

# The Black Tower

An adventure for 5<sup>th</sup> edition Dungeons & Dragons  
by Brian Reeves

*The Black Tower* is a simple adventure designed for a party of 4 – 6 characters of 3<sup>rd</sup> level. Many of the monsters were selected as an homage to earlier editions of Dungeons & Dragons, as they have become classics of old-school adventures. This scenario can take place in any temperate swamp within reasonable distance from a small town by simply changing the place names. To adjust this adventure for higher or lower characters, do the following: for 1<sup>st</sup>-level characters, reduce all trap DCs by 3, replace the carrion crawler with four giant rats, the gelatinous cube with a gray ooze, and make Harran a ghast. For higher-level characters, double the number of goblins, increase the spiders to 3, add more piercers to area 12, and make Harran a wraith.

For the map, I've used the "Wolf Tower" by Dyson Logos, found on his website at <http://rpgcharacters.wordpress.com/>. For less cramped adventuring, let each square represent 10 feet, not the usual 5 feet. Please note that, in this adventure, the entrances located on the ground floor of the tower are sunk into the earth and not accessible. The only way in and out of the tower is via the basket and pulley system on the battlements (not pictured on the map).

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## Background

Almost two hundred years have passed since the attempted coup of Harran the Mad, a decorated army general who had served two generations of kings. As an award for exemplary service during an orc incursion, Harran Calaron had been awarded with a parcel of land of his choosing. To everyone's shock, Harran had selected a swampy lowland some distance from the capitol, land that had previously been considered undesirable due to its boggy terrain and preponderance of hideous beasts. Harran told everyone he had a plan to drain the swamp, boasting that doing so will reward him with the most arable land in the entire kingdom.

His first act was to oversee the construction of a tower which would serve as his domicile while the rest of the keep would be built. Choosing a patch of relatively dry ground on a hillock deep in the swamp, Harran pulled together stoneworkers and architects, selected a hard, black volcanic stone from some nearby mountains, and within five weeks had the base of the tower in place.

Almost immediately, the project hit upon problems. A bullywug raid led to half of his workers being slaughtered before Harran was able to rally his

soldiers, seek out the hidden bullywug lair, and wipe them out. Not long after, the worker's camps became infested with oozes that had to be burned out, and stirges became a regular problem. Fevers swept through the workers regularly.

Finally the tower was complete. Harran moved his family into the rooms in the upper floor of the tower, deaf to the complaints of his wife and daughter, who hated the stench and the constant insects. As Harran turned his attention toward the construction of the dykes and channels that would dry up the swamp, disaster struck once more in the form of a young green dragon, Kaxannanar, who had been hibernating elsewhere in the swamp. Taking offense at all this human activity, Kaxannamar attacked the tower in a rage, killing almost all the workers who were housed in the most vulnerable area, a camp near the base of the tower. To his horror, Harran discovered his daughter, Kira, had been in the camp, sneaking off to visit a young laborer whom hoped to marry her. The remaining workers fled, followed by the artisans, and even some of the soldiers, who saw this last terror as a precursor of many more to come. Stricken by the death of their only child, Harran's wife, Julae, hurled herself from the top of the tower.

After all this, Harran retreated into his tower,

burying himself in books. He began to research magic, hoping to find a way to return his wife and daughter from the grave. Few saw him, and those who did said he had gone mad from grief, foregoing his formerly fastidious grooming, eating only what little he needed to survive, even allowing swamp insects and parasites to live, unmolested, in and on his body. The last time anyone saw him, he looked a worse fright than any diseased wretch in the capitol's back alley slums.

Upon his presumed death, the tower was forsaken. Most considered it cursed, and even those who rejected such things recognized the folly of a homestead in the swamp. The place became a rumor, its location forgotten.

