

MONSTERS OF THE LANTERN VALE

THREE ADVENTURES OF WIT & COURAGE



Three Adventures of Wit and Courage

A creature stands up after the hunters have killed it. A dead captain demands relief from a war nobody remembers. Two quarry workers wait for rescue, their bodies turned to stone. Each mystery begins with people worth helping and a monster whose nature changes how the heroes must act.

This book contains three independent adventures for four level-4 characters using the 2014 fifth-edition rules. Each aims for a two-hour session, including the opening and a short conclusion. Players aged 10-12 are the intended audience, with a serious fantasy tone, memorable people and dangerous decisions. The adventures also work for older groups. Runtime is an editorial estimate, not a measured playtest result.

Contents

ADVENTURE	CENTRAL CHALLENGE	BOOK PAGE
The Thing Beneath Blackwater Mill	Regeneration, water and rescue	3
The Last Watch at Hollow Keep	Resistance, possession and unfinished duty	13
The Statues in Briar Quarry	Petrification, cover and extraction	24

Each chapter includes a DM introduction, four scenes and encounters, a map, NPCs, complete creature rules, alternate endings and detachable player handouts. PDF bookmarks lead to chapters and useful reference sections. The separate player packet contains only maps and handouts; keep this main book with the DM.

Before the First Session

Use existing level-4 characters or prepare characters before the two-hour session begins. Each adventure assumes normal equipment and full daily resources. No particular class or spell is essential: the millwright supplies fire, the smith lends a magical sword, and the keeper provides treatment for petrification. Adjustments for three or five heroes appear with each creature. Start at level 4 even if you play the adventures as a series; advancement is optional.

Read the DM Introduction first, then the creature block and finale. Put the map and any limited supplies in view. For Blackwater, mark six fire flasks; for Hollow Keep, mark three acts that can release the oath; for Briar Quarry, mark four salve doses. Do not show private creature positions or unrevealed documents on the player maps. Illustrations establish atmosphere; the keyed maps and text settle distances and movement.

Ask the group whether ghosts, temporary loss of control or turning to stone would spoil their fun. The ghost variant leaves an affected player choosing useful actions. A

petrified player can operate the keeper until restored. Describe pain and danger plainly without lingering on injury. Let character humor come from people such as Hobb or Renn; the monsters remain credible threats.

Running the Monster Mysteries

Give players the information their characters can observe. A closing wound, a burn that remains, or a worker frozen mid-task is a clue, not a fact hidden behind a mandatory skill check. Essential conclusions have more than one route. Checks decide cost, speed or cooperation; they should not decide whether the adventure continues.

Before a dangerous choice, state what is visible and what is uncertain. Show the exit, name the moving parts, and let the players divide the work. A clever spell may solve an obstacle outright. If they bypass a fight, honor the result and use the ending their actions earned. The shorter successful branches need no replacement monster.

Each adventure has one principal creature. Keep its damage, position and expended abilities between scenes. The four encounters are four playable problems, not four compulsory combats. Use the listed time budgets as guidance: move past a solved problem, and trim a recovery obstacle if the finale needs more room. An optional break can come after the second scene; subtract it from discussion time if two hours is a hard limit.

One Valley, Any Order

Lantern Vale is a loose setting connection. Blackwater Mill is west of the village, Hollow Keep east, and Briar Quarry north. Travel between adventures happens between sessions. Run any chapter first; no later adventure assumes a previous victory. If the heroes saved the mill, its flour feeds the quarry crew. If they restored the keep, it can shelter workers. If they secured the quarry, its stone can repair either site. Keep the consequences the players actually earned.

Rules, Art and Use

The book uses 2014 D&D 5e monster behavior, with every changed procedure labeled homebrew. It does not silently mix in newer stat blocks. The ghost is an original oathbound variant, not the unmodified Monster Manual creature. Creature references and attribution appear in each chapter. This is an independent adventure collection, not an official Wizards of the Coast product.

The cover and three establishing illustrations were generated for this book. Six authored site diagrams provide separate player and DM views of three locations. The illustrations depict atmosphere rather than exact tactical geometry. No filler notes pages have been added. The companion archive includes editable Familiar content, validated native module bundles, artwork, maps and printable player material.

The Thing Beneath Blackwater Mill



Dungeon Master's edition

Mara offers the party 100 gp from the mill cooperative: 40 gp for bringing Tomas home and another 60 gp for making the mill safe to reopen. The mill is one mile upstream, a fifteen-minute walk. The characters may already know Mara as the person who repairs their wagon wheels; otherwise she approaches them at the village inn.

OPENING READ-ALoud

You hear the mill bell ringing from upstream, unevenly, as though someone is tugging the rope and stopping to listen. A soaked woman pushes through the inn door carrying a lantern with a bent handle. She sets it beside your meal. "My brother rang that bell yesterday. The thing below him is still there." Outside, a hunter waits beside a cart of ropes and tools. Do you ask her about the mill, or call the hunter inside?

Overview

A troll has occupied the village mill. Its wounds close almost as quickly as the villagers inflict them; the miller's brother is trapped above its flooded den. Learn what stops the healing, take control of the water, and bring him home.

Party: four level-4 characters. **Rules:** D&D 5e, 2014 rules; environmental procedures explicitly marked homebrew. **Audience:** ages 10-12 and older; danger, suspense and dry humor, without graphic injury. **Length:** about two hours. **Preparation:** read the troll block and sluice procedure; put the map, six fire tokens and three objective tokens on the table. Each character begins with their normal equipment and full daily resources. No magical weapon is required.

DM Introduction

Three nights ago a hungry troll followed the stream into Blackwater Mill and discovered that the spray quenched the villagers' burning arrows. It now uses the undercroft as shelter and raids the surrounding farms. Mara Venn, the millwright, shut down production but could not rescue her brother Tomas: he climbed to the maintenance gallery and pulled a warped iron hatch behind him. He has drinking water and can survive the session; the danger is getting him past the troll.

Hobb, the village hunter, led a failed patrol. He claims they killed the troll, although he actually fled when it fell. He did see a lantern burn remain open while an arrow wound vanished. The party can learn the same lesson from the patrol's abandoned notes and, later, by observing the creature. Mara can lend fire-making supplies and explain the sluice; neither assistance requires a successful roll.

The adventure moves from the millwright's workshop to the wrecked patrol wagon, then the mill controls and the troll's den. Closing the sluice creates dry footing, but stopping the waterwheel first protects the mill's gearing. The heroes can fight, lure the troll into a lockable spill channel, bargain for Tomas's release, or extract him and retreat. A living, unconfined troll remains a threat even if Tomas escapes. If nobody intervenes, Tomas eventually surrenders his supplies, the mill remains closed, and the village loses its next grain shipment.

Hook

Mara offers the party 100 gp from the mill cooperative: 40 gp for bringing Tomas home and another 60 gp for making the mill safe to reopen. The mill is one mile upstream, a fifteen-minute walk. The characters may already know Mara as the person who repairs their wagon wheels; otherwise she approaches them at the village inn.

Stakes

Track three outcomes: Tomas rescued; troll killed, confined or otherwise prevented from returning; mill machinery preserved. No hidden countdown kills Tomas. When combat begins he stays behind his hatch unless directed. Destruction of the mill costs the 60 gp safety payment until the party helps secure a usable alternative; rescuing Tomas always earns 40 gp.

Factions

Mill cooperative: Mara speaks for six farming families. They want Tomas alive and the mill working. They lend equipment but cannot finance a second building.

Hobb's patrol: Hobb is its only member present. He wants to recover his reputation and the patrol's supply chest. A truthful account earns Mara's respect; a renewed lie costs his place in the next patrol.

The troll: it wants an easy meal and a damp, defensible shelter. It speaks Giant, understands no Common, and responds to food, pain and obvious confinement. It can accept a bargain but will not honor an unsupported promise to stop raiding.

