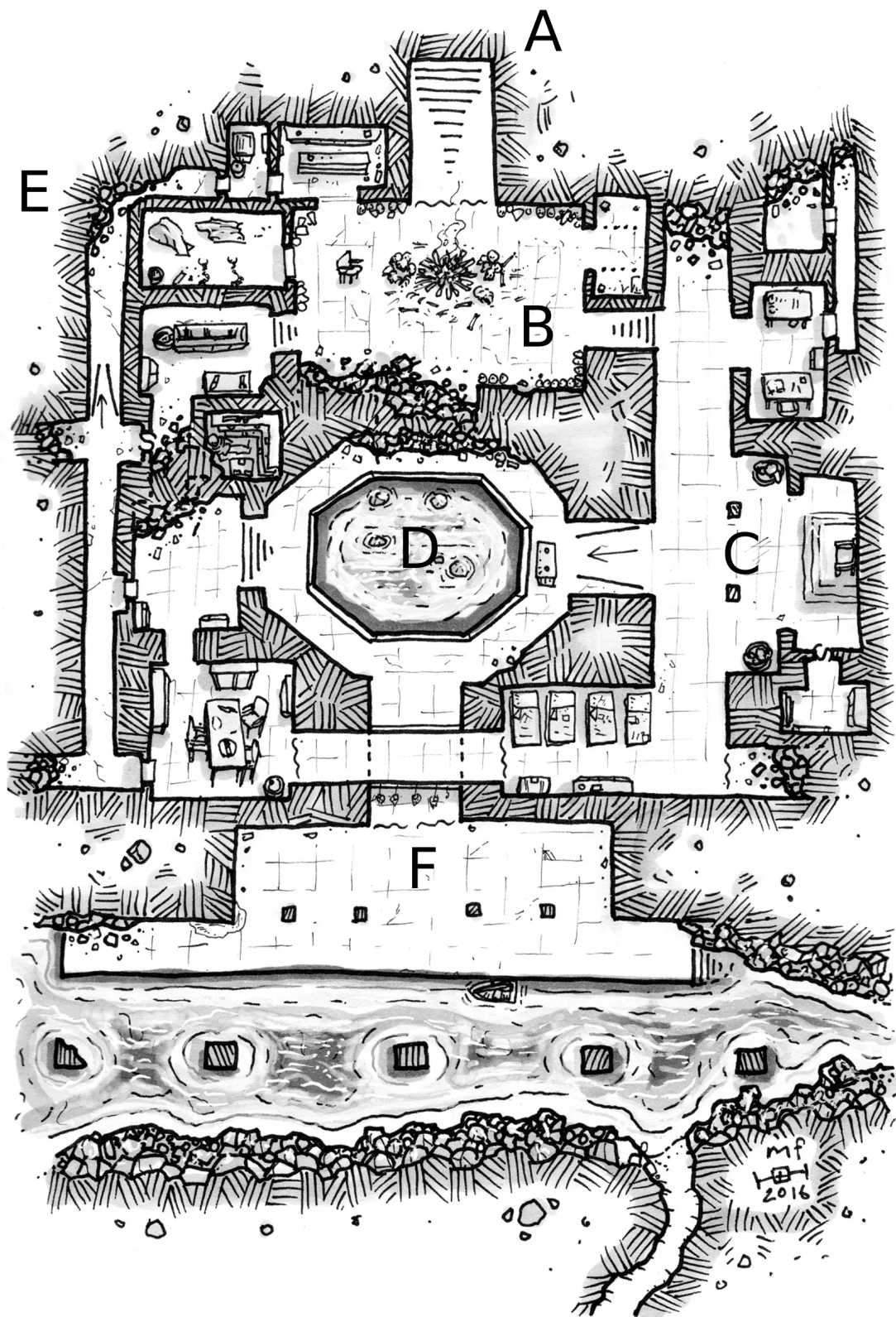


Death and Chaos

An Orcus adventure for four level 3 heroes.