For the last two centuries, the tower has been ravaged by time and the depredations of monsters, human and otherwise. A host of tenants have come and gone, leaving behind treasures and filth alike. The newest tenants are a splinter tribe of goblins, exiled from their home tribe. Led by Grruddu, these goblins have set their sights on a nearby trade road and small village, leading brutal raids on any target that looks vulnerable. They are growing stronger and bolder with each raid. Someone needs to do something about it, and the heroes are perfect for the job.

## Getting Started

There are several ways to get characters involved in this scenario. Dungeonmasters should consider what best motivates their players.

- Stopping over at Arle's Crossing, the characters spot a notification of a reward for anyone capable of solving a series of raids around the edge of the Mistmirk swamp. The town mayor is happy to speak to the characters about the problem, saying the raids seem to be coming from the swamp itself. He fears the worst and needs swift action.
- While traveling along a trade road that runs near the Mistmirk swamp, the characters are beset by a group of five goblins. One of them flees into the swamp and can be followed to the Black Tower.
- The characters hear the story of Harran the Mad, learning that he owned a powerful magic item that was never recovered from the Black Tower, despite many attempts to locate it. The nature of this magic item is up to the DM and will vary based on the needs of her campaign, but Magic Item Table F (DMG 146)

offers plenty of inspiration. DMs who are reluctant to let their 1<sup>st</sup> -level characters acquire an item of that significant power can always pull a bait-and-switch: the magic item *isn't* in the Black Tower after all!

Whatever the cause that brings them out there, the characters begin this scenario within sight of the Black Tower. Read the following:

It seems like forever since you entered this boggy, stinking swamp. Your progress has been slow and your route twisted by many fetid pools, deadfalls, and the occasional combat with denizens of the swamp. Insects whine around your ears. You're soaked from having to wade through mucky ponds and from a constant drizzle. But up ahead the marsh opens up to reveal a low hill in the middle of a shallow lake. The hill is home to a few scraggly, dead-looking trees, but they are dwarfed by a tower of black stone, its base sunk into the earth, the whole thing leaning at a slight tilt. The tower looks very old, its stones crumbling and unstable, but someone – or something – has since built a crude platform and winch on the battlements, and you can see a basket hanging from hemp rope near the top.

At this point, the characters are free to approach the tower in any way they see fit. There are a number of traps around the base of the tower, and a goblin archer is positioned near the top of the tower.

## The Black Tower

Architecturally, the tower was constructed well enough to have survived the ravages of the Mistmirk's harsh environment, but time has definitely taken its toll. This hill is the driest section of land for miles, but it is still damp, and that, combined with the limestone cavern beneath it, have led to the tower's foundation being compromised. Currently, the Black Tower is tilted at a 10° angle, giving each room a noticeable, though not dangerous, slope. The only time the angle should come into play is if a character drops something, in which case it will slide toward the western wall of the room (the areas below ground starting with area 8 are not tilted in this way).

The bottom floor of the Black Tower has sunk completely into the ground, burying the original entrance under a ton of earth. Getting to these doors would require either powerful magic or a lot of time

and effort. Previous occupants have been forced to enter through the only current approach, the jury-rigged winch and pulley up top. Getting up there by climbing is risky but possible; time has made the stones loose, but has also helped form plenty of handholds, and the tower's angle can help climbers keep their balance. The Black Tower is 50 feet tall (just over 15 meters). Scaling it will call for one DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check, where a failure will result in 2d6 falling damage.

A lone goblin archer has been posted on the battlements as a spotter. If he sees the characters, he will bang on an old iron pot which serves as an alarm system, then start firing arrows. Reinforcements from area 5 below will arrive in three rounds.

The Black Tower itself is composed of hard, black volcanic stone. Cheaper limestone blocks were used to build the tower's dungeon. Interior doors are old, rotten ironwood that can be broken down fairly easily with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check or by inflicting 15 points of damage to the door. Doors in the dungeon portion have fared much better, requiring a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) to batter down, or by inflicting 25 hit points of damage.