Encounter Matrix

SCENE / ENCOUNTER / MINUTES	OBJECTIVE	COMPLICATION	EXIT
1. A Lantern with a History (20 min)	Learn the weakness; choose supplies	Hobb hides his flight	Wagon track
2. The Wagon in the Stream (20 min)	Recover tools and inspect evidence	A shifting cart pins the chest	Mill yard
3. Stop the Wheel (25 min)	Shape the battlefield and reach Tomas	Controls expose operators	Undercroft or escape
4. It Stands Up Again (40 min)	Resolve the troll threat	Regeneration and water	Return to Mara

Allow 5 minutes for the opening and 10 for rewards and closing moments. These are table-time estimates, not playtest measurements. An efficient rescue or confinement plan can finish in 80-95 minutes. The involved route has evidence to examine, a resource decision, a recovery problem and a finale with three simultaneous objectives. If time runs short, let Mara bring the supply chest from Encounter 2; preserve the decisions at the mill.

Locations

The accompanying B-key map is the geometry reference; north is upstream. Coordinates are in feet from its northwest corner. The mill site occupies 90 by 60 feet. Outside the drawn site, the west bank continues as the safe approach and retreat path.

B1, yard: x0-30, y0-20; ground level. The wagon path enters from the west. A 10-foot-wide ramp runs east to B2, rising 10 feet over its 20-foot length. It costs ordinary movement, not a climb.

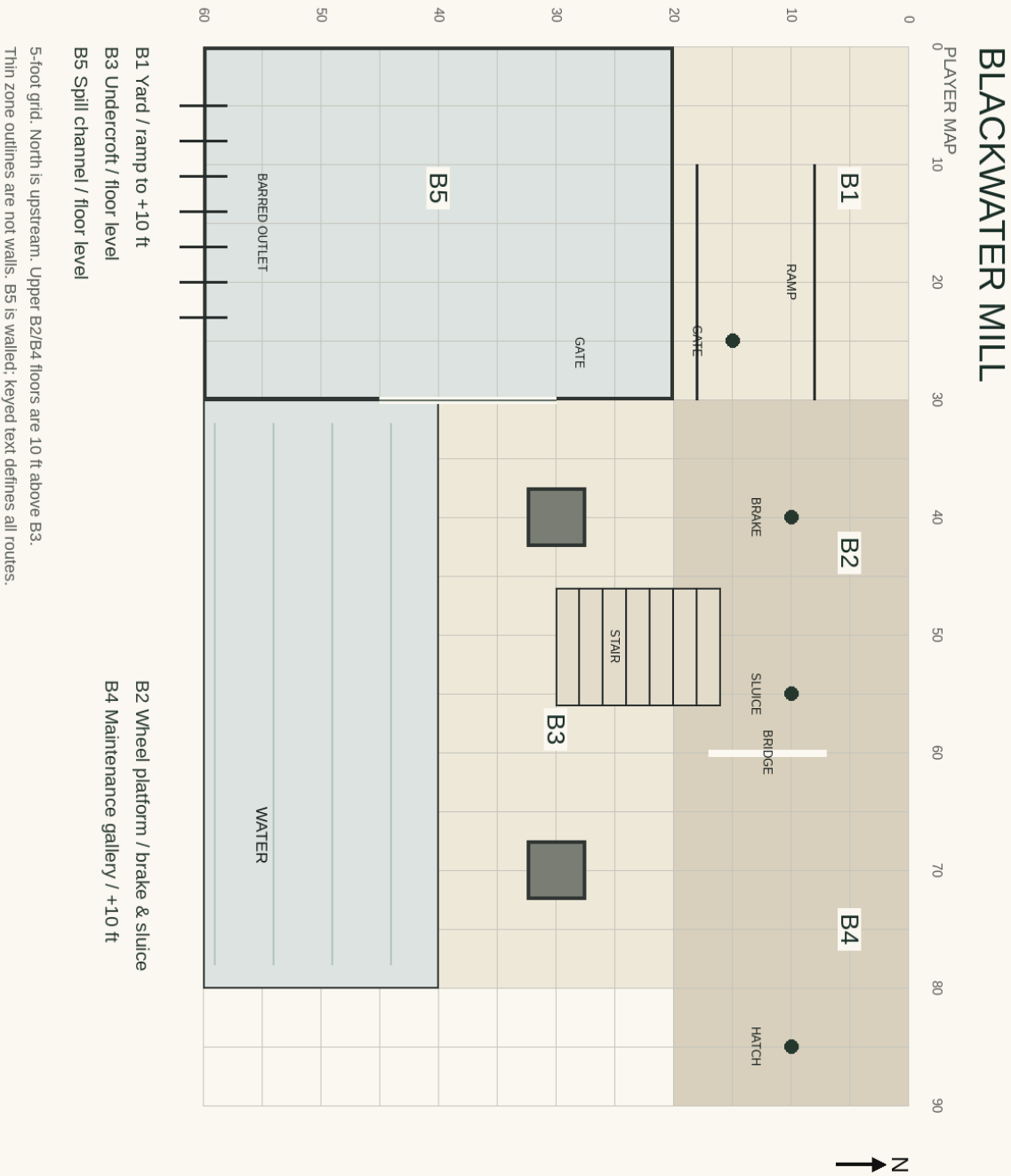
B2, wheel platform: x30-60, y0-20; elevation 10 feet. The brake is at (40,10), sluice winch at (55,10). A 10-foot-wide stair descends south into B3; traversing it costs 20 feet of movement. A 10-foot-wide bridge connects directly east to B4 at the same elevation. Railings provide half cover against attacks from below.

B3, undercroft: x30-80, y20-60; ground level, 15-foot ceiling. Its south half is initially difficult terrain from moving water. The troll begins at (55,45), occupying a 10-foot square; it has unobstructed routes to the stair and the channel. Two timber pillars at (40,30) and (70,30) are 5-foot squares and provide cover. Neither controls the building's stability during play.

B4, maintenance gallery: x60-90, y0-20; elevation 10 feet. Tomas waits behind the hatch at the east end. The west bridge is open. A rope lowered over the north rail reaches dry ground outside the mill; Tomas can climb down if someone anchors it. Treat the climb as ordinary climbing movement when the rope is secured.

B5, spill channel: x0-30, y20-60; ground level. Water is 2 feet deep and difficult terrain. Its 15-foot-wide east mouth opens into B3. A raised iron gate can close that mouth; an exterior lever at (25,15), reachable from B1, drops it. The south outlet is barred with gaps too small for the troll. The channel has 15-foot stone walls with an inward overhang. The gate has AC 19, 60 hp and immunity to poison and psychic damage. It gives the village time to bring an iron transport cage the following morning; confinement is not a permanent solution by itself.

The Thing Beneath Blackwater Mill - player map



Player map: use with the adventure's keyed location descriptions.

Scenes

Scene 1: A Lantern with a History

Runtime: 20 minutes. **Objective:** establish what happened and choose a plan. **Stakes:** limited fire supplies and Hobb's trust.

READ-ALoud

You enter Mara's workshop beneath hanging saws. Wet leather and lamp oil scent the room. Hobb is trying to bend the lantern handle straight, although his hands shake whenever the upstream bell rings. Mara unfolds a mill plan across a workbench. Do you examine the lantern, question Hobb, or study the controls?

Encounter 1: The Hunter's Account

Participants: Mara, Hobb and the party; no hostile creatures. Hobb starts beside the supply chest, Mara beside the map. Ask each player for one question or useful preparation. Mara explains all B-key routes and Tomas's location without a roll. Inspecting the lantern reveals blackened oil residue and a troll hair caught in its handle.

Hobb freely admits that arrows did little. A patient question about the lantern gets the decisive answer: "Everything closed up except where the oil caught." A character who accuses him can make DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation); failure makes him refuse to accompany them, but he still blurts out the burn observation while defending himself. If nobody questions him, Mara asks what happened and he answers in everyone's hearing. DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) notices his shame, not hidden monster lore.

Mara lends 50 feet of hemp rope, a tinderbox, a crowbar, two hooded lanterns with fuel, and six prepared fire flasks. Assign the flasks to named carriers; their homebrew rules are under Items. Hobb offers to operate one outside lever if treated honestly. He never joins melee; assign his single action per round to a named control, and have him retreat to B1 if approached by the troll.

Success: the party knows fire matters and has supplies. **Fail-forward:** an alienated Hobb stays home; Mara's explanation and supplies remain available. **Next:** follow the wagon tracks to Encounter 2; bypassing it leads directly to B1.

