

Whispers in the Stacks

Ancient Horrors Beneath Aeler

Adventure Overview	
Title:	Whispers in the Tunnels
Tier:	Tier II-III (Seasoned-Veteran) - 40-150 XP
Theme:	Isolation, Psychic Horror, Ancient Aeler Mysteries
Focus:	Survival Horror, Investigation, Underways
Hooks:	The Deep Drake Awakens, Shadows in the Stone

1 Adventure Summary

The ancient Aelerian underways, once the lifeblood of a forgotten kingdom, have become a tomb of whispers. A catastrophic seal failure has not only flooded the tunnels but awakened something far older and more dangerous than mere mechanical failure - the Deep Drake, an ancient psychic entity that once ruled these depths. Now it stirs, its consciousness spreading through the water and stone like a malignant tide.

The PCs are trapped in the underways when the flooding seals them in, forced to navigate not just the physical dangers of collapsed tunnels and rising waters, but the psychic predations of the Deep Drake and its Drakespawn - twisted creatures born from the dreams and fears of those who have fallen victim to its influence.

As the entity's power grows, the PCs must survive the claustrophobic nightmare while uncovering the truth about the fallen Aeler kingdom and finding a way to either destroy the Deep Drake or seal it away forever - before they become the next generation of Drakespawn.

2 Adventure Hooks

2.1 Primary Hook: The Deep Drake Awakens

A routine inspection of ancient Aelerian seals turns into a nightmare when the Deep Drake stirs from its slumber. The PCs are investigating maintenance issues when the entity's psychic scream echoes through the stone, and the floodgates seal shut behind them.

2.2 Secondary Hook: Shadows in the Stone

Reports of workers hearing whispers in the walls and seeing shadows that move wrong lead the PCs to investigate. What they find is the beginning of the Deep Drake's awakening - and the first of its victims transforming into something inhuman.

3 Key Locations

3.1 1. The Sealed Junction (Flooded Depths)

Where it all began - the initial seal failure that trapped the PCs and awakened the Deep Drake.

Key Features:

- Chest-deep water with zero visibility
- Ancient Aelerian stonework showing signs of something massive having been sealed here
- Carved warnings in stone-tongue that shift when not directly observed
- The seal mechanism itself, cracked and still leaking dark water

Hazards:

- Environmental Collapse Clock (6 segments) - structural integrity degrading
- Hazard 2 from unstable masonry
- Fatigue 2 per hour from the unnatural cold and psychic pressure
- Whisper Mechanic (Wits + Lore, DV 3) - hearing the Deep Drake's calls

3.2 2. The Bone Market (Abandoned Halls)

Once a thriving marketplace of the ancient Aeler kingdom, now a haunting reminder of what was lost.

Key NPCs:

- **Echoes of the Dead** - Ghostly remnants of ancient merchants who warn of the Deep Drake
- **The Cartographer's Shade** - A scholar spirit who can reveal the layout of the sealed sections

Key Features:

- Lanterns that flicker with their own light, showing glimpses of the past
- Shops with goods that crumble to dust when touched
- Murals depicting the fall of the ancient kingdom
- Evidence of the Deep Drake's previous awakenings

Hazards:

- Reality distortion - time flows differently here
- Ghostly merchants who try to make deals that cost more than expected
- The Deep Drake's whispers are stronger here (+1 to all Whisper rolls)

3.3 3. The Crying Workshop (Ancient Forge)

Where the ancient Aeler crafted their greatest works - and where they last tried to bind the Deep Drake.

Key Features:

- Tools that still glow with residual geomantic energy
- Anvils that weep black tears when touched
- Ancient blueprints showing the original sealing ritual
- The forge where the binding stones were created

Hazards:

- Backlash 2-3 CP from using ancient tools incorrectly
- The forge's heat is psychic, not physical - burns the mind instead of the flesh
- Failed ritual remnants that still hold dangerous power

3.4 4. The Drowned Palace (Heart of Corruption)

The Deep Drake's lair - a vast underwater chamber that was once the throne room of an ancient Aeler king.

Key Features:

- Massive chamber with a deep, dark pool that reflects impossible things
- A throne carved from black stone that pulses with psychic energy
- Murals showing the Deep Drake's true form and its relationship to the ancient kingdom
- The source of the corruption that creates Drakespawn

Hazards:

- Sanity effects from encountering the Deep Drake's full presence
- Physical danger from Drakespawn guardians
- Risk of immediate corruption when entering the water
- Reality becomes unstable - what you see may not be what's real

3.5 5. The Whispering Maze (Twisted Tunnels)

A section of tunnels that has been warped by the Deep Drake's influence into an impossible labyrinth.

