

IN THE CARE OF BONES

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY SEAN WINSLOW AND MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

An underground shrine at the center of a grassy plain was once a widely known destination for pilgrims in search of miraculous healing.

Now, with no pilgrims about, the energies of the place have been directed toward a clan of velvet spiders, who have grown to great size and ability.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY SETTLEMENTS

- A generation ago, pilgrims would often come this way, heading out onto the plains for healing.
- A lone tree stands over a well of the sweetest, clear water.
- Silken dolls are a sign that fairy weavers are about.
- Beware of floods during the spring thaw and the rainy season.
- Haunted ruins make for poor shelter.
- Keep your eye on the sun and the mountains, or you'll surely lose your way.

THE LEELANDS

The Leeland is a low, grassy flood plain thirty miles wide and sixty long.

What few trees stand are thick with song birds, while the grasses are home to fat beetles, field mice, rats, rabbits and ground hogs.

In spring, the region's stream often overflow their banks and flood large areas of the Leelands - this can happen very suddenly.

In winter, the land sleeps under a crust of snow and all is silent but the crows.

LEEELAND ENCOUNTERS (D8)

1. Songbirds, spying for the pilgrim spirits
2. Giant elk
3. A trio of velvet spiders, hunting stealthily
4. An old pilgrim trail of hard-packed dirt, runs straight to the golden tree
5. Gatherers from nearby settlements, looking for seed, rabbits, or herbs
6. Cenops, a giant harrier (15' wingspan)
7. Plains fox, emboldened by hunger
8. Kill site - spider-wrapped rabbit or fox; a shredded elk carcass left by Cenops.

THE SHRINE COMPOUND

A low stone wall (not shown) encloses a circular area several acres in size, with the ruins and tree at its center. Originally designed to keep out the floods, most of it has tumbled.

THE RUINS

Housing for the order that tended the shrine. Many travelers have come and gone since, and evidence can be found of their cook fires, detritus.

High relief engravings on the walls show the separate journeys of nine pilgrims, each bearing a wound or ailment, descending to the Face of Panur and then returning home. As they go, they walk in sunlight, though none are healed.

HAUNTED RUINS GRANT NO SLEEP

The grass spiders (see below) make their home in the ruins. Remnant drag lines (of varying freshness) can be found everywhere, along with countless dried rabbits. Unless they are currently hostile, they are likely to slink away rather than face the adventurers directly, though they may return later (see below).

PILGRIM'S DESCENT

The small stone building shelters the mouth of **wide tunnel** cut into the bedrock.

A stair of heavy stone slabs descends to the underground shrine.

THE GOLDEN TREE

A majestic lerimar tree (80') stands a short walk from the ruins. Its roots tap the waters of the shrine, so its leaves hang perpetually in the greenish-gold of late summer.

On the leeland, the tree can be seen from nearly seven miles away.

HARRIER'S NEST

Cenops nests in the tree at night. It's extremely dangerous to be out and about at dawn or dusk when he is coming or going.

Discarded bones litter the ground around it.

THE HOLE

Between its roots, a widening shaft drops 100' to the waters of the flooded shrine.

A long-dead gnome hangs in a tangle of brittle drag line. If disturbed, it falls into the water.

THE SHRINE OF PANUR IMPLACABLE

The water-filled shrine is lit by sunlight spilling through the hole. As the day progresses, the shaft of light traces the walls and water, at noon illuminating the first idol so brightly the shrine is lit like day.

DASHED HOPES

The original shrine had nothing to do with healing, for Panur is a god of acceptance, not of restoration.

after several tumultuous years, deconsecrated the shrine and left.

Now, after endless years with only spiders to love, the spirits are keen for people to watch over.

To those who listen for them, they speak as an inchoate hiss, a roar of whispers just below clear understanding.

Any who drink the water may receive the pilgrim spirits' gifts while in the shrine. This includes a subtle rejuvenation and greatly accelerated healing, even of otherwise permanent injuries or disease.