## Locations

### 1. Battlements

From up on these battlements, you can see out over the Mistmirk, though the haze and drizzle keeps you from seeing far. Wind and rain have caused the crenellations to crumble, making the edges extremely perilous, and gaps have formed in the floor that make for tricky footing. Someone has built a platform off one side of the battlements, creating an elevator from a basket that can be raised or lowered by a winch and pulley. It is rickety but looks sturdy enough to hold one person at a time.

There is a trapdoor in the floor which can be found with a DC 5 Wisdom (Perception) check. It has been booby-trapped with a poison needle, which inflicts 1 piercing damage and 2d10 poison damage to anyone not wearing gloves who grabs the trapdoor's pull ring. The victim must also succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour.

The basket can be raised or lowered to the ground with a DC 10 Strength roll. However, any

activity on the rooftop will attract eight stirges, which swarm anyone on the roof or coming up in a basket.

**Stirges (8):** AC 14, hp 2 each, blood drain +5 (1d4+3 piercing plus attachment, no attack needed when attached).

### 2. Harran's Bedchamber

This must have once been a fine room. The ruined remnants of a canopy bed still sit against one wall, and worthless, tattered tapestries still hang between windows. Moisture from the rain trickles down through holes in the ceiling, causing everything to be covered in mildew. There is a door on one end of the room, and a spiral stone staircase in the center descends downward.

The door leads into a narrow privy, which is currently the home to a green slime which covers a 5' patch on the ceiling right inside the door. Bones litter the floor from the green slime's victims. As soon as someone moves under the slime, it will drop on them. If a creature sees the slime, it can avoid this with a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, but otherwise they are automatically hit and take 1d10 acid damage every round until the slime is scraped off or destroyed (which requires cold, fire, sunlight, an effect that cures disease, or radiant damage). The slime does 2d10 acid damage against wood and metal, including anything used to scrape it off.

### 3. Harran's Study

This floor is dedicated to what once must have been an impressive library. Bookshelves, now slumping and rotten, line the walls, though only a few worthless books remain. A map of the region was carved into a table that sits in the center. The skeletal remnants of some hapless adventurer are skewered to the table by a long, spiny sword. There's a rusty iron door on one side of the chamber, while a wooden door is on the other.

The skeleton on the table is of an elf fighter with a few pieces of unusable armor still on its body. The skeleton not animated. Like everything else in this chamber, it has long since been picked clean by waves of adventurers and monsters. The iron door leads to a repository, which was also looted ages ago. But not

*everything* in Harran's study was discovered – Harran had a secret panel built into the stone floor under the table, which can be found with a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Inside are 10 gold pieces, 2 gemstones (worth 10 gp apiece), a silver key, and a potion of *greater healing*.

#### 4. Kira's Room

This chamber, located in the stone center of the Black Tower, would be totally lightless if it were not for a magical glowing orb hung in a brass lantern on the ceiling. Its light has grown feeble over the years but still illuminates what must have been the room of a young woman: a canopy bed and vanity still remain, as do a dusty portrait of a man, woman, and child, inscribed with the words “For Kira.” Something has been living in here; the place stinks.

The goblins use this room to house a cockatrice. Though they consider it extremely dangerous, they know it can be put to some sort of use, so they aren't willing to just kill it. The cockatrice is chained to one of the bedposts on a 10 foot chain. If antagonized, it will try to wriggle free, succeeding on a DC 15 Dexterity roll. There is nothing of value in the chamber other than the lantern, which is hung from a ring in the ceiling 15 feet off the ground. It sheds light equivalent to a candle, though its light is permanent.

**Cockatrice (1):** AC 11, hp 27, bite +3 (1d4+1) plus petrification (see MM 42).



#### 5. Dining Room

This room holds a table large enough to seat several people. Though it has been centuries since the builder sat down for a meal here, the table has seen recent use, now covered in rotting filth that has drawn a cloud of flies. Fittings for candelabra and tapestries remain on the walls but anything of value has been stripped. There are two doors, and a narrow, curving hallway which leads to an empty archway.