Key Features:

- Corridors that shift and change without warning
- Doors that lead to different times or places
- Echoes of past victims trapped in endless loops
- The maze feeds on confusion and fear

Hazards:

- Getting lost advances the Maze Corruption Clock automatically
- The maze shows visions of what you fear most
- Exits may lead to places you don't want to go
- Time distortion - hours can pass or be skipped entirely

4 Key NPCs

4.1 Ancient Spirits

King Valdris the Forgotten - Ancient Aeler Monarch

- Skills: Command 5, Lore 4, Presence 4
- Talent: Royal Authority (Aeler)
- Haunted by the failure that led to his kingdom's fall
- Can provide crucial information about the original sealing ritual
- Becomes more unstable as the Deep Drake's power grows

Master Forgemaster Thane - Ancient Artisan

- Skills: Craft 5, Engineering 4, Arcana 3
- Talent: Master Artisan (Aeler)
- Creator of the original binding stones
- Guarding the secrets of the forge with his life
- May sacrifice himself to help the PCs if they prove worthy

4.2 Living NPCs

Rennik Stoneheart - Modern Aeler Engineer (Body 3, Wits 4, Spirit 2)

- Skills: Engineering 4, Survival 3, Insight 2
- Talent: Stone-Sense (Aeler)
- Was investigating the seal failure when everything went wrong
- Becoming increasingly paranoid and hearing voices
- May be the first to show signs of Drakespawn transformation

Captain Mira Deeproad - Tunnel Guard (Body 4, Wits 3, Presence 3)

- Skills: Melee 4, Command 3, Survival 3
- Talent: Tunnel Fighter (Aeler)
- Trying to maintain order as the situation deteriorates
- Becomes increasingly desperate as more guards fall to corruption
- Will sacrifice herself to buy the PCs time if needed

4.3 The Antagonists

The Deep Drake - Ancient Psychic Entity

- An eldritch being of pure psychic energy that once ruled these depths
- Feeds on fear, confusion, and the life force of living minds
- Cannot directly interact with the physical world but corrupts through dreams and whispers
- Seeks to break free completely and reclaim its ancient dominion
- Immortal and nearly impossible to destroy permanently

Drakespawn - Corrupted Victims

- Former living beings twisted by the Deep Drake's influence
- Retain some human intelligence but are driven by the entity's will
- Can phase between physical and psychic states
- Multiply when victims fall to corruption
- Cannot be reasoned with - only destroyed or purified

5 Adventure Flow

5.1 Opening Scene: Trapped in the Depths

The adventure begins with the PCs investigating seal maintenance when disaster strikes. The Deep Drake awakens with a psychic scream that shatters the seals, flooding the tunnels and sealing the PCs inside. The initial chaos gives way to a growing sense of wrongness as whispers begin to echo through the stone.

Initial Complications:

- Environmental Collapse Clock (6 segments) - structural damage from flooding
- Isolation - no way to call for help, no reinforcements coming
- The first whispers of the Deep Drake's presence
- Rennik Stoneheart showing early signs of corruption

Survival Challenges:

- Finding air pockets and safe routes through the flooded tunnels
- Managing resources (light, food, warmth) in an enclosed environment
- Dealing with the psychological pressure of isolation
- First encounters with the entity's influence

5.2 Rising Action: Descent into Madness

As the PCs explore deeper into the flooded underways, they encounter the remnants of the ancient Aeler kingdom and begin to understand the true nature of their predicament. The whispers grow stronger, reality becomes less stable, and the first Drakespawn begin to appear.

Key Scenes:

1. **The Bone Market Haunting** - Encountering the ghosts of the ancient kingdom
2. **The Crying Workshop Revelation** - Learning about the original sealing attempt
3. **First Drakespawn Encounter** - Realizing what happens to victims
4. **The Whispering Maze Trial** - Navigating impossible tunnels while sanity frays

Horror Clocks:

- Deep Drake Awakening (12 segments) - How close the entity is to full manifestation
- Sanity Collapse (10 segments) - Party's collective mental stability
- Environmental Doom (8 segments) - Structural failure and flooding progression
- Drakespawn Infestation (6 segments) - Spread of corrupted creatures

5.3 Climax: The Drowned Palace

The investigation leads to the heart of the corruption - the Drowned Palace where the Deep Drake makes its lair. Here, the entity's full power can be felt, and the PCs must make a desperate choice: attempt to destroy the creature, find a way to reinforce the ancient seals, or make a terrible sacrifice to contain it.