Hundreds of years ago, a secret organization in pursuit of power made the mistake of combining two powerful magical items: an *orb of chaos* and the mysterious *necrosis cube*. The result was the creation of the terrifying undead ichor-ghouls. The site was sealed with a powerful incantation, but over the years its power has faded. Recently, a band of goblins broke into the complex. Unable to find anything of value or overcome the undead guardians which remained, they eventually abandoned the complex again... but left the entrance gaping open to the wider world.



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The ichor-ghouls

The "zombies" of this complex are much more dangerous than they first appear. They are, in fact, creatures known as ichor-ghouls. The ichor-ghouls trapped in this complex, however, have been starving for a long time: Their blood-drenched flesh has dried to desiccated husks; their desperate and unquenched need for living energy has driven them first to madness and then to near-mindlessness.

When the PCs first encounter the desiccated husks, let them draw the wrong conclusions: The shambling gait and limited actions of the ichor-ghouls should leave them thinking that they're facing common zombies.

Their first indication that something is wrong should be when they start sweating blood and their skin becomes coated with a scarlet sheen. Describe the blood dripping from them, pooling on the floor, and seeming to flow towards the desiccated corpses which grow in strength with every passing moment...

When one of the desiccated husks transforms into bloody bones, describe the dry skin cracking open as the undead horror literally tears itself out of its own body. The thing which emerges is a glistening mass of raw muscle, pulsing with thick veins of crimson-black blood. Its fang-like teeth glitter as its mouth parts in a ghastly, hissing smile...

The trick to running the warrens is to play up the horror elements of the ichor-ghouls: The warrens are a hunting ground, and the PCs are the prey.

Describe creaking noises coming from around corners. Shock them as they're about to open a door by having a ichor-ghoul rip open the one behind them. Just as they think they're going to have a chance to breathe, describe the booming noise they hear as another ichor-ghoul beats upon the rusted door it's been imprisoned behind. Have the ichor-ghouls move to cut them off from the entrance. Use the creeping horror of the blood sweats when a ichor-ghouls is near... but they don't know where.

Plot hooks

The easiest way to use this adventure is to integrate it into an existing adventure by placing it inside of a larger complex. But when using it as a stand-alone adventure, any of the following plot hooks can be used to get the PCs involved:

Goblin Raiders: As a unique twist on a familiar theme, when goblin raiders attack the local village, the PCs are asked to track them back to the source and eliminate the threat. The trail takes them to the ancient complex. After exploring the complex, however, they discover that the goblins merely came through this area - their ultimate origin lies somewhere else entirely.

Sudden Sinkhole: A sinkhole suddenly appears in the middle of town, revealing a network of previously unknown caves. As the PCs explore the caves they stumble across the ancient complex, built here centuries ago and then forgotten. As they explore the complex they realize that someone has beaten them to the punch. But who? And could this have anything to do with the sudden appearance of the sinkhole?

Ancient Lore: The PCs find themselves in possession of a piece of ancient lore, allowing them to pinpoint the location of an ancient complex in which it is said are hidden mystical secrets. If the complex is still there, this could be the PCs' ticket to magic, riches, or both.

A. Sacred Stairs

A long flight of cream-colored stone stairs takes you down into the earth. The stairs are cracked and worn from immense age and thick filigrees of dust and grime suggest long neglect and emptiness, though here and there you can see that the grime has been disturbed more recently. The stairs end in a curtain of velvet, its purple hue almost indiscernible under the thick layer of muck.

Curtain: A Religion DC 10 check will reveal that the pattern on the curtain is a stylised representation of the white cat of Thalander, a god who despises the undead.

A detect magic check (Arcana DC 10) will reveal that this curtain is permeated with a dim magical aura. This aura is the remnant of what was once a permanent *hallow* effect. The effect was once quite strong, but the passage of time has literally worn it away.

Tracks: A Nature DC 10 check will confirm that the staircase has only recently seen activity for the first time in many years. Whatever was here didn't stay long, but went to both doors and both hallways. A DC 15 success will reveal the clear print from the booted foot of a goblin.