There are four goblins seated at the table, feasting on grubs, birds, and other nasty creatures they've collected in the swamp. If they become aware of fighting elsewhere in the tower, they will prepare for battle by flipping over the table to provide an extra defensive wall, while two hide behind it to fire shoot arrows and the other two take positions on either side of the door. Each goblin has a belt pouch made from a dried frog that contains 1d4 silver pieces.

**Goblins (4):** AC 15, hp 7 each, scimitar +4 (1d6+2 slashing) or shortbow +4 (1d6+2 piercing).

#### 6. Main Hall

This long, curved hallway stretches around the central core of the tower. A pair of heavy iron doors has buckled inward, letting in a tide of mud and wet earth. These were likely the front doors, long since blocked as the Black Tower sank into the hill. Murky water lies ankle-deep in here. To your alarm, you see quite a number of bones – both animal and humanoid – moldering in the water. The high ceiling is choked with spider webs. Several soggy doors lead into unknown rooms.

This crescent-shaped room is now the lair of a giant spider. Though the goblins have learned the hard way not to come in here, they let the spider stay as an added line of defense, and because they're too cowardly to do anything about it. The bones in the water can be identified as human, halfling, and goblin, not to mention quite a number of birds, bats, and rats.

To complicate matters, a boa constrictor has made the water into its home, and will attack from below soon after the characters enter the room.

The rooms along the perimeter served various functions during the Tower's heyday, but now those functions are all but obliterated. The room closest to the dining room was a kitchen and larder. The other

three were meant to be servant's quarters, but only housed the architects during the construction phase. Other than area 7, they are empty, just as overcome with water and rot as the rest of this floor.

If the characters cut down the bodies, they will find desiccated old bodies but lots of equipment: two swords, bits of armor, a mace, a waterskin, 50' of rope, 11 gp, and a scroll of *entangle*.

**Giant Spider (1):** AC 14, hp 26, bite +5 (1d8+3 piercing, plus 2d8 poison damage on a failed DC 11 CON save or half with a successful save), web +5 (range 30/60 ft., target creature is restrained).

**Constrictor Snake (1):** AC 12, hp 13, bite +4 (1d6+2 piercing), constrict +4 (1d8+2 bludgeoning plus target is grappled, escape DC 14).

## 7. Refuse Pile

Decades of temporary residents of the Black Tower must to have been using this room as a trash heap, because it is piled with discarded, broken items and filth. The smell is overpowering.

This room is now the home of a very dangerous creature, a carrion crawler. It happily eats whatever tasty morsels the goblins toss its way, but the prospect of fresh meat draws it out of hiding.

Searching the refuse pile is not a pleasant job but it might be worth it, as some overlooked valuables have been hidden among the filth: 8 gold pieces, a bracelet inscribed with the word "JULAE," a short sword, and 8 gems worth 10 gp apiece.

**Carrion Crawler (1):** AC 13, hp 51, bite +4 (2d4+2 piercing) and tentacles +8 (1d4+2 poison, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 CON save or be paralyzed with poison for 1 minute).

## 8. Goblin Barracks

It's hard to tell what purpose this dank room once held, but now it has become the home of goblins. Stinking furs have been thrown down for bedding. The walls drip with water seeping down from the swamp above. A barricade made of wagon wheels and planks is situated right near the base of the stairs, spear tips point toward you like spikes. One corner is matted with fur and gnawed bones. On the far wall hangs an old curtain which depicts a family crest that

is unfamiliar to you: a wolf and hound rampant on either side of a black shield that bears a rose and three stars. The name "Calaron" is written in scrollwork beneath.

This room regularly houses ten goblins, though five of them are currently elsewhere in the tower (the archer in area 1 and the four feasting in area 5). That leaves 5 goblins off duty in this room. They have a worg which nests in the corner of the room; this is actually Grruddu's mount, but it serves as an excellent guard dog as well. Depending on the time of day, the goblins might be sleeping, hunting in the swamp, raiding a nearby homestead, gambling with dice, or just sharpening their swords. If they heard the sounds of commotion coming from the room above (very likely, if there was combat at all), they will be ready with an ambush of their own. They will set the trap at the base of the stairs, set the mastiff on the characters, and fire arrows. Grruddu himself will join them from area 9.