Key Challenges:

- Resisting the Deep Drake's mental domination (Spirit + Resolve, DV 5)
- Surviving encounters with multiple Drakespawn guardians
- Navigating the physically dangerous underwater environment
- Making difficult choices about who might need to be sacrificed
- Performing the sealing ritual while under psychic attack

5.4 Resolution: Breaking the Cycle

The adventure concludes with the PCs' choice determining not just their survival, but the fate of the underways and potentially the broader region. The Deep Drake is ancient and patient - even apparent victory may only delay its return.

Possible Resolutions:

1. **The Perfect Seal** - Successfully reinforce the ancient bindings (18-20 XP)
2. **The Sacrificial Binding** - Permanently contain the entity through great sacrifice (15-18 XP)
3. **The Tactical Retreat** - Seal yourselves inside to prevent the entity's escape (12-15 XP)
4. **The Corrupted Victory** - Become Drakespawn to gain the entity's power (8-12 XP, character transformation)
5. **The Temporary Victory** - Drive the entity back but know it will return (10-14 XP)

6 Adventure-Specific Rules

6.1 The Whisper Mechanic

When in the influence of the Deep Drake, PCs must make Wits + Lore rolls (DV 3) to resist hearing its psychic calls. Each failure:

- Generates 1 CP that the GM can spend for psychological effects
- Advances Sanity Collapse Clock by 1 segment
- May reveal useful but disturbing information
- Risk of immediate Drakespawn transformation at 7+ Sanity loss

Whisper Examples:

- "The water remembers your name..."
- "Your friends' thoughts are not their own..."
- "The deeper you go, the closer you come to truth..."
- "Sacrifice is the only path to salvation..."
- "You were meant to be more than human..."

6.2 The Sanity System

PCs track their mental stability through the Sanity Collapse Clock and individual Sanity loss:

Sanity Loss Effects:

- 1-2 Sanity: Minor paranoia, -1 die to social rolls
- 3-4 Sanity: Moderate fear, generate 1 CP on all rolls
- 5-6 Sanity: Severe trauma, -2 dice to all rolls
- 7+ Sanity: Drakespawn transformation begins - physical changes, loss of humanity

Recovering Sanity:

- Leaving the affected area reduces Sanity loss by 1 per day
- Aeler purification rituals (requires Spirit-Shield talent or assistance)
- Destroying sources of corruption
- Strong emotional support from uncorrupted allies (1 Sanity recovery per scene)

6.3 Drakespawn Transformation

When a PC reaches 7+ Sanity loss, they begin transforming into a Drakespawn:

Stage 1 (7-8 Sanity):

- Eyes reflect unusual colors in darkness
- Speaking in whispers without realizing it
- Attraction to dark, enclosed spaces

- +1 die to Lore rolls involving forbidden knowledge
- -1 die to social rolls due to unsettling presence

Stage 2 (9-10 Sanity):

- Physical mutations begin to appear
- Can perceive multiple timeline branches (generates 2 CP per scene)
- Permanent reality distortion effects
- Becomes hostile to former allies
- Must make Spirit rolls to resist the entity's commands

Stage 3 (11+ Sanity):

- Complete transformation into Drakespawn
- Character becomes NPC under GM control
- Retains memories but twisted by the entity's influence
- Becomes antagonist in future adventures

6.4 The Collective Horror

The party's average Sanity level affects the entire group:

Low Average (1-3):

- Reality becomes more stable - the entity's influence weakens
- Group maintains better cohesion and rational thinking
- Some resistance to the Deep Drake's whispers

Medium Average (4-6):

- Shared hallucinations begin to occur
- The entity's influence becomes stronger
- Group paranoia and infighting increase
- Reality distortions affect everyone

High Average (7+):

- Collective madness sets in - what one sees, all see
- The Deep Drake's power reaches its peak
- Group becomes fragmented - former allies turn on each other
- Reality itself becomes hostile and unpredictable

7 Rewards and Consequences

7.1 Immediate Rewards

- **Experience Points:** 12-20 XP based on resolution chosen
- **Boons:** 2-4 Boons for surviving the horror and making difficult choices
- **Ancient Aeler Artifacts:** Powerful items from the fallen kingdom
- **Psychic Scars:** Permanent (but potentially useful) mental changes

7.2 Long-term Consequences

- **Aeler Relations:** How the PCs handled ancient secrets affects their standing
- **Mental Trauma:** Lasting psychological effects that may manifest later
- **Reputation:** Known as either heroes who faced ancient horror or those who unleashed it
- **Ongoing Threat:** The Deep Drake remembers and may seek revenge