GM Info: The *hallow* effect dates to an ancient effort to seal the complex. Although the *hallow* effect is no longer functional, the ichor-ghouls in the complex have long since been conditioned to avoid the curtain. If the PCs flee back to this area, the ichor-ghouls will stop before the curtain. However, if the PCs leave it hanging open, one of the ichor-ghouls will overcome their fear and try to push the curtain aside ... at which point, all the ichor-ghouls will realize that the *hallow* effect is gone.

B. Desiccated Warrens (600 XP)

Emerging from the hall you find a barren room of cream-colored stone, cracked and worn from immense age. Thick filigrees of dust and grime suggest long neglect and emptiness, but here and there you can see that the grime has been disturbed more recently. A number of rooms branch off from this one. Lying in the middle of the room, by a long-burned-out campfire, is a dry, shriveled body.

The small cell-like chambers in this area once served as living quarters. Today they are filled with the broken and shattered remnants of furniture and the detritus of forgotten lives. See the tables on the next page to randomly generate or choose the contents of each room.

Fake Corpse: In the middle of the room, a desiccated husk lies on the floor. It has all the appearance of a corpse, and only a close examination and a Heal check (DC 10) reveals otherwise.

Anyone getting within 6 squares of the desiccated husk, however, will trigger its blood sweats aura. Characters succeeding at a Perception check (DC 15) will notice that the "corpse" seems to be healing itself.

Once the ruse is up (either because it has been detected or because it has successfully transformed into a bloody bones), the ichor-ghoul will leap to its feet and attack - howling a piercing, sibilant hiss that will alert its brethren (three desiccated husks, hidden in the adjacent rooms).

The ichor-ghoul will also attack if the PCs attempt to escape.

Hidden Coffers: Beneath a false flagstone is a small brass coffer hidden in it. The coffer is locked (Sleight of Hand, DC 15).

Inside the coffer there is a treasure trove.

GM Info: The ichor-ghouls in this area were trapped here by the ancient *hallow* effect. They were undisturbed by the goblins and have regained none of their strength. They have, in fact, lain in their current positions for long years almost beyond count. Although they may be slow to awake from their torpor, the appearance of fresh blood in the form of the PCs will quickly drive them into a maddened frenzy.

C. Ruined Orrery (150 XP)

The center of this room is filled with a massive contraption of brass and copper and rotten, worm-eaten wood. Great hoops of metal are suspended about a central sphere, with various lumps, pulleys, cranks, and levers protruding here and there in an apparently chaotic and incomprehensible jumble.

Orrery: Those familiar with astronomy or magic can identify the contraption as an orrery, although the damage to it from years of neglect has rendered it inoperable.

A more thorough examination of the orrery, requiring at least one minute and an Arcana check (DC 15), will reveal several odd features of the orrery: First, the motions of the heavenly bodies it tracks are not accurate to a modern understanding - there are several minor inconsistencies reflective of a much older cosmological theory. Second, the orrery features no less than seventeen heavenly bodies which are completely unknown to modern observation.

A careful examination reveals that the orbs representing the seventeen unknown heavenly bodies are, in fact, made from tarnished silver.

Silver Orbs: The silver orbs are worth 25 gp each (for a total of 425 gp). They are welded to the thick brass rings, however, and would need to be broken off.

Moving the Orrery: The orrery is bolted down and weighs more than 14,000 pounds. If the PCs can figure out some way to remove the orrery, it is worth 2,500 gp as scrap metal. To the proper collector it could be worth as much as 12,000 gp (if it could be moved intact or reassembled).

Hidden Compartment: What is not readily apparent is that the orrery is actually imbedded down into the floor. A hidden door in the side of the wooden base (Perception DC 15) leads to a small compartment in the base which was used to service the mechanisms of the orrery.

Ichor-Ghouls: Laying inside the hidden compartment of the orrery is a desiccated husk. It is completely hidden from sight unless the characters discover and open the compartment, but its blood-sheen and health soak abilities still function within 4 squares.

If the desiccated husk regains enough hit points to undergo a restorative transformation into a bloody bones, it will attempt to burst through the thin wooden ceiling of the compartment (Athletics DC 15), crawl out of the orrery, and attack.