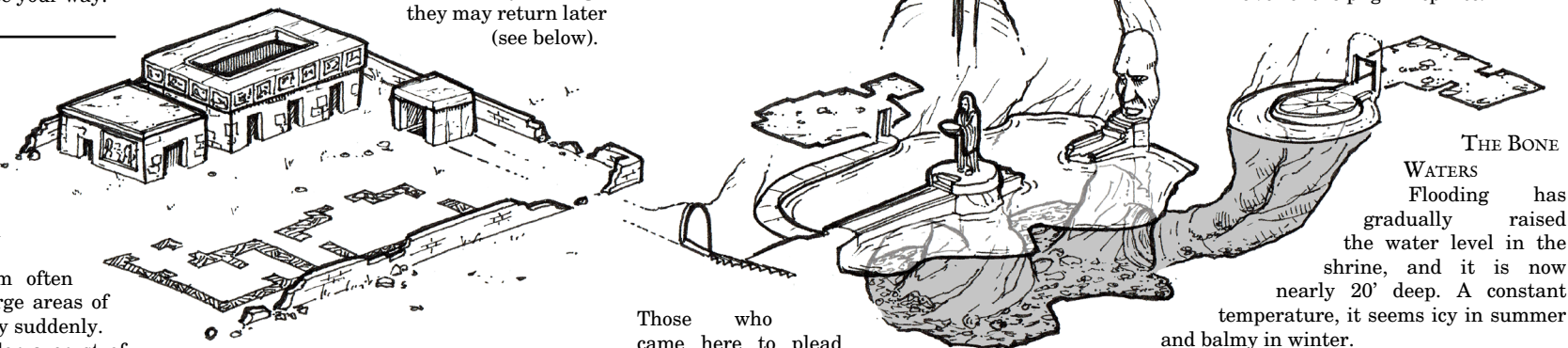
They love the spiders dearly, and harming them is sure to cause great chaos and anger among the spirits.

IDOLS OF PANUR

Two idols dominate the shrine. The first, the **woman with nothing**, greets pilgrims with a look of sadness and an empty bowl. Despite their long journey, she seems to convey, there is nothing for them here, nor anywhere.

The second, the **implacable visage**, will take burdens of misery (or vain hopes) from any who kneel before it.

Any who place an offering in the bowl are thumbing their nose at Panur, and earn the favor of the pilgrim spirits.



Those who came here to plead for healing would instead be relieved of their vain hopes and accept their fate.

Those not well enough to return home stayed on until their deaths, and their bones were placed in the pool.

THE PILGRIM SPIRITS

The spirits of the accumulated dead remained in the shrine, however, hoping to protect others from similar disappointment. As their numbers grew into the thousands, they accrued enough power to offer healing to the living themselves.

The Glimland missionaries that built the shrine were horrified by this development, and

THE BONE WATERS

Flooding has gradually raised the water level in the shrine, and it is now nearly 20' deep. A constant

temperature, it seems icy in summer and balmy in winter.

The submerged floor is buried in bones - rib cages, skulls, thighs - all furred with algae.

A **giant carp** (11') makes lazy circuits, nosing in the murk for crayfish. If the pilgrim spirits are displeased for any reason, it will be aggressive with swimmers, biting, buffeting and dragging them under.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

THE HIGH PRIEST'S BONES

The pilgrim spirits have kept the carp from disturbing high priest's bones, which lie directly below the face, the spot he took his own life.

His garments are rotted away, but on the skeleton are the **silver circlet** and the **bronze sword** (see over).

HIGH PRIEST'S TUNNEL

Now completely submerged, a 100' tunnel connects the shrine with the condensarium. There are no bones here.

Precious little light reaches the far end of the tunnel, and only when brightest daylight shines from the shrine's ceiling shaft.

The swim is difficult, and drowning a real risk. Those who have the pilgrim spirits' favor might be aided by the carp.

CONDENSARIUM

At the far end, an ornate circular platform stands just above the waterline. While the shrine is sparsely decorated, all that stops here.

The platform is inlaid with a riot of color - chips of blue lapis, green jade, mother of pearl, black mica, turquoise and red agate all swirl toward a central point.

There, on a disc of gold, stands the **condenser** (see right).

MILDEWED CHAMBER

Beyond the condensarium is the meditation chamber of the high priest. At bright noon, a faint, algae-green glow comes from the tunnel, but it is pitch black here otherwise.

The floor is as colorful as that of the condensarium.

A mildew reek comes from ruined and rotted furniture - a writing desk, cot, vestment stand and scroll rack.

The scrolls are ruined, but if enough scraps are pieced together, they are clearly a log of numerous surreal experiences, either visions or mad ravings. Careful research will point to the **panoply scroll** (see right).

The **spectre of the high priest** is trapped here by the power of the pilgrim spirits. Unable to accept his fate with the equanimity of his faith, his shade is contorted by long-festering anger. He strikes from the darkness with a ghostly version of his brass sword.

A CLUTCH OF WHITE VELVET

Fifteen **giant spiders**, each the size of a large dog, dwell in and around the shrine.

They are bone white, with a dense coat of fine

bristles, making them seem clad in white velvet.

They are intelligent, and form a sort of community, spending most of their time hunting plains rodents (alone, or in threes) or sharing the latest rodent-hunting tips.

They are active whenever it's warm, though they avoid moving when Cenops is near.

