

# A LITANY IN SCRATCHES

An adventure location by Michael Prescott

## THE SITUATION

The High Uttvelt is a natural labyrinth of hundred-foot cliff walls covering many square miles. A religious order once made its home here, but now only undead and monstrous treasure-seekers inhabit their ruined monastery.

## THE GATEHOUSE

The outer wall of the High Uttvelt is pierced by a long, stone tunnel, guarded by the monastery's gatehouse.

It is dark inside (save for the light from a few second-floor arrow slits), and the corners are filled with windblown leaves and detritus.

Oddly, **everything wooden has been removed**. There is no furniture anywhere, and even doors have been taken from their hinges.

The ground-floor kitchens contain bare stone ovens (also without doors). All is quiet.

The entry hall continues through the cliff.

## THE MONASTERY

The tunnel runs several hundred feet through the cliff before emerging at a ravine, a narrow space between the cliffs of the Uttvelt.

### A. RUINED BRIDGE

A stone bridge once spanned the 20' deep ravine, but it has crumbled, leaving two 10' gaps.

### B. THE RAVINE FLOOR

An icy stream (2' deep) winds along the sandy ravine floor, obscured by large, thick bushes.

Several of the plants are **vampire bushes**, which will entangle any warm-blooded creature passing within range of their fronds, to slowly drain them of blood.

### C. FINGER LAKE

The stream empties into a long, narrow lake that runs for several miles between the cliffs of the Uttvelt.

### D. HIDDEN CAVE MOUTH

The stream emerges from a small cave, leading to the Barricade (N).

### E. CLOISTER

A long, L-shaped cloister encloses a garden (F). Branches of the garden's gigantic **vampire tree** reach into the cloister, swaying and scratching at its walls. They will seize any warm-blooded creature they touch.

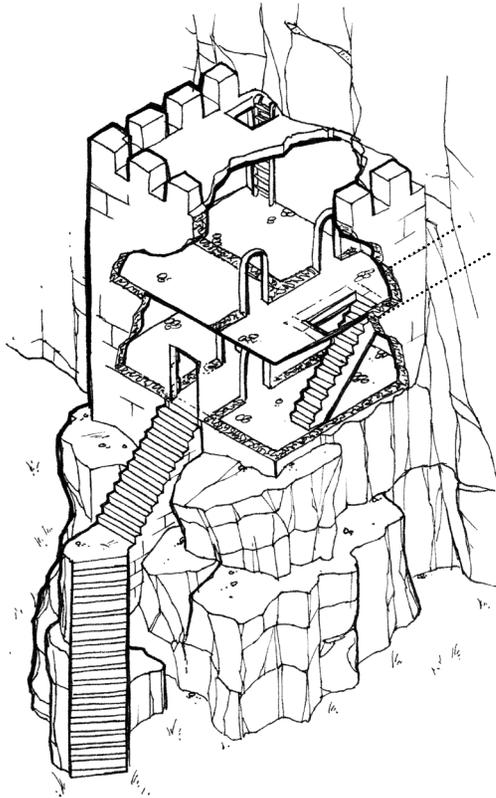
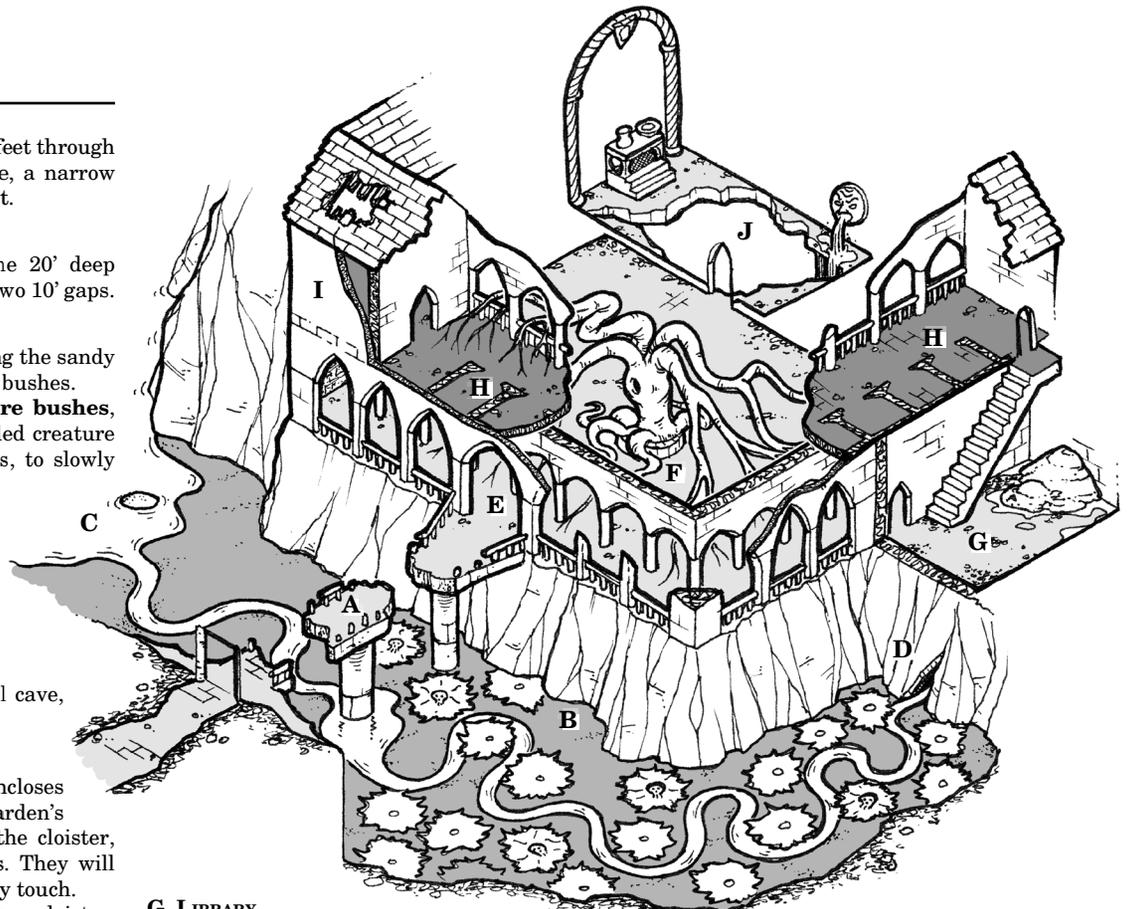
Two **dead kobolds** lie in the cloister, desiccated and barely distinguishable from the leaf litter. Near the bodies, **crazed writing** in dried blood reveals that the tree's scratching is it writing out passages from the Tome of Immortals (see M), over and over again.