D. Chaos Pool (600 XP)

In the center of this small room a simple stone pool has been driven into the earth. It is filled with a shimmering silver liquid, which churns and boils as if stirred by some invisible hand, although there is no clear cause for its violent motion. Near it the broken remains of a bucket - rotten slats of wood and rusted hoops of metal - lay in a long-forgotten heap. Three dusty stone shelves are built out from the walls of their room. They are covered in an assortment of vials, cartons, and the like - all of them filled with the dust and the thick, black sludge of long-decayed garbage.

Pool of Chaos: The silvery liquid is a pool of chaos. It was collected from the River of Scintillating Silver (F) for the purposes of experimentation, before the inhabitants of the complex succumbed to the ichor-ghoul infection.

Dusty Shelves: Most of the contents of the shelves have long since calcified and rotted, leaving little of value.

- Ten large hunks of amber (worth 25 gp each) lie inside a half-decayed sack.
- Inside a glass jar smeared with grime and tucked into the back corner of one of the shelves there is a silver-grey liquid. An Arcana check (DC 15) will identify this as a solution of diamond dust in liquid mithril. It is worth 250 gp.
- In a nondescript and cracked pottery bowl there are several lumps covered in a black, tar-like substance. Scraping the tar-like substance off reveals five fine-cut aquamarines (worth 50 gp each) and two white emeralds (worth 150 gp each).

Necrosis Cube: Bobbing on the surface of the pool of chaos is the *necrosis cube* (see appendix).

Ichor-Ghouls: Hiding in the adjacent rooms are a number of ichor-ghouls, who rush the party when they see the opportunity.

- 4 desiccated husks

E. Zombie Warrens (750 XP)

Beyond the door you see a narrow hallway of grungy, cream-colored stone. About fifteen feet away a second hallway intersects with this one. There are several iron doors set into the walls, all of them gaping open and some of them half-ripped from their hinges. In the center of the hall a nest-like mound has been piled.

Ichor-Ghouls: If the ichor-ghouls in this area become aware of the PCs before the door to this area is opened, they will gather in the hallway and prepare to rush the door as soon as it opens. Otherwise they will be scattered throughout the area, many of them near their nests.

- 3 desiccated husks
- 1 bloody bones

Rooms: The small cell-like chambers in this area once served as living quarters. Some of the rooms contain ichor-ghoul nests. The rest have been stripped entirely bare by the ichor-ghouls (their contents being used to build their nests).

If the PCs search the nests, there are 1d4-1 interesting items in each nest.

d20	Item of interest
1	Alembic
2	Alchemist's kit (useless from age)
3	Pool of dried blood
4	Defaced statue of a goddess
5	Dice
6	Broken staff
7	Ivory jewelry box (50 gp) (empty)
8	"Chaos Dooms Us" written in blood on the wall
9	Crimson-colored ash
10	Blood-stained dress
11	Child's poppet with a third-eye on the forehead
12	Small keg of ale
13	Manacles
14	Razor
15	Small pouch of runestones
16	Crystal ball (non-magical)
17	Tapestry depicting a city enshrouded in purple clouds (ruined)
18	Bottle of wine (worth 100 gp)
19	Darkwood sapling (growing in the compost-like filth)
20	Silver candelabra (10 gp)

F. The Dock (900 XP)

The tunnel abruptly opens onto a floor of jagged, blackened glass, after which runs a river of silvery, iridescent liquid. You can also see - all around the pool - the faded remnants of scorch marks upon the stone of floor and walls and ceiling. A line of broken stone columns runs along the middle of the river.

This is where the *orb of primal chaos* exploded.

River of Chaos: The river of silvery liquid is a pool of chaos. It was created by the destruction of the *orb of primal chaos* and remains dangerous to this day.

The party may improvise a way to cross safely, perhaps by jumping onto the columns and then to the shore on the other side (Athletics DC 15) or by improvising a bridge. Anything that comes into contact with the river risks experiencing its effects.

Ichor-Ghouls: Lurking around the edges of the dock are ichor-ghouls:

- 2 bloody bones
- 2 desiccated husks

New Rules

Pools of Chaos

Pools of chaos are composed of raw, seething primal chaos. Proximity to a pool of chaos may bring about strange changes over time, while direct contact with the raw chaos is even quicker.