Each goblin has a belt pouch made from a dried frog that contains 1d4 silver pieces, and little else to their name.

**Goblins (5):** AC 15, hp 7 each, scimitar +4 (1d6+2 slashing) or shortbow +4 (1d6+2 piercing).

## 9. Grruddu's Chamber

Once this was a storeroom for the Black Tower, still evident by the boxes and kegs shoved into corners and along walls. Several of them have been stacked to make a sort of makeshift throne, draped with wormy furs. A decent collection of weapons, likely stolen from humans, leans against the wall. An iron pot has been put to use in the center of the floor as a firepit.

If the characters have somehow made it this far without getting involved in noisy combat, Grruddu will be snoozing on his throne. Otherwise, he will confidently stride into battle wherever he is needed.

A search of this chamber will turn up quite a number of treasures, almost all of which were acquired during recent raids: 50 gold pieces in a small lockbox (untrapped), 6 gems worth 10 gp apiece, two potions of *superior healing*, a *quall's feather token*, a greataxe, a heavy crossbow with 10 bolts, a crowbar, a crystal arcane focus, a hammer, a signal whistle, ten days of rations, a keg of water, and a bullseye lantern.

Curiously, the same crest depicted on the

tapestry in the previous room is chiseled onto the wall in one corner. There is a secret door here that leads into area 10.

**Grruddu, Goblin Boss (1):** AC 17, hp 21, two scimitars +4 (1d6+2 slashing, second attack at disadvantage), javelin +4 (1d6+2 piercing).

## 10. Secret Chamber

The hand of time weighs heavily on this room. Cobwebs hang from the heavy wooden rafters, the floor is covered on old dank pools, and dust has settled on the surfaces of the table, chairs, and cot which are lined against one wall. A weapon rack holds some weapons which have rusted beyond use. On the opposite wall is a heavy stone door.

This was once a redoubt, a hidden place designed to house Harran's family in the case of a threat to the castle. Nothing in here is of any value. The stone door is trapped with an old rusty slicing blade that rips out of a slot along the door with an attack of +6, doing 2d10 slashing damage to anyone standing in front of the door who fails a DC 23 DEX save. The trap can be spotted with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, and disabled with a DC 15 Dexterity check. The door requires a DC 12 Strength check to open, or it can be opened by the silver key found in area 3.

## 11. Vault Entrance

At the base of the stairs is an archway over which is written a phrase in some unknown language. Beyond it is a small chamber lined with racks of weapons and stands of armor. Much of it is still in decent shape and could be salvaged. There is a stone door along one wall, and on the far side of the room the wall has collapsed, revealing a natural limestone cavern. The dust of ages hangs over everything.

This room served as Harran's personal collection of weapons and armor taken from fallen enemies. Nothing here will command a high price if sold, but is perfectly functional, if aged. Nearly any common or martial weapon can be found among the racks, and there is an example of leather, scale, and plate mail (all human-sized). All told, the collection is worth about 30 gold pieces.

The stone door is locked. The lock requires a DC 15 Dexterity check to pick, or the door can be

forced open with a DC 20 Strength check, but anyone attempting to open the door without the proper lock (lost to time) triggers a stone block to fall from the ceiling, doing 4d10 bludgeoning damage to anyone directly in front of the door who fails a DC 15 DEX save. The trap can be spotted with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) and can be disabled with a DC 15 Dexterity check. The inscription over the door is in a dead language and reads, "War is Man's True Glory."

## 12. Limestone Cavern

A natural cavern has opened up here. The sound of constant dripping comes from water seeping down numerous stalactites, creating a shallow pool in the bottom of the chamber. A natural shelf on one side of the room rises out of the water. Up there, placed between two limestone columns, is a brass-bound wooden treasure chest.