### F. OPEN-AIR GARDEN

Years ago, the windblown seed of a **vampire bush** landed in the garden's stone fountain and sprouted. Once its roots penetrated the Shrine (M) below, the dark energies there nourished it, allowing it to grow large enough to fill the entire garden with its thirsting canopy. Its probing branches reach into the cloister (E) and the dormitories (H).

It is blind, aware only of what its swaying branches touch. Dessicated birds abound.

The massive roots have cracked the fountain, forcing a **gap** just wide enough for someone careful to clamber down into the Shrine (M). The roots are nerveless, strong and immobile.



### G. LIBRARY

The kobolds from (H) use this room as a latrine and **rubbish tip**. The books and shelves are long gone; bones (mostly deer, wolf) protrude from a stinking pile of refuse.

### H. DORMITORY

Running above the cloister is the dormitory, an L-shaped corridor overlooking the garden. As in the cloister, the dormitory is filled with the **branches** of the huge tree.

A dozen cells line the outer wall (all with their doors and furniture removed).

A pack of **22 kobolds** lives in the cells, carefully avoiding the branches. They are thralls to the drake (I) who has brought them here to pillage, although they have been unable to make any progress in the crypts because of the undead.

### I. ABBOT'S CHAMBER

A **nest of straw**, rags and bones dominates the room. Jammed into it are d12 gold and silver

trinkets (candlesticks, rings, etc.), a gnome-sized jawbone and d100 silver coins: all the kobolds have been able to loot from the monastery.

If the pony-sized **fire drake** is absent when adventurers arrive (5 in 6 chance), it has a 2 in 6 chance of arriving each hour. It enters through the **smashed roof**, bringing deer for the kobolds.

When it learns of the adventurers, it will order the kobolds to drive them out, and will not leave its scant treasure until they are gone.

### J. CHAPEL OF NEW SPRING

The floor of the original chapel has **collapsed**, revealing a 20' drop into the Cistern (K) below.

On the far wall is a **graven image**

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representing the spirit of Spring. Except in winter, an **icy spring** flows from its mouth. Originally flowing into a ceremonial basin, it now plummets down to the water.

The old altar is undisturbed: upon it sit a **carafe and bowl** of gold-chased platinum.

#### K. THE CISTERN

Chest-deep water fills this old cistern, which is 20' below the Chapel (J). Rubble from the collapsed ceiling (as well as several smashed stone benches) breaks the surface in a few places.

A couple of steps climb up into the crypts (L).

#### L. CRYPTS

The crypts are knee-deep in icy water. A **gentle flow** takes the water from the Cistern (K), through the Shrine (M) and out past the Barricade (N).