7.3 Prestige Opportunities

- **Deep Road Walker:** For those who master the tunnels and their dangers
- **Mind's Eye:** For resisting psychic corruption and maintaining sanity
- **Ancient Keeper:** For those who protect old secrets rather than exploit them
- **Drake's Bane:** For those who permanently harm the Deep Drake

8 GM Notes and Variations

8.1 Scaling the Adventure

For Lower-Tier Parties (Seasoned):

- Reduce the Deep Drake's power and psychic effects
- Provide more obvious escape routes and help
- Make Drakespawn less dangerous and easier to cure
- Focus on investigation rather than survival horror

For Higher-Tier Parties (Veteran/Paragon):

- Increase the entity's power and the scope of its influence
- Add secondary entities or cults serving the Deep Drake
- Make the corruption irreversible without great cost
- Create connections to larger regional or national threats
- Introduce time pressure from external forces trying to exploit the situation

8.2 Alternative Hooks

- **Ancestor's Warning:** Spirit shields activate autonomously, trying to prevent access to the sealed areas
- **The Drowned King's Call:** Ancient royal blood calls the PCs to reclaim a lost throne
- **Mercenary Contract:** PCs are hired to retrieve something valuable from the flooded tunnels, only to find it's guarded by ancient horrors
- **Refugee Rescue:** Trapped survivors in the tunnels are being transformed into Drakespawn

8.3 Atmospheric Horror Techniques

Sensory Deprivation and Overload:

- Use lighting to create unease - lanterns that flicker, glow dimmer, or show things that aren't there
- Describe sounds that shouldn't exist - whispers in empty tunnels, footsteps behind the party
- Make touch important - cold spots, surfaces that feel wrong, water that's too thick
- Smells that trigger memories or fears - decay, ozone, the scent of old blood

Isolation Effects:

- Communication becomes unreliable - voices echo strangely, messages get lost
- Time distortion - scenes that should take minutes feel like hours
- Spatial confusion - familiar routes become unfamiliar, distances change
- The feeling of being watched by something that cannot be seen

Psychological Pressure:

- Start subtle - minor unease, slight paranoia
- Build gradually - increasing frequency of strange events
- Personalize fears - each PC faces their specific terrors
- Save major revelations for climactic moments
- Let silences and pauses carry weight

8.4 Theme Reinforcement

This adventure emphasizes core survival horror themes within Aeler culture:

- **Ancient Wisdom vs. Hubris:** The danger of disturbing forces beyond understanding
- **Isolation in the Depths:** The claustrophobic terror of being trapped underground
- **Psychic Horror:** Fear that comes from within the mind, not just physical threats
- **Fallen Glory:** The melancholy beauty of a lost civilization
- **Sacrifice and Survival:** The moral ambiguity of desperate choices

8.5 Clock Management Tips

Pacing the Horror:

- Advance the Deep Drake Awakening clock steadily but not too quickly
- Let the Sanity Collapse clock build tension through player choices
- Use the Environmental Doom clock to create physical urgency
- The Drakespawn Infestation clock should accelerate in the final act
- Allow players to slow clocks through clever actions and sacrifices

Complication Generation:

- Hearts: Paranoia spreads, allies turn on each other
- Spades: Physical manifestations of psychic corruption, structural collapse
- Clubs: Resources become contaminated or lost, equipment fails
- Diamonds: Reality distortions, temporal anomalies, otherworldly intrusions

8.6 Sample Complications

Hearts (Psychological/Social):

- PCs begin to hear each other's thoughts, leading to paranoia
- One PC becomes convinced another is already Drakespawn
- Ghostly voices of the ancient dead offer tempting bargains
- Romantic subplot becomes complicated by supernatural influence
- Family connections are used against PCs by the entity's whispers

Spades (Physical/Direct):

- Tunnel collapse traps or separates party members
- Drakespawn emerge from the water without warning
- Ancient defenses activate against intruders
- The environment itself becomes hostile (shifting walls, gravity changes)
- Reality distortions cause physical injury

Clubs (Resource/Logistical):

- Essential supplies become contaminated by psychic residue
- Light sources fail or show disturbing visions instead of illumination
- Magical or technological aids malfunction unpredictably
- Time pressure as the Deep Drake's awakening accelerates
- Allies become unavailable due to corruption or disappearance

Diamonds (Supernatural/Otherworldly):

- Forbidden knowledge reveals itself unexpectedly through whispers
- The Deep Drake manifests partially in the physical world
- Ancient wards begin to fail, unleashing other sealed horrors
- Reality itself becomes unstable, with multiple timeline branches
- Other psychic entities take notice and interfere