Changes to inanimate matter: While immediate contact with a pit of chaos is instantly transformative, even near proximity to a pit will slowly transform objects and creatures. Objects (or portions of objects) within 20 squares of a pit of chaos have a chance of alteration as follows:

- 50 percent chance on contact, and each round after
- 10 percent chance after the first hour
- 5 percent chance after the first 24 hours
- 5 percent chance after the first month
- 5 percent chance after the first year
- 5 percent chance each year thereafter

These percentage chances are not cumulative.

When something is changed, half the time its material changes and the other half of the time its shape or texture changes. Use the *Material Changes* and *Shape/Texture Changes* tables to determine the specific type of change.

Generally these alterations cannot be reversed or repaired except through the use of an incantation.

d%	Material
01-05	Wood
06-10	Iron
11-13	Gold
14-16	Silver
17-19	Brass
20-22	Copper
23-25	Lead
26-30	Leather
31-35	Cloth
36-40	Paper
41-50	Hard stone
51-55	Brittle stone
56-60	Glass
61-62	Ice (10% chance of being unmelting)
63-64	Ooze/paste
65	Wax
66-70	Water
71-73	Oil
74	Blood
75	Bone
76-78	Acid
79	Poisonous liquid
80-86	Inert vapor
87-90	Poisonous vapor
91	Lava
92-93	Food (bread, meat, soup, etc.)
94-00	Roll again twice

d%	Shape/Texture
01-15	Surface becomes smooth as glass
16-30	Surface becomes rough and jagged
31-35	Surface becomes spiky
36-45	Enlarges (x2d10 in size)
46-55	Shrinks (d% of original)
56-70	Warp
71-80	Grows appendage/extension/addition (d% of original size)
81-85	Liquifies
86-89	Shape changes entirely
90-00	Roll again twice

Changes to creatures: Living creatures suffer a +7 attack vs Fortitude each time the following occurs:

Contact:

- On contact, and each round after

After spending time within 20 squares of a pit of chaos:

- After the first hour
- After the first 24 hours
- After the first month
- After the first year
- After each year thereafter

On a hit, use the *Physical Changes* table to determine the specific type of change.

Generally these alterations cannot be reversed or repaired except through the use of an incantation.

d%	Physical Change
01-15	Skin changes color
16-25	Hair changes color
26-30	Skin changes texture
31-35	One or two limbs are twisted and useless
36-40	One or two limbs are enlarged
41-50	Enlarges (increase one size)
51-60	Shrinks (decrease one size)
61-65	Grows one or two additional, useless limbs
66-70	Grows one or two additional, usable limbs
71-73	Loses one or more eyes
74-76	Gains one or more eyes
77-80	Portion of creature turns to inanimate matter (roll for material; suffers 1d12+3 points of damage)
81-85	Portion of creature liquifies, vaporizes, or alters into untenable shape (suffers 1d12+3 points of damage)
85-90	Creature polymorphs into an entirely different, random, creature
91-00	Roll again twice

Spellcasting near a pool of chaos: Using incantations or arcane powers within 20 squares of a pit of chaos is a risky proposition. To successfully cast the spell the caster must attempt an Arcana check (DC 10 plus half the level of the power or incantation). If this check fails, roll on the *Spellcasting Changes* table on the next page to determine how the spell's effect is changed. Some results have multiple entries - choose the first one which applies.

d%	Change to the Spell Effect
01-20	Spell target(s) or those within the area of effect are affected as if they made contact with a pool of chaos.
21-50	Near and Far spells have a random area within range (and random targets within that area where relevant). Melee and Ranged spells choose targets randomly from those within range. Self spells instead target a random creature within 6 squares.
51-70	Damage-inflicting spells heal instead of harm. Penalties become bonuses and vice versa. Effects become their opposites, if applicable.
71-85	Spell energy goes wild, becoming a random spell of the same level, keeping target the same if possible.
86-00	Spell energy surges uncontrollably, exploding in a Near burst 10. +7 attack vs Reflex; 1d12+3 force damage.