Descended from jumping spiders, they spin no webs but leave a sturdy 'drag line' whenever they leap or pounce - which they can do to a distance of about 15' horizontally, and 10' directly upwards.

Fresh drag lines are thick threads of gray silk as strong as braided rope. They must be moistened weekly or they become brittle.

GIFTS OF THE BONES

The pilgrim spirits have long watched over this clan for generations, and their love has magnified the spiders' natural gifts:

SPIDER'S WISH

A spider's wish, honed to a fine point over a lifetime of watching and waiting, is that you *stay very still and look over there*.

As often as not, when they need it to, something will chance to catch the attention of their quarry. The sunlight on a leaf, perhaps, or the uncanny swaying of the grasses in the wind.

LUCK OF THE HIGHLY OBSERVANT

When a spider brings its full attention to a target, it can influence any small motion left to fate. Thrown, hurled, shot, tossed or abandoned objects, the direction of a walk taken at random to make water away from the others - all of these can be influenced by a watchful spider.



THE THREE STRATEGIES

The spiders are aware that the shrine is the somehow the cause of their prosperity, but they don't understand why.

The strange, two-legged statue in the shrine, and the stony face beyond are endlessly fascinating to them, and strangely calming. A spider knows nothing if not acceptance.

The sight of actual, living humans prompts great discussion in the clan. Perhaps the humans can learn something of the shrine?

The spiders cannot agree on the manner to proceed, and at various times they will try three main strategies, all of which involve staying out of sight.

There is a friendly bet between the spiders which strategy will pay off first.

THE WAY OF WAITING UNTIL VERY NEARLY

Taktak and Shuffa have a plan that isn't very subtle - draw the adventurers' attention to the golden tree using spider wishes, and then push them in the hole.

It hasn't occurred to them that this might prove fatal to the adventurers (plains rodents are pretty good with holes, in general).

THE WAY OF SIMILAR FORMS BEING TEMPTING

Boklit, cleverest of the spiders, can weave with great skill. She and three of her kin will try to tempt adventurers with gifts.

At first they will leave these in the grass in the adventurers' path - tiny humanoid 'dolls', featureless and of gray silk.

If the gifts are not collected, Boklit and her friends will attempt to place among the adventurers' belongings when they stop to rest or sleep, and will start crafting dolls that look like the adventurers. She cannot capture likenesses, but she can render a person's build and equipment with startling detail.

Boklit is terrified of direct contact with humans. If she truly must intervene (e.g. if she catches wind of Kekphlet's plans, below), she will bring forth her most desperate invocation, the gray puppet.

THE GRAY PUPPET

Boklit's puppet is a silken doll, 5' in height. She has been working on it for several seasons, for just such an occasion.

If set forth with a push, Boklit can direct its motion by will alone (for what is more happenstance than a puppet?)

She has been practicing for some time and though there is no strength in its limbs, she can make it walk, run, even dance merrily.

She puppets it with great precision, although she harbours a number of alarming misunderstandings about how humans move.

The puppet is a work of art, but not sturdy. If it is abused it will soon be surrounded by a frizzy halo of broken fibres.

It is also spectacularly flammable.

THE WAY OF GENTLY THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN

Kekphlet has lied to the others about his strategem. He claims he will try to drive the adventurers off, all the better to redouble their curiosity.

His actual intention is to lure adventurers away where they can be caught and eaten. (Or perhaps poisoned, maimed and webbed to the ground in some quiet part of the field for later.)

Kekphlet may taste the memories of any he devours, and he will use this to full advantage.

THE RELICS OF PANUR

THE CONDENSER

A heavy contraption of brass filaments that converge on a sturdy, round base. It catches the miseries and vain hopes removed by the implacable face and condenses them to a few drops of essence, deposited into one of two cloudy glass vials.

When it is discovered, it is pointing toward the main shrine. The essence has dried up, but the dust and flakes in the vials are a powerful concentrate: one is the vain hopes of seventeen people, the other the agonizing misery of forty three, enough to throw a small town into despair.

Don't drink it.

THE PANOPLY SCROLL AND SILVER CIRCLET

There is one way to use the essence, a long ritual meditation in which a minute quantity is consumed.

If the ritualist is wearing the silver circlet, the ritual transmutes the essence into a powerful hallucinogen that produces prophetic visions.

Visions from the essence of vain hope reveals heroes, great teachers and triumphs of courage.

Visions from the essence of misery reveal dark secrets, conspiracies, blasphemers and traitors.

THE BRASS SWORD

A ceremonial blade used by the high priest on pilgrims whose despair could not be extracted by the implacable face. It is not well balanced, but is a *blade of slaying* against those suffering burdens of misery.

The blood of the high priest permanently stains it.