9 Character Options

9.1 Recommended Backgrounds

- **Deep Road Delver:** Specialist in Aelerian tunnel systems
- **Mind's Eye Seeker:** Psychic sensitive who can resist mental influence
- **Ancient Lore Keeper:** Scholar of Aelerian history and mysticism
- **Tunnel Guard:** Combat specialist trained for underground warfare
- **Spirit Medium:** Can communicate with the ghosts of the fallen kingdom

9.2 Useful Skills

- **Lore** (Essential for understanding the entity and ancient warnings)
- **Insight** (Key for detecting corruption in others and oneself)
- **Survival** (For navigating the dangerous flooded tunnels)
- **Arcana** (For dealing with supernatural elements and ancient magic)
- **Resolve** (Critical for resisting psychic influence)
- **Stealth** (For avoiding Drakespawn and moving quietly)
- **Medicine** (For treating both physical and mental trauma)

9.3 Suggested Talents

- **Mind's Eye:** Immunity to psychic detection and some mental effects
- **Deep Road Walker:** Enhanced navigation and survival in tunnels
- **Spirit Shield:** Resistance to supernatural influence and ghostly effects
- **Iron Will:** Re-roll failed Spirit-based rolls once per session
- **Backlash Soothing:** Reduce magical backlash effects
- **Stone-Sense:** Detect structural weaknesses and hidden passages

9.4 Helpful Followers

- **Cap 2 Tunnel Scout:** Knowledge of local passages, early warning system
- **Cap 3 Spirit Guide:** Can detect supernatural threats and communicate with ghosts
- **Cap 4 Deep Road Veteran:** Combat expertise in confined spaces, morale support
- **Cap 5 Ancient Lore Master:** Extensive knowledge of Aelerian history and magic

10 Ancient Aeler Artifacts

10.1 Minor Treasures

- **Whisperstone Pendant:** Grants +1 die to Lore rolls but generates 1 CP per session from psychic feedback
- **Deep Road Lantern:** Illuminates twice as far but shows ghostly visions of the past
- **Bone Compass:** Always points toward the nearest major threat
- **Echo Crystal:** Can record and play back sounds, but may capture unwanted whispers

10.2 Major Relics

- **King Valdris's Crown:** Grants Command 5 but slowly corrupts the wearer's mind
- **Thane's Binding Hammer:** Can reinforce magical seals but requires great sacrifice to use
- **Spirit Shield of the Ancients:** Provides Spirit 5 against supernatural effects but attracts the attention of other entities
- **Deep Drake's Tooth:** Contains immense psychic power but risks the wielder becoming Drakespawn

11 Campaign Integration

11.1 Sequel Hooks

- **The Brood Queen:** A more powerful relative of the Deep Drake stirs in distant tunnels
- **Surface Invasion:** Drakespawn begin appearing in the world above
- **Ancient Alliance:** Other sealed entities seek to break free and reclaim their domains
- **The Corrupted:** Former allies who became Drakespawn plot revenge against the PCs
- **The Cycle Continues:** The seals were only temporary - the Deep Drake is already beginning to return

11.2 Regional Impact

- **Tunnel Traffic:** Trade routes through the affected areas become dangerous or impassable
- **Refugee Crisis:** Survivors flee to surface communities, spreading fear and uncertainty
- **Political Tensions:** Different factions blame each other for the disaster
- **Economic Disruption:** The loss of tunnel infrastructure affects regional commerce
- **Supernatural Awareness:** The event raises awareness of other hidden threats

12 Conclusion

"Whispers in the Tunnels" transforms the mechanical investigation of "The Broken Seal" into a claustrophobic survival horror that captures the true terror of isolation beneath the earth. The adventure challenges players not just to survive physical dangers, but to maintain their sanity and humanity in the face of an ancient psychic horror that seeks to corrupt everything it touches.

The module showcases the unique aspects of Aeler culture while introducing genuinely frightening elements that will test even experienced players. The multiple resolution paths ensure that player choices have meaningful consequences, and the ongoing threat of the Deep Drake's return provides hooks for future adventures.

Whether the PCs emerge as heroes who contained an ancient evil or as the newest generation of Drakespawn, their experience in the tunnels will leave lasting scars - both physical and psychological. The adventure demonstrates that in Fate's Edge, the greatest horrors are often not those that can be fought with weapons, but those that attack the very foundations of what makes characters human.

The Deep Drake waits in the darkness, patient and eternal. Will you listen to its whispers? Will you pay the price for knowledge? Will you survive to tell the tale - or become part of the legend yourself?