Scene 2: The Wagon in the Stream

Runtime: 20 minutes. **Objective:** recover the patrol chest safely. **Stakes:** extra tools, and someone may get soaked.

READ-ALoud

You reach a cart tipped across a shallow stream. Water ticks against its spokes. A wooden chest is wedged beneath one wheel, and three snapped arrows lie beside a page caught on a thorn bush. On the far bank, broad footprints lead toward the mill. Do you secure the cart, reach for the chest, or examine the page?

Encounter 2: Weight and Water

Setup: the cart and chest lie 10 feet from the bank in knee-deep water; no troll is present. Give the patrol note immediately to anyone examining the bush. It records that wounds closed except the burn from Hobb's lantern, providing an independent weakness clue.

To free the chest, players must support the cart and lift the wheel. A rope secured to a tree, a wedged beam, or two people holding the cart supports it without a check. A crowbar lifts the wheel without a check once supported. An unsupported attempt instead needs DC 12 Strength (Athletics); on failure the cart shifts, the acting character takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage and gets soaked, and the chest remains accessible. Nothing washes downstream. The cart settles after its first shift; a second supported attempt succeeds. Mage Hand can retrieve the paper but cannot lift the wheel; a suitable lifting spell solves the obstruction.

Inside are two flasks of acid, a steel mirror and an intact 20-foot chain. Acid uses the standard 2014 equipment rule: an action, an improvised ranged attack against a target within 20 feet, 2d6 acid damage on a hit. It also suppresses regeneration. Explain that property when a character proposes acid; do not require another knowledge roll. The chest contains no coins.

Success: the party gains all three supplies and the written clue. **Fail-forward:** damage and wet clothes are the only failure costs; abandoning the chest still leaves the note and Mara's fire. **Next:** tracks lead 200 feet upstream to B1.

Scene 3: Stop the Wheel

Runtime: 25 minutes. **Objective:** reach Tomas and decide whether to drain the den. **Stakes:** intact machinery and an advantageous position.

READ-ALoud

You stand below the mill's turning wheel. The stream roars through stone supports, and a chain rattles above the spray. A hand appears briefly at an iron hatch on the high gallery. Beneath it, long footprints cross the wet silt between two pillars. Do you take the ramp, inspect the channel gate, or signal to the hand?

Encounter 3: Two Controls, One Loud Mistake

Arrival: the troll is in B3, not yet attacking. It notices creatures openly entering B3. Anyone crossing B2 quietly makes DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth), once for the group using the lowest result; failure alerts the troll but does not teleport it. Roll initiative and carry straight into Encounter 4. Characters on B1 can examine the channel lever unnoticed.

Sluice procedure (homebrew): turning either control takes an action, requires a free hand, and needs no check. The brake requires two accumulated actions to stop the wheel; the sluice requires two to close. Partial progress persists if interrupted. Reversing a completed control takes one action. Closing the sluice drains B3's south half at the end of the following round, removing difficult terrain there. B5 stays wet. If the sluice closes before the brake is fully engaged, the

gearing cracks audibly and requires 50 gp of repairs. Mara warned the party of this sequence; the controls also have the plain engraved instruction "BRAKE, THEN SLUICE."

Opening Tomas's warped hatch takes an action with a crowbar, or DC 12 Strength (Athletics) without one. A failed attempt bends its latch enough that the next attempt succeeds automatically, but the noise alerts the troll. Tomas follows clear directions, has speed 30 feet, AC 10 and 4 hp, and takes Dodge while waiting. He makes no attacks or other combat contributions. A rope evacuation from B4 bypasses the den; flight or teleportation works normally. His escape does not automatically contain the troll.

Success: mark drained den, safe machinery and/or rescued Tomas as earned. **Fail-forward:** a noisy approach starts the finale with the current control progress and positions intact. **Next:** resolve the living troll in Encounter 4, or withdraw with Tomas to the Resolution Paths.

Scene 4: It Stands Up Again

Runtime: 40 minutes. **Objective:** secure the mill or escape with Tomas. **Stakes:** the troll can recover while the party spends resources.

READ-ALoud

You hear a heavy breath below the gallery. A long hand closes around a stone support, and the creature steps into view, water shining on its knotted hide. It watches the nearest flame, then glances toward the stair. Do you hold its attention, move toward a control, or get someone clear?

Arrival variant: if the troll already moved during Encounter 3, describe its actual position; omit the stone support. If no flame is visible, replace the flame sentence with "It watches the stair, then looks toward the open yard." If it is already confined, skip combat and use the confinement and guard-duty procedure in Encounter 4.

Encounter 4: The Troll's Three Problems

Opposition: one troll, with the same hp and position throughout the mill scenes. Start at B3 (55,45) unless earlier events moved it. Characters start where their plan placed them; unplaced characters begin in B1. Roll normal initiative. Announce each regeneration with a visible wound closing; after fire or acid, describe that wound staying open.

Tactics: on its first turn the troll seeks the nearest creature it can reach, preferring a target without visible fire if distances tie. It must use the stair to reach the 10-foot-high galleries; its 5-foot reach cannot reach them from the undercroft floor. It attacks conscious threats rather than fallen characters. After taking fire damage it tries to move into B3's water or B5; water does not undo suppression already caused by damage. At 20 hp or fewer it attempts to retreat south through B3's open end. Characters can pursue, negotiate or allow escape; a fleeing troll is not a secured mill.

Combat plan: the party can combine fire or acid with ordinary attacks. A character standing in B3's active water can still throw a flask. Flame cannot spread across its flooded squares. Draining the den makes movement easier; it does not increase fire damage.

Confinement plan (homebrew lure): place meat or visibly retreat into B5 while another character waits at its exterior lever. A troll that can see a conscious enemy elsewhere follows bait only on DC 12 Charisma (Deception); on failure it pauses at the mouth and the baiter can change approach next round. If all other enemies break line of sight, it follows fresh meat or a retreating creature into B5 without a roll. Once its whole 10-foot footprint is inside, an action at the lever drops the gate. A creature still in the channel can squeeze through the south bars using 10 feet of movement; the Large troll cannot. The troll attacks the gate on its subsequent turns. Reinforcing it with the recovered chain takes two actions from outside and raises gate hp to 120, including damage already taken. The party can burn or threaten the confined troll, or bring Mara's cage crew: if left unguarded before morning it eventually breaks out. A party member maintaining visible fire on the bank makes it cower away from the gate until dawn; no additional flasks are consumed beyond keeping a lantern lit. This fear response is a homebrew morale rule.

Bargain: a Giant-speaker can trade the cooperative's smoked boar carcass for safe withdrawal with Tomas. Mara authorizes using it; Hobb can fetch it in twenty minutes. The troll accepts food if not currently being attacked. This rescues Tomas but does not make the mill safe. Another reliable confinement or relocation plan may earn the full reward if the party can explain how it prevents an immediate return.

Success: award the outcomes actually achieved.

Fail-forward: B1 and the north rope route stay available. The troll stops pursuit beyond the yard if offered a day's food; otherwise it pursues for two rounds, then returns to its shelter. Tomas waits behind his hatch if not rescued. **Next:** return to Mara for payment and decide who watches any confined creature.

NPCs

NPC: Mara Venn

A stocky woman with cropped gray hair and a carpenter's square tucked into her belt. She wants Tomas back and fears the village losing its harvest. "Tell me which part needs holding." She offers the plan, supplies and payment; she knows the controls, not troll biology. Help earns practical loyalty. Threats make her insist on witnessing any equipment loan, but she never withholds rescue information. If betrayed, she publicly accounts for missing property. Tomas is her younger brother; Hobb is her former apprentice.

NPC: Hobb Reed

A lanky hunter whose neat boots are a poor match for his muddy cloak. He wants someone to call him useful again and fears another panicked flight. "I was there. That's not the same as being brave." He knows the burn clue and can operate the gate. He hides that he ran before checking the troll. Kindness gets his confession and practical help; ridicule leaves him behind. If the party protects his lie, he refuses to repeat it when Mara asks directly.

NPC: Tomas Venn

Mara's wiry brother, hungry and furious with the warped hatch. "I have had a long time to decide that this is a terrible door." He wants a route home, fears climbing past the troll, and knows a rope can reach the north bank. He obeys concise instructions, refuses a suicidal dash, and gratefully points out a safer route if pressured. His bell signals brought help; he owes no secret debt.