The countless **niches** are jammed with bundles of rotted cloth, each containing the husk of a monk who once lived and prayed above.

Until the master of the crypts calls them forth, they are inert corpses.

There is little of value: probing the corpses-bundles will reveal (d6):

1. Crumbling scrolls inscribed with passages from the Book of Immortals (M)
2. A humble and rusted weapon (staff, cudgel, or long knife)
3. A bauble of modest value (e.g. silver ring, semi-precious stone)
4. An eruption of mold spores
5. A "Crypt Servant", a skeletal undead thrall
6. Nothing

#### M. THE SHRINE

A large chamber, hewn roughly and knee-deep in water.

A massive, spiralling bundle of **tree roots** winds down through a **crack** in the ceiling and curls around a mighty **stone lectern**.

Upon it and curled about with tree roots is a great **tome**, the Book of Immortals. The tree's finest roots trace the letters on the page obsessively - forwards and backwards.

Rotted **tapestries** (really just carpets, re-embroidered by amateurs with scenes from the Book) hang from the walls.

A few fingers of light stream around the roots, revealing **glinting silver** beneath the water. All in all, there are about six sackfuls of silver plate, candlesticks, silverware and coin scattered about under the water.

Sitting quietly to one side is the **Master of the Crypt**; a slime-coated, skeletal figure fixed to its chair. Nearby is a **brass gong**.

The master can speak, but can't leave his

chair. His body no longer sustains him, and physical damage to it is of no concern to him.

The Master seeks 41 sacrifices so that he may advance on the Path of Immortality: he has 39 so far: the five monks that defected to his cult in secret, and the thirty-four others they murdered over the following years.

He needs two more. While willing converts are best, murder is much simpler.



Like a spider, he will allow adventurers to explore the Shrine for a few moments before banging the gong to **summon crypt servants**: in d6 minutes, d3 servants will arrive each minute, not stopping until all 39 have arrived. The sounds of them swishing toward the shrine through the water-filled can be heard easily.

The master is overconfident, and once he believes that he has his next two victims, will begin crowing that his entry into the "Well of Iron" is at hand.

If he gets his sacrifices, he will order his servants to carry him to the Well, a journey of several miles deeper into the High Uttvelt.

#### N. THE BARRICADE

Every single wooden object in the gatehouse and monastery - every door, bench, chest and chair - has been piled here by the kobolds to make a **barricade** to prevent the Crypt Servants from entering the ravine.

The water flows through the cracks easily enough, but the only way past it is to clamber up

and over it, squeezing through a claustrophobic **gap** between it and the crypt ceiling.

#### WHAT'S IN THAT TRASH?

The wind, time and the kobolds have moved nearly everything in the monastery from its original place. Countless items have been discarded, lost or burnt.

Any time the adventurers

14. Scrolls describing edible plants of the area
15. A map of the near third of the Uttvelt
16. A gleaming scale from a small fire drake
17. A sealed jar of cider, strong but cloudy
18. A half-burnt scroll: devotional songs to the spirit of spring
19. A half-burnt scroll: hastily drawn erotica
20. The Hosteler's journal: mostly mundane visits from tinkers and supplicants, later pages record with increasing frequency visitors he considers both strange and rude. It ends with speculation that the crypt-keeper is plotting to overthrow the abbot, and believes the seeds of the conspiracy began somewhere far away he refers to as 'the Well'.

#### THE BOOK OF IMMORTALS

The book has been badly changed by moisture, mold, and the tree: pages are stuck together, illegibly stained, or reduced to wet pulp.

The book long-windedly describes a path to immortality, based upon freeing oneself from the mortal realm, mostly by committing atrocious acts the book describes in detail: living a life of duplicity, building a blasphemous shrine, accumulating human sacrifices, killing one's family or village), after which one can be inducted as an immortal at the Well of Iron. There are many brutal examples, accounts meant to inspire the reader.

It is mostly fanciful garbage, though the Well is a real place.

search a likely spot (any niche, pile of detritus, crevice, etc.), roll on this list to see what they uncover. (Don't use this table in the crypts.)

Roll d20:

1. A makeshift chisel for stoneworking
2. A rusted iron key (it unlocks some of the doors in the Barricade (N))
3. A bread knife, sharpened into a weapon
4. A pot of ink, wax-sealed and still usable
5. A bundle of quills, tied with string
6. An iron candlestick
7. A leather travelling pouch containing ceremonial vestments for one
8. A small brass, oil-burning lamp
9. The stub of a tallow candle
10. A small knife stuck in a bone fragment
11. A sack full of stone chips
12. A Spirit of Spring carved of a candle
13. A half-burnt handbook on maintaining monastic discipline