The treasure chest is actually a mimic, which has gone a long time since its last meal. It has within its body 14 gold pieces and a well-crafted dagger worth 20 gold pieces.

The mimic isn't alone in this cavern. At the far end, near the ramp leading to a secret door to area 14, there is a piercer on the ceiling. It will drop 30 feet onto anyone who enters the space directly at the bottom of the ramp.

**Mimic (1):** AC 12, 58 hp, pseudopod +5 (1d8+3 bludgeoning), bite +5 (1d8+3 piercing plus 1d8 acid).

**Piercer (1):** AC 15, 22 hp, drop +3 (3d6 piercing damage).



### 13. Vault

This room holds a veritable treasure trove: you see several chests of coins, iron lockboxes, bags of gemstones, and shelves of art objects. Sealed for so long, everything has become dank with mildew.

The corner alcove has become the home of a gelatinous cube, which is nearly impossible to see, requiring a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Harran's treasure's consist of 2,400 copper pieces, 700 silver pieces, 60 gold pieces, 2 onyx gemstones worth 50 gp each, and 5 art objects worth 25 gp each. There is also a beautiful longsword on its own stand. The sword has a minor enchantment (+1) and is inscribed with the word "VIGILANT" in an old language along the blade. It has the Sentinel ability, glowing when within 120 feet of fiends. If the characters came to the Black Tower in search of a magic item, it can be found here instead.

Random tables for the art objects can be found on page 134 of the Dungeonmaster's Guide, or use the following:

- A copper chalice with silver filagree
- A gold locket with a painted portrait inside
- A pair of engraved bone dice
- A black velvet mask stitched with silver thread
- A carved whale bone statuette

**Gelatinous Cube (1):** AC 6, hp 84, pseudopod +4 (3d6 acid damage), engulf (DC 12 DEX save or become engulfed by the cube, taking 3d6 acid damage on the first round 6d6 acid damage each subsequent round until the target escapes).

### 14. Crypt of the Workers

This room is lined with stone biers upon which rest numerous skeletons. Something has come along since these poor souls died, and many of the bodies are strewn about the floor.

Cautious characters might predict the skeletons will be animated, and they will be right. Harran the Mad enchanted these skeletons as guardians. Hearing the battle will alert him to the arrival of the characters. These are the skeletons of the workers slain during the

construction of the Black Tower, so they were buried with nothing of value.

**Skeletons (6):** AC 13, 13 hp each, shortsword +4 (1d6+2 piercing).

### 15. Calaron Family Tomb

Three huge coffins occupy one wall of this room, illuminated by a pair of everburning candelabra. Silver plaques on each of the caskets bears a name: "Harran Calaron," "Julae Calaron," and "Kira Calaron." Even though it is underground, this room seems unnaturally cold.

Herein dwells all that is left of twisted Harran the Mad, now trapped on this plane in the form of a wight. The bodies of his beloved wife and child lie in the caskets, reduced now to bones, but he fights fiercely to defend them without even really remembering who they were in life or why he wishes to protect their bodies. He has nothing of value on his body (most of it is in the vault in area 13) but he does have a *ring of water walking* on one finger, a relic of the time when he was seeking out a place in the Mistmirk to build his tower fortress.

**Harran, wight (1):** AC 14, 45 hp, longsword +4 (1d8+2 piercing, multiattack), life drain +4 (1d6+2 necrotic damage, and target must make DC 13 CON save or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken, which lasts until the target takes a long rest).

### Concluding the Adventure

Depending on the nature of the characters' expedition into the Black Tower, this adventure might end when they discover the item they seek, when they destroy Harran the Mad's undead form, or even when they finish off the last of the goblins. The town of Arle's Crossing will be grateful to the characters for their service, offering them free room and board for a month, should they choose to stay on – there are other dangers in the area and a small town on a trade route is always in need of stout adventurers to solve some problems!

