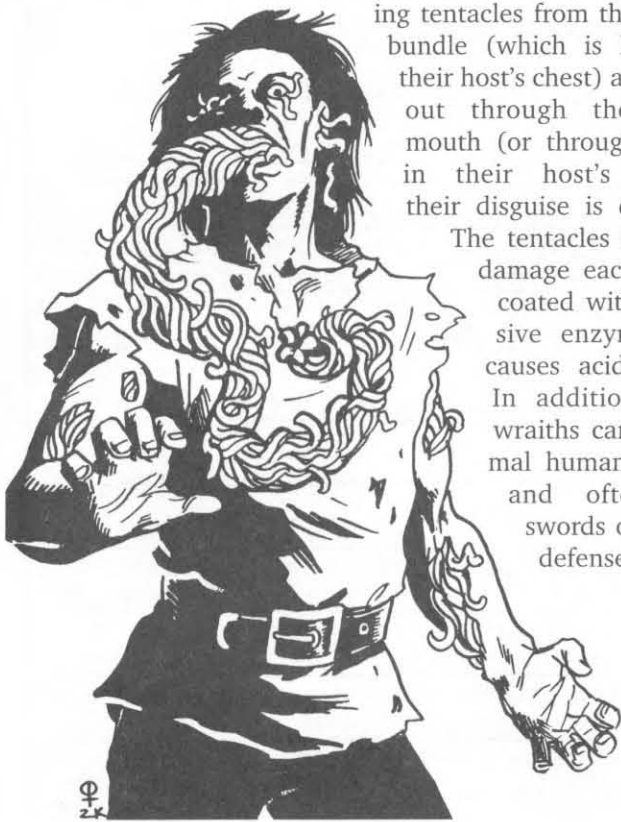
Wormwraith

Medium-Sized Aberration

The uninformed believe wormwraiths to be a type of undead. In truth, they are living creatures that occupy human corpses. Their natural form is a huge bundle of sentient worms, squirming and writhing with a communal intelligence. The worms gestate inside the recently dead, devouring the internal organs and bonding to the bone structure. By the time they reach maturity, they have filled out the body and can animate it with remarkable dexterity. They use the skin of their host as a disguise and can pass for human while keeping their true nature hidden. Many wormwraiths move among human society for years, undetected by the casual observer.

Wormwraiths attack by forming tentacles from their central bundle (which is located in their host's chest) and lashing out through their host's mouth (or through wounds in their host's skin, if their disguise is damaged).

The tentacles cause 1d8 damage each and are coated with a corrosive enzyme which causes acid damage. In addition, wormwraiths can use normal human weapons and often carry swords or axes for defense.



Hit Dice: 5d8 (22 hp)
 Initiative: +2 (Dex)
 Speed: 30 ft
 AC: 12 (+2 Dex)
 Attacks: 3-5 tentacles,
 +3 melee; 2 longswords,
 +0 melee
 Damage: Tentacles 1d8
 plus acid; longswords 1d8
 Face/Reach: 5 ft. by
 5 ft./5 ft.
 Special Attacks: Acid 1d6
 Saves: Fort +1, Ref +3,
 Will +5
 Abilities: Str 13, Dex 15,
 Con 13, Int 13, Wis 13,

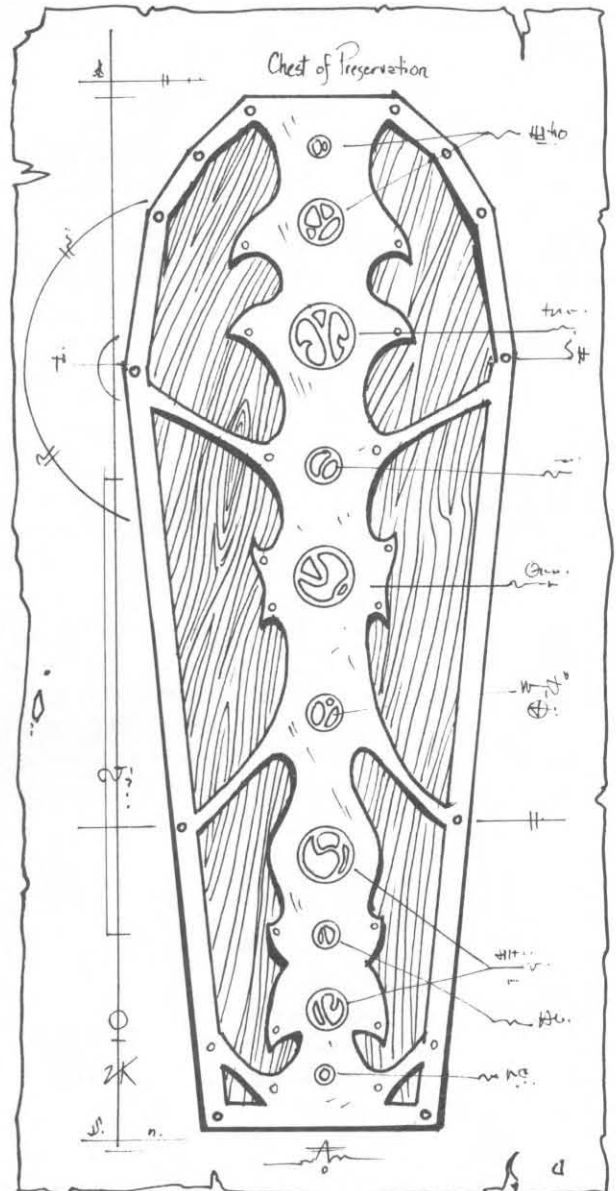
Cha 12
 Skills: Climb +5, Hide +8,
 Listen +5, Move Silently
 +7, Search +5
 Feats: Ambidexterity, Blind
 Fight, Multiattack, Weapon
 Finesse (tentacles)
 Climate/Terrain: Urban
 areas, especially near
 cemeteries or graveyards
 Organization: Solitary
 Challenge Rating: 4
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Neutral evil
 Advancement Range: 6-8
 HD (Medium size)

Chest of Preservation

The *chest of preservation* was created in order to heal grievously wounded soldiers and carry them safely home. It is actually a coffin, though its creators refused to call it such for fear of necromantic associations. The man-shaped box has been carved out of a single piece of wood – a tree-trunk or a great log – and is marked with symbols of healing and rest.

Anyone lying in the chest with the lid closed enters a state of suspended animation and heals 1d4 points of damage for every eight hours spent in the chest, though they cannot move or engage in any other activity during that time. The chest can also prevent a dying character from losing any more hit points, keeping her alive until her friends can bring her to a proper healer. If the chest is opened before the requisite eight hours, the healing is negated and anyone within must wait another eight hours before gaining any benefits.

Caster Level: 5th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, cure light wounds; Market Price: 3,400 gp.





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