Creature Reference

Troll

Large giant; chaotic evil. AC 15; hp 84; speed 30 ft. STR 18 (+4), DEX 13 (+1), CON 20 (+5), INT 7 (-2), WIS 9 (-1), CHA 7 (-2). Perception +2; darkvision 60 ft.; passive Perception 12; Giant. CR 5 (1,800 XP).

Keen Smell: advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks relying on smell.

Regeneration: regain 10 hp at the start of its turn. Taking fire or acid damage prevents this on its next turn. It dies only if it begins its turn at 0 hp without regenerating.

Multiattack: one bite and two claws. **Bite:** melee +7, reach 5 ft., one target; 1d6+4 piercing. **Claw:** melee +7, reach 5 ft., one target; 2d6+4 slashing. No saving throws, resistances, immunities or other actions beyond ordinary creature actions are added.

Scaling: for three level-4 heroes use 65 hp and only one claw with the bite each turn; for five use 100 hp and the normal three attacks. These are homebrew adjustments, not recalculated CRs. For inexperienced players, Hobb volunteers for the brake; never secretly change regeneration. The base troll's average successful multiattack damage is 29, so show the exit routes before initiative.

Items

Item: Prepared Fire Flask

Homebrew equipment supplied only for this adventure: six sealed clay oil pots with wick caps. As one action, a character with a free hand lights a cap from a burning lantern or tinderbox and throws the pot at a creature within 20 feet. Make a ranged attack using Dexterity plus proficiency; a hit deals 1d4 fire damage, and a miss deals none. Each throw consumes one flask; it does not leave persistent ground fire. Unused flasks belong to Mara and are returned. This is deliberately simpler than ordinary oil; it is neither a magic item nor standard alchemist's fire.

Resolution Paths

Rescue and safe mill: Tomas returns and the troll is dead or securely awaiting collection. Pay 100 gp total, 25 gp per character for four heroes, provided the machinery is usable. The cooperative arranges transport for a confined troll; the party's agreed guard duty ends when the cage arrives at dawn.

Rescue only: pay 40 gp total, 10 gp each for four. Mara closes the mill and seeks another solution. Preserve whatever control repairs and discoveries the party made.

Broken gearing: if the troll is resolved but the gearing is damaged, Mara retains 50 gp for repairs; total payment is 50 gp with Tomas rescued, or 10 gp if only the mill threat was resolved. If the mill is destroyed, only rescue payment applies. Never charge both the repair retention and the destruction penalty.

Retreat: survivors keep their discoveries and may return; the troll retains lost hp until its normal regeneration restores them. An escaped troll relocates to the same stream's upper caves, an explicit future problem rather than a secretly completed objective.

Rewards and Follow-Up

No treasure is hidden in the troll's den. The two acid flasks, chain and mirror are a patrol recovery loan, not additional loot; consumed acid incurs no charge. Return unused borrowed gear. Each character receives 450 XP if the group resolves the troll by combat, secure confinement or reliable relocation, whether or not Tomas was also rescued; a rescue-only outcome earns 200 XP each. These are alternative flat adventure awards for the default party, not additive monster XP. A milestone campaign can instead record one completed adventure. No level gain is required between the book's modules.

Mara offers the party lodging before their next expedition. Hobb's testimony can introduce the quarry's stone workers; Tomas remembers seeing a strange light at Hollow Keep. Either lead is optional and carries no extra monsters into this session.

Rules and Credits

This adventure uses 2014 fifth-edition rules. Troll statistics and underlying game rules derive from the System Reference Document 5.1 by Wizards of the Coast LLC, available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document> and licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>. This original adventure changes environmental procedures, equipment and optional scaling as explicitly labeled. It is not an official Wizards of the Coast product. The player map contains physical geography only; encounters and hidden creature positions remain in this DM edition.

Handouts

Handout: Patrol Note

Visibility: player-safe. Give when the thorn bush is examined.

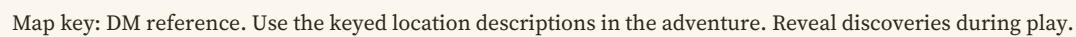
Arrows went in. Wounds closed. Hobb's lantern broke against its shoulder; that burn stayed open. It backed into the mill spray. Bring something that burns, and keep a path back to the bank.

Handout: Mill Control Plate

Visibility: player-safe. Give on examining B2 or Mara's plan.

BRAKE, THEN SLUICE. Two turns each. Reverse with one turn. Do not close the water against a moving wheel. Gallery hatch opens from the west. Channel gate drops from the yard.

BLACKWATER MILL



The Last Watch at Hollow Keep



Dungeon Master's edition

Tamsin asks the heroes to accompany her to Hollow Keep, twenty minutes east of the village. The road wardens offer 80 gp total if the haunting ends, regardless of whether they fight or negotiate. Tamsin lends a lantern, 50 feet of rope and a leather tool roll. Orren can provide a silvered-looking sword recovered long ago from the keep; it is actually magical, as identified under Items.

OPENING READ-ALoud

You hear three bell strokes from the hill, then a fourth that shivers through the smithy's windows. The blacksmith drops his hammer. "West gate. Hold until relieved," he says, in a voice suddenly straighter and colder than his own. A young woman catches the hammer before it strikes his foot. She turns toward you with soot on her cheek. Do you help the smith sit down, or ask what happened at the tower?

Overview

An abandoned watchtower rings its alarm each night. A blacksmith returns speaking a dead captain's orders. Enter the keep, discover why its commander cannot stand down, and decide what the living owe the abandoned dead.

Party: four level-4 characters with full resources. **Rules:** D&D 5e, 2014; the oathbound ghost is a complete homebrew variant below. **Audience:** ages 10-12 and older; eerie military mystery, no gore. **Length:** about two hours. **Preparation:** read the ghost's possession rules and the three requirements for releasing its oath. Set out the H-key map, both printed handouts and three tokens labeled orders, names and bell to mark release progress. No particular class or magic weapon is required.

DM Introduction

Forty years ago Captain Edrin Vale held Hollow Keep while villagers escaped a siege. His commander sent withdrawal orders, but a falling beam trapped the courier in the records room before delivery. Vale died believing his company had been abandoned. His ghost has awakened because the blacksmith Orren Pike removed an old bell clapper for scrap. Orren brought it back when the bell began ringing without it, but the disturbance left Vale convinced the siege had resumed.

Vale possessed Orren briefly yesterday and made him repeat the old watch orders. Orren is now free, shaken and remembering fragments of the captain's memories. His apprentice Tamsin wants the haunting ended before her master is taken again. Vale remains at the tower and sees living visitors as possible recruits or enemy scouts. His need is specific: proof that withdrawal was authorized, an acknowledgment that his three soldiers got the villagers out, and the bell sounding stand-down. He does not need a replacement guardian.

The heroes can gather those facts by listening to Orren, exploring the muster court and recovering the courier's dispatch. They can negotiate the release of Vale's oath, use the dispatch to keep him talking while another hero rings the bell, or defeat him. Destroying this homebrew ghost ends the haunting permanently; his unfinished history remains a separate human matter. Without intervention he frightens away repair crews and occasionally possesses a passerby, leaving the keep abandoned and the road unsafe after dark.

Hook

Tamsin asks the heroes to accompany her to Hollow Keep, twenty minutes east of the village. The road wardens offer 80 gp total if the haunting ends, regardless of whether they fight or negotiate. Tamsin lends a lantern, 50 feet of rope and a leather tool roll. Orren can provide a silvered-looking sword recovered long ago from the keep; it is actually magical, as identified under Items.

Stakes

Orren's words in the opening are a remembered echo, not a current possession. Tell players who examine him that he is conscious, frightened and in control of his movements. The haunting threatens the road and the people who use it; it is not an invisible countdown to Orren's death. The ghost has one possession attempt for this session, usable only if confrontation becomes hostile. Track whether it has been spent.

Factions

Road wardens: want a safe crossing and will accept any lasting resolution. Their payment is already held by Tamsin.

The smithy: Orren wants the relics returned respectfully; Tamsin wants him safe and dislikes being dismissed as an apprentice. They disagree about risking a visit, not about helping the party.