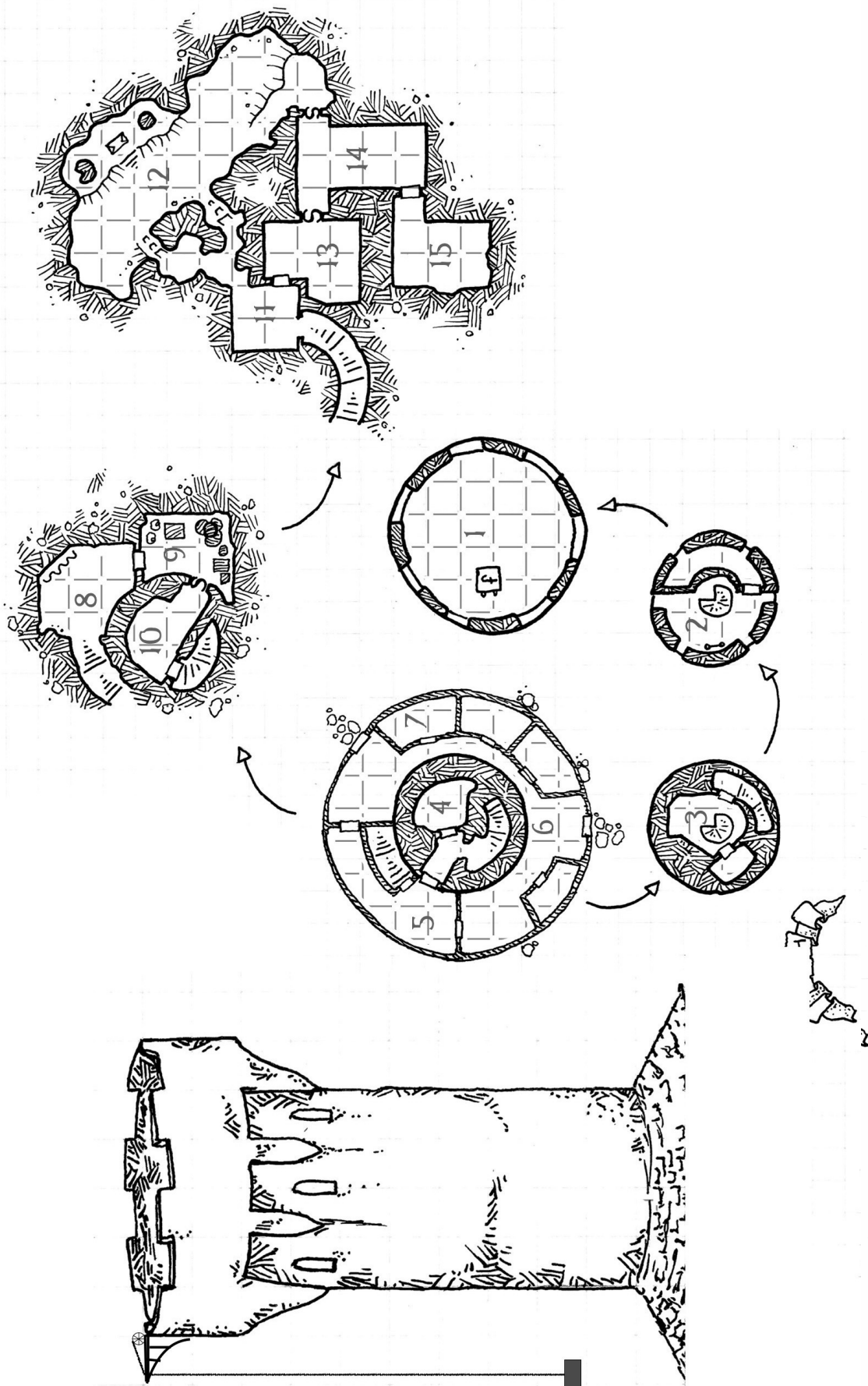


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