Vale's last watch: only Vale remains active. His three soldiers, Anwen, Dorr and Pell, are names in the muster record, not additional monsters. Vale wants lawful relief and recognition of their duty; he fears that standing down will expose the village to attack.

Encounter Matrix

SCENE / ENCOUNTER / MINUTES	OBJECTIVE	PRESSURE	TRANSITION
1. A Voice in the Smithy (20 min)	Understand the haunting and prepare	Orren's incomplete memories	Keep approach
2. The Muster Court (20 min)	Cross safely and identify the watch	Broken bridge and old orders	Records or tower
3. The Undelivered Order (25 min)	Recover proof and learn the signal	A fallen rack pins the dispatch	Bell tower
4. Until Relieved (40 min)	Release or defeat Vale	He interprets interference as attack	Road reopens

Opening and closing use 15 minutes together. A party that quickly connects the documents and bell can finish in 85-100 minutes. The full route has a crossing problem, evidence comparison, NPC disagreement and a finale with simultaneous jobs. If the session is running late, put the dispatch on the records desk without the fallen rack; keep its interpretation and Vale's decision.

Locations

Hollow Keep's ground level is an 80-by-60-foot rectangle. Coordinates start at the northwest corner; north points toward the old battlefield. All doors are 5 feet wide and unlocked. External walls are 10 feet high. A two-story tower in H4 rises above the north side.

H1, approach: x0-20, y20-40. A 15-foot-long, 5-foot-wide bridge runs east across a 10-foot-deep dry ditch to H2. Its western third is sound; the eastern 10 feet have missing boards. The southern ditch slope allows a 30-foot detour with no roll, costing ordinary movement plus 10 feet of climbing. Retreat follows the west road.

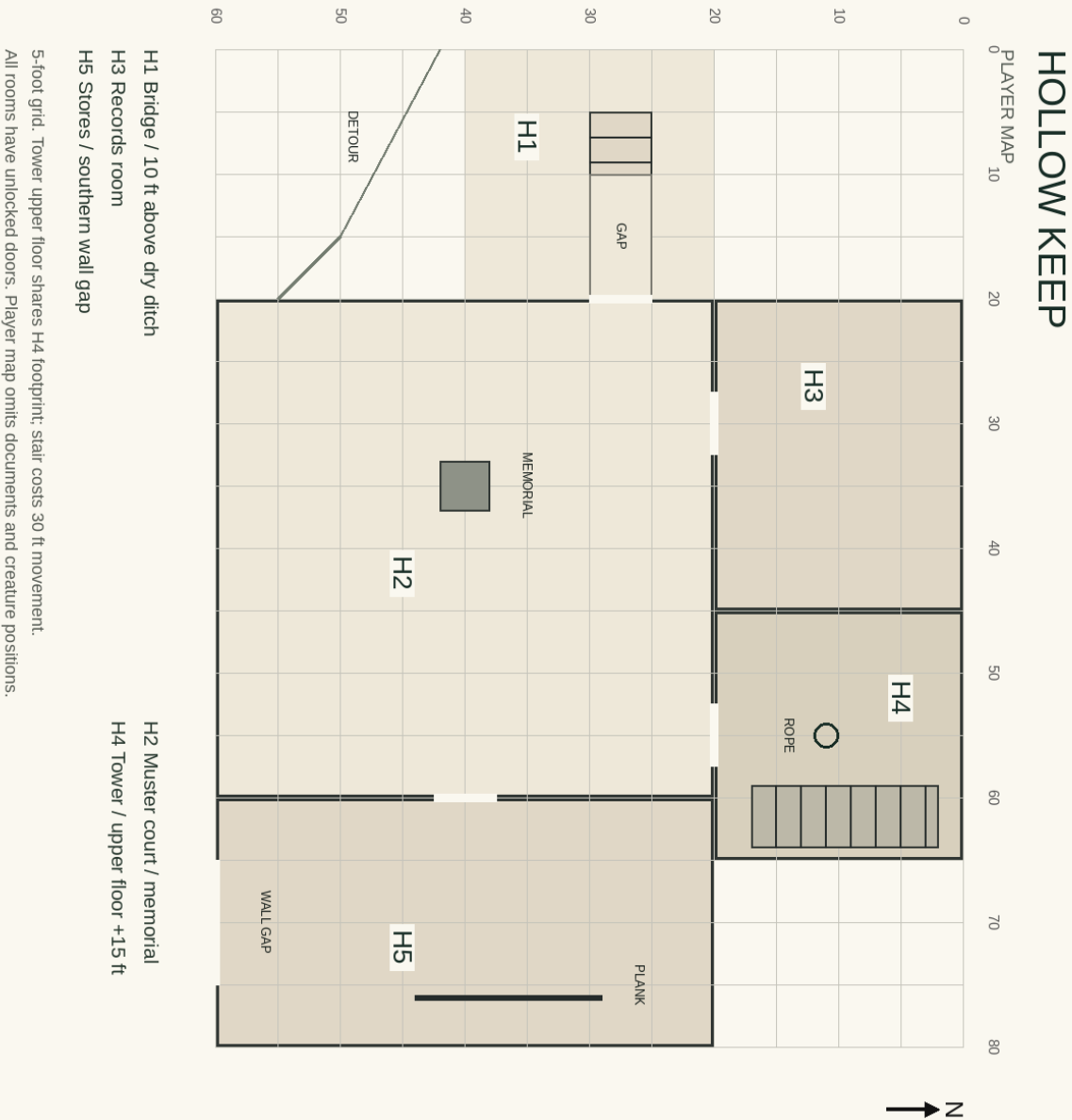
H2, muster court: x20-60, y20-60; open sky. A waist-high memorial tablet stands at (35,40). Doors lead north into H3 at (30,20), northeast into H4 at (55,20), and east into H5 at (60,40). Fallen benches provide half cover but do not obstruct those routes.

H3, records room: x20-45, y0-20; roof intact, dim until lit. A desk at (25,5), a fallen rack at (35,10) and a courier's satchel beneath it are the only significant contents. The room is connected only to H2 for corporeal creatures.

H4, tower: x45-65, y0-20. Ground floor holds a stone watch post and a 5-foot-wide stair along the east wall. The stair takes 30 feet of movement to reach the upper floor, 15 feet above ground. The bell hangs over the upper floor's center; its rope reaches both floors. A lever beside the upper bell opens the shutters, not a secret door. Vale begins on the upper floor.

H5, stores: x60-80, y20-60. An intact 15-foot plank lies along the east wall; a cart and spare cord stand beside it. These provide tools for H1 and H3, not treasure. A 10-foot-wide gap in the southern exterior wall is another entrance from outside the keep.

The Last Watch at Hollow Keep - player map



Player map: use with the adventure's keyed location descriptions.

Scenes

Scene 1: A Voice in the Smithy

Runtime: 20 minutes. **Objective:** gather firsthand evidence. **Stakes:** Orren's trust and the borrowed watch sword.

READ-ALoud

You find Orren beside a cold forge, turning a bell-shaped scrap of charcoal between his fingers. The shop smells of iron and rain. Tamsin has laid a wrapped sword across the bench, next to a drawing of the keep. Do you ask Orren about the voice, unwrap the sword, or examine the drawing?

Encounter 1: What Orren Remembers

Participants: Orren and Tamsin; no hostile ghost here. Let each hero ask a question or examine an object. Orren freely shares three facts: he returned the stolen clapper, the captain's voice repeated "names, orders, stand-down," and his memory contains a courier entering the records room. Tamsin knows the site geometry and the broken bridge.

A patient listener gets one additional memory without rolling: three villagers escaped beneath the soldiers' shields. DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) recognizes Orren is ashamed of stealing, not inventing the story. Failure makes his delivery less convincing but removes no facts. If accused, he admits taking the clapper and asks the party to return the sword too. Tamsin agrees to lend it regardless of his embarrassment. The blade's inscription glows when its bearer says "I keep the road"; anyone testing that phrase, written on its scabbard, recognizes the visible magic. Identify can confirm its precise rules, but is not required to use it.

Tamsin offers to accompany the party as a noncombat helper. She has AC 12, hp 9, speed 30 feet, all six ability scores 10, initiative +0, all saving throws +0 and no skill or save proficiencies; no useful attacks. These are simplified homebrew support statistics. She can use Help, carry a document or work a mechanism. She withdraws to H5 if injured and never takes the party's decisive choice away. Orren stays at the smithy unless the players specifically ask him to join; even then he waits outside H1.

Success: clues, equipment and an optional helper are ready. **Fail-forward:** a strained conversation leaves Orren at home but supplies and all essential facts remain. **Next:** follow the east road to H1.

Scene 2: The Muster Court

Runtime: 20 minutes. **Objective:** enter the keep and learn whose duty is unfinished. **Stakes:** a safe crossing and first contact with Vale.

READ-ALoud

You find a narrow bridge with daylight showing through its missing boards. Wind whistles across the dry ditch. Beyond it, a stone tablet stands among fallen benches, and an open doorway leads beneath the bell tower. Do you test the bridge, follow the ditch around, or call to the tower?

Encounter 2: The Missing Roll Call

Crossing: show the gap before anyone steps on it. A character can use normal jumping rules for the 10-foot gap, secure a rope and climb, or take the southern detour. Anyone who steps onto the unsupported edge without a plan makes DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. On failure they fall 10 feet for 1d6 bludgeoning damage and can climb out by the southern slope; no rescue roll is required. The H5 plank can bridge the gap when fetched by another route. Mage Hand cannot carry it; a strong character can.

Discovery: the tablet lists "ANWEN - DORR - PELL" and "They held the west gate. All thirty-two villagers reached the river." Read this to anyone examining it; no History check is needed. Below it is an engraved watch signal: "One long bell: stand down." Give the Muster Tablet handout. If the tablet is overlooked, Tamsin points it out; if she is absent, the same names and signal are on the H3 dispatch's reverse.

Contact: calling up to the tower brings Vale to its upper opening. He asks, "Who relieves us?" He answers from the opening and stays on the upper floor during this exchange. A respectful explanation earns access to the records room without interference. A lie about commanding the garrison gets the reply "Show the seal" and the same lead. Insults make him warn the party to leave; they do not start combat unless someone attacks or tries to ring the bell as a prank. If hostility begins, carry his location and resources into Encounter 4; the documents remain available.

Success: the heroes know the names and signal and can explore. **Fail-forward:** a fall costs hp; a bad conversation costs goodwill, not access. **Next:** H3 holds the proof, while H5 offers equipment. Going straight to H4 is allowed.

Scene 3: The Undelivered Order

Runtime: 25 minutes. **Objective:** obtain the dispatch and interpret it. **Stakes:** convincing evidence and an honest account of the captain's abandonment.

READ-ALoud

You step into a room smelling of dust and damp leather. A fallen rack pins a courier's satchel against the floor. On the desk, a loose wax seal shows a sun split by a narrow line. Do you brace the rack, reach for the satchel, or inspect the seal?

Arrival variant: if using the shorter preparation that removes the rack obstacle, use this complete opener

instead: "You enter a room smelling of dust and damp leather. A courier's satchel lies open on the desk beside a loose wax seal. A narrow line splits the sun stamped into the wax. Do you inspect the satchel or examine the seal?"

Encounter 3: Proof Beneath the Rack

Setup: the 200-pound rack is wedged at an angle, leaving room for hands and tools. The dispatch lies inside the satchel. A character with the H5 plank can lever it up while another extracts the bag without a check. Two characters can instead lift together: one DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check with advantage from Help. On failure the rack drops and the lifter takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage; the leather strap tears, exposing the dispatch, which can then be drawn out with no further roll. The rack does not destroy the document. Mage Hand can pull the exposed dispatch, or a careful blade can cut the bag open through the gap, avoiding the lifting problem entirely.

Give the Dispatch handout. Its front authorizes withdrawal and records the successful evacuation. Its reverse repeats the three soldiers' names and the long-bell signal. The officer's seal matches the tower carving, and a second signed copy sits in the desk drawer: a separate recovery route if the bag is abandoned. Both are available to deliberate inspection without a roll.

Tamsin asks whether to tell Vale the whole truth: his commander tried to recall him, but no one came back to look for the trapped courier. Let the party choose how to frame this. A DC 12 Intelligence (History) check dates the order precisely; failure changes no usable conclusion. Vale can read the original and recognizes the seal without a persuasion gate.

Success: the heroes have lawful relief and the evidence of the soldiers' success. **Fail-forward:** the damaged bag still yields the order; the second copy remains. **Next:** take the evidence to H4. If they previously provoked Vale, initiative can continue while a runner carries it upstairs.

Scene 4: Until Relieved

Runtime: 40 minutes. **Objective:** end the haunting. **Stakes:** an angry ghost, a reachable bell and whether the truth is spoken.

Presentation: the following opener assumes arrival on the upper landing with Vale visible. For characters remaining downstairs, instead say: "You hear a rope tap against the stair rail. A pale light spills down the steps, and a voice above you says, 'Report.' The bell rope hangs within reach. Do you answer, climb the stairs or examine the rope?" If Vale is possessing someone, use the host-specific arrival variant below.

READ-ALoud

You hear the bell's rope tap against the stair rail. Pale light falls through broken shutters onto a soldier whose boots hover above the floor. His tabard bears the split sun. "Report," he says, holding out an empty hand. Do you present the dispatch, speak the soldiers' names, or approach the bell rope?

Arrival variant: if Vale is elsewhere, move the description to his actual position. If he is already attacking, replace his spoken line with "Keep your post!" If he is possessing someone, omit the visible soldier and describe the actual host speaking those words in Vale's voice; the ghost remains inside that host. Do not restore his spent possession or lost hp.

Encounter 4: The Captain's Last Order

Opposition: one oathbound ghost, Vale. He begins on H4's upper floor; the default peaceful approach brings the heroes to the upper landing using the 30-foot stair route. Heroes who stop downstairs, or who are already in initiative, retain their actual positions instead. He does not attack peaceful visitors. If the party presents evidence, resolve conversation before initiative. Run rounds only once someone attacks, attempts possession, or needs simultaneous actions under pressure.

Release the oath (homebrew): three concrete acts, in any order except that the bell must be last, end the haunting without a check. First, read or show the genuine withdrawal order within 30 feet of Vale while he can hear or see it; this takes an action in combat. Second, speak Anwen, Dorr and Pell's names and explain that all thirty-two villagers escaped; this takes another action. Third, pull the rope to give one sustained bell note, an action from either floor of H4. When those acts are complete, Vale releases any host and fades permanently. Damage does not erase progress. A forged order may distract him on DC 13 Charisma (Deception), buying one round without an attack, but cannot fulfill the proof requirement.

The bell is audible and useful even if Vale is outside H4. He must be within the keep's footprint to hear it for this procedure. If he is turned and flees beyond the walls, the party can wait for him to return after the effect ends; fulfilled evidence steps remain fulfilled. Silence blocks reading and ringing inside its area but does not erase evidence he already accepted. Protection from Evil and Good prevents his possession of its protected target. A successful Turn Undead immediately ends possession: Vale reappears as described in Creature Reference, then follows the normal turned movement and action restrictions. Forced flight from turning may take him beyond the keep; his boundary limit applies only to voluntary pursuit.

Hostile tactics: Vale attempts possession once, choosing a nearby unprotected character or Tamsin. If that attempt fails, or after he emerges on a later turn, he uses Withering Touch against armed intruders; he cannot attack while

possessing a host. He passes through walls to intercept anyone carrying away the bell rope, but does not hide inside solid stone to prevent every response. He offers one warning before his first attack. A character using an action to show a genuine document pauses his attacks until the start of that character's next turn, once per document, giving a runner time to act. He never attacks an unconscious creature.

Combat resolution: reducing Vale to 0 hp disperses him permanently and releases a host. A host is not the ghost's hp pool. Ordinary weapons deal half their normal bludgeoning, piercing or slashing damage to the ghost; magical versions bypass that resistance. The watch sword lets one martial character strike normally, while others can deliver evidence, work the bell, protect companions or use damaging spells. Radiant and force damage are not resisted.

Success: the haunting ends through release or destruction. **Fail-forward:** a retreat out the southern gap is always available. Vale stops at the keep's boundary and releases a fleeing host there; he resumes his watch with any previously accepted evidence remembered. The party may return with a different plan. **Next:** tell Orren what happened and settle the sword's ownership under Items and Resolution Paths. On peaceful release, Vale grants the sword as his final words before fading; no conversation after his disappearance is required.

NPCs

NPC: Tamsin Pike

An adult apprentice smith with a long braid and a tool roll wrapped so it will not rattle. She wants Orren safe and fears being left with a shop she is not ready to run. "I brought tools. Someone always needs tools." She offers repairs, the map and an extra pair of hands. She knows the bridge, not the ghost's hidden history. Trust makes her practical and brave; pressure makes her demand a clear task. Betrayal ends her help after she reaches safety. She will not volunteer as a possession target.

NPC: Orren Pike

A broad-shouldered smith who keeps rubbing soot off already-clean hands. He wants to make restitution and fears the captain remembering his face. "I thought a dead keep had no owner." He offers the sword and remembered orders. He hides nothing once asked directly about the clapper. Compassion gets the clearest account; threats make him stammer without withholding clues. If the party sells the sword without permission, he refuses future business.

NPC: Captain Edrin Vale

A stern ghost in old armor, with a trimmed beard and an intact human face. He wants lawful relief and proof his soldiers were not wasted. His fear is abandoning the village. "Who relieves us?" is a real question. He can read the seal, identify his soldiers and grant the sword to the party. He remembers the battle but not its outcome. Respect gets conversation, proof changes his mind, and violence makes him treat visitors as attackers. He does not know the dispatch arrived.

Creature Reference

Oathbound Ghost: Captain Vale

Homebrew variant of the 2014 ghost, designed for this mystery; no certified CR. Medium undead; lawful neutral. AC 11; hp 54; speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover). STR 7 (-2), DEX 13 (+1), CON 10 (+0), INT 12 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 17 (+3). Wisdom saves +4; Perception +4; passive Perception 14; darkvision 60 ft.; Common and Dwarvish.

Resistances: acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks.

Immunities: cold, necrotic, poison damage; charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone and restrained conditions.

Incorporeal Movement: move through creatures and objects as difficult terrain. Ending a turn inside an object deals 1d10 force damage to Vale. He has no separate Etherealness action in this variant.

Withering Touch (action): melee spell attack +5, reach 5 ft., one creature; 3d6+3 necrotic damage. One attack per action; no Multiattack, legendary actions or damaging aura.

Possession (action; once this session): one humanoid Vale can see within 5 feet makes DC 13 Charisma saving throw. On success nothing happens. On failure Vale disappears into the host; remove his token, retaining his hp. The host stays aware and chooses its own actions but must remain at or move toward a watch post designated by Vale within 30 feet. It cannot attack or cast spells; it can Dodge, Help, speak and interact with objects. It repeats the save at the end of each turn, ending possession on success. An ally within 5 feet may use an action to call the host's own name and grant advantage on its next repeat save before that ally's next turn. These restrictions replace the usual ghost's complete control and are homebrew.

During possession attacks against the host damage only the host. Vale cannot be targeted except by Turn Undead or an effect that specifically ends possession. Possession also ends after one minute, when the host reaches 0 hp, when successfully turned, when a relevant spell ends it, when the host crosses the keep's boundary, or when the oath-release procedure succeeds. Vale reappears in the nearest unoccupied space within 5 feet of the host, except when the oath releases him permanently. While possessing a host, Vale has no independent movement, actions, bonus actions or reactions; only the host takes its restricted turns. Keep

Vale in initiative. At the start of his own turn he may voluntarily end possession without an action, reappear as above, and then move and act normally that turn. He cannot voluntarily emerge during another creature's turn. He never uses the host's attacks or gains an additional turn.

This variant has no Horrifying Visage or magical aging.

Scaling: three heroes: 40 hp and touch damage 2d6+3. Five heroes: 70 hp; all other abilities unchanged. More hp makes the fight longer, not the mystery harder. Do not add a second ghost; every clue refers to this captain.

Items

Item: Watch Sword

An old longsword with a split-sun pommel. It is a magical weapon with no attack or damage bonus and no attunement requirement. Use normal longsword proficiency, Strength attack and damage, 1d8 slashing one-handed or 1d10 two-handed. Its attacks count as magical. Speaking "I keep the road" makes its inscription glow dimly; the glow has no lighting radius or additional effect. It has no charges or recovery requirement. This original magic item is homebrew.

Orren holds it in trust for the keep. Vale can grant it to the heroes while being peacefully released. If Vale is destroyed, the sword's ownership remains with the keep; the road wardens allow the party to borrow it for future local rescue work, but not sell it.

Resolution Paths

Lawful relief: the evidence and bell release Vale. He thanks each soldier by name, gives the watch sword to the party, and asks that the tablet be kept clear of ivy. Orren sleeps peacefully. Pay 80 gp total, or 20 gp each for four heroes.

Victory by force: Vale is dispersed and the haunting ends. Pay the same 80 gp. The sword remains a loan. The heroes can still repair the neglected memorial and tell the village the true history; a battle does not erase those opportunities.

Temporary retreat: the road wardens postpone payment. Orren remains free, Vale retains accepted evidence, and no new victim is secretly taken while the party regroups. Leaving the matter entirely unresolved closes the road after dark.

Rewards and Follow-Up

Each hero earns 400 XP for ending the haunting, by either method, as a flat award instead of additional monster XP. For milestone play, record one completed adventure. Return the lantern, rope and tool roll. No coins or saleable treasure are hidden in the records room; the old documents belong to the village archive.

A restored keep can become a road shelter, with Tamsin designing its new bell frame. The heroes may propose that work without accepting another combat quest. A note in the

dispatch refers to Blackwater's grain road and Briar Quarry's stone supply, connecting the book's sites without requiring an order of play.

Rules and Credits

Use 2014 fifth-edition rules. The oathbound ghost is an explicitly altered creature with a shorter, less restrictive possession effect and no magical aging; use its complete block instead of combining it with a standard ghost. Underlying rules and ghost traits derive from the System Reference Document 5.1 by Wizards of the Coast LLC, <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>. Original story, magic item and release procedure are homebrew. This is not an official Wizards of the Coast product. Player maps show physical rooms without document contents or ghost positions.

Handouts

Handout: The Muster Tablet

Visibility: player-safe. Give after examining H2.

ANWEN - DORR - PELL

They held the west gate. All thirty-two villagers reached the river.

WATCH SIGNAL: one long bell, stand down.

Handout: The Undelivered Dispatch

Visibility: player-safe. Give after recovering either copy in H3.

Captain Vale,

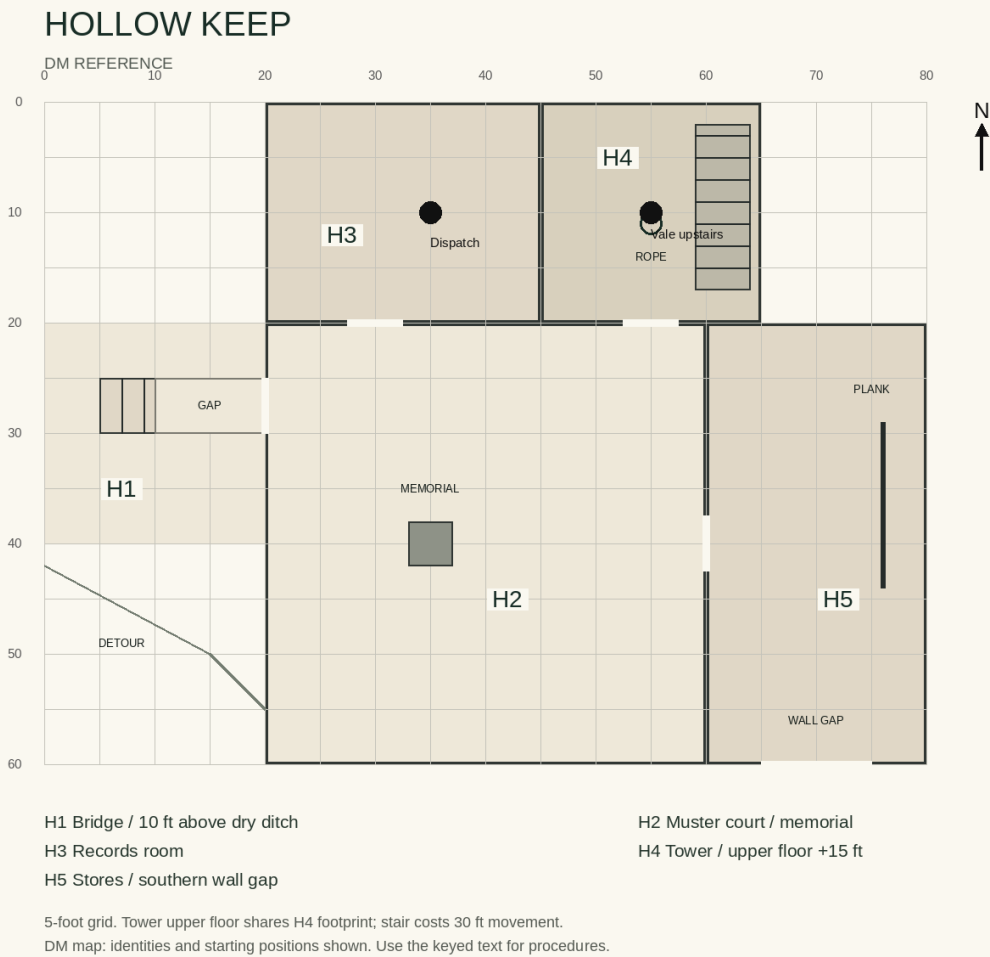
The evacuation is complete. All thirty-two villagers are across the river.
Withdraw your watch. These orders release you from the west gate;
hold no longer for our return.

Commander Ilyra Senn

[The wax bears a sun split by a narrow line.]

Reverse: Anwen, Dorr, Pell. Stand-down signal: one long bell. Supply
roads: Blackwater grain; Briar Quarry stone.

The Last Watch at Hollow Keep - DM map



Map key: DM reference. Use the keyed location descriptions in the adventure. Reveal discoveries during play.

The Statues in Briar Quarry



Dungeon Master's edition

Renn brings the party a lunch pail with its owner's name scratched into the lid: EMMET. He offers to lead them to the quarry, a half-hour walk north. The quarry owners have placed 100 gp with him: 30 gp for each worker safely returned and 40 gp for a quarry that can reopen without exposing workers to the basilisk. Garrick cannot revoke this payment to hide his wrongdoing.

OPENING READ-ALoud

You hear a lunch pail rattle as an old man puts it on the table. Inside are an untouched apple and two sandwiches wrapped in cloth. "Emmet never leaves the crusts," he says. Pale dust coats his boots, and a length of hauling rope is knotted around his wrist. "He's still down there. Standing up. But he isn't moving." Do you ask Renn what he saw, or gather what you need for the quarry?

Overview

Two quarry workers stand motionless among the cut stone, their tools still beside them. A basilisk has emerged from a newly opened chamber. Rescue the workers, learn to manage its gaze, and choose what happens to the creature and its nest.

Party: four level-4 characters with full resources. **Rules:** D&D 5e, 2014; capture, quarry machinery and restoration salve use labeled homebrew procedures. **Audience:** ages 10-12 and older; unsettling discovery and tactical rescue, no graphic injury. **Length:** about two hours. **Preparation:** read the basilisk gaze carefully, put out the Q-key map and four salve tokens, and explain how averting eyes changes attacks before initiative. Play in daylight so the mirror has a real use.

DM Introduction

Foreman Garrick opened a chamber beneath Briar Quarry despite workers reporting unusual claw marks. A basilisk nesting inside emerged and petrified Lysa and Emmet. Garrick concealed the first disappearance to avoid closing the quarry; the second made silence impossible. The creature is defending its nest and hunting small animals, not carrying out a villain's plan. Two eggs remain in the chamber.

Old Renn escaped by looking down and following a hauling rope. He recognizes the statues as his coworkers and knows their families are waiting. Sella, a travelling monster keeper, arrived with four doses of stonewake salve, a treatment for this basilisk's victims. She will lend them immediately and help capture or relocate the basilisk, but she would like the eggs in return for her work. The party can refuse; she will not withhold emergency medicine.

The heroes can uncover Garrick's lie, prepare screens and a mirror, rescue the workers and resolve the basilisk. Fighting, trapping, relocating and withdrawing after rescue all have supported consequences. Killing the basilisk does not automatically restore petrified creatures; the salve does that. If no one helps, the quarry stays closed, the workers remain petrified and the basilisk expands its hunting territory toward the quarry road.

Hook

Renn brings the party a lunch pail with its owner's name scratched into the lid: EMMET. He offers to lead them to the quarry, a half-hour walk north. The quarry owners have placed 100 gp with him: 30 gp for each worker safely returned and 40 gp for a quarry that can reopen without exposing workers to the basilisk. Garrick cannot revoke this payment to hide his wrongdoing.

Stakes

Two people need restoration and extraction. A gaze can temporarily remove a hero from action; four salve doses are available from the start, and Sella can administer one as an action. Mark used doses openly. If all four are spent before everyone is restored, Sella's two teamsters bring eight additional doses from her medicine store at dawn without a fee, even if Sella herself is petrified. Safely extracted victims can then be restored; statues still beside an active basilisk must first be reached behind cover or after the threat is contained. Eight doses cover the maximum five heroes, two workers and Sella; Renn and Garrick stay out of the quarry. A petrified character's player may run Sella's support actions until restored.

Factions

Workers: Renn speaks for the crew. Their goals are rescuing Lysa and Emmet and getting honest safety decisions. They lend tools and do not demand a monster kill.

Quarry management: Garrick wants production and his job. The absent owners have authorized the reward and expect a report. His lie can cost him his position; admitting it and paying for a safer boundary may preserve it.

Sella's menagerie: Sella wants a living specimen and promises proper containment. She has one empty cage and an isolated fenced limestone hollow available a mile away. She prefers to raise the eggs but accepts leaving them with their parent.

Encounter Matrix

SCENE / ENCOUNTER / MINUTES	OBJECTIVE	PRESSURE	TRANSITION
1. The Man Who Kept Digging (20 min)	Learn the danger; choose tools	Garrick minimizes what happened	Upper rim
2. A Path Without Looking (20 min)	Rig safe approaches	Screens require deliberate positioning	Quarry floor
3. Bring Them Back (25 min)	Restore and extract two workers	Noise can draw the basilisk	Creature or retreat
4. The Nest Beyond the Stones (40 min)	Resolve the basilisk and eggs	Gaze, bite and conflicting priorities	Worker camp

Use 5 minutes for the opening and 10 for the return. A direct capture or successful stealth rescue may take 85-100 minutes. The involved route adds evidence comparison, terrain preparation, extraction and a confrontation. If time runs short, let Sella finish the screen setup while the heroes choose how to approach the victims; do not add a second basilisk to extend play.

Locations

The site is 100 feet east-west by 80 feet north-south. Coordinates begin at the northwest corner. North points toward the worker camp. All quarry floor areas are brightly lit during this adventure; walls cast narrow shadows that do not obscure the planned mirror approach.

Q1, rim and camp: x0-100, y0-20; elevation 20 feet above the floor. Supplies and NPCs wait here. A 10-foot-wide ramp within the western Q2 strip descends south over 60 feet of travel. The remaining rim edges are vertical, with no loose collapse hazard.

Q2, ramp: x0-20, y20-80; slope from north to south, reaching floor level at its southern end. A hauling rope runs along its inner edge. A character who keeps one hand on it can follow the route while averting their eyes without a check. The ramp joins the floor at (20,75). Ordinary climbing or flight can bypass it.

Q3, crane yard: x20-50, y20-50; quarry floor. A crane centered at (35,30) can lift loads within 15 feet. Lysa's statue stands at (30,35). A trolley with a removable steel mirror starts at (35,45). A 10-foot-wide path along x20-30 connects the southern ramp exit north to the yard.

Q4, cutting floor: x50-80, y40-80; floor level. Emmet stands at (65,60). A stack of 5-foot-high stone blocks at x50-60, y65-75 grants total cover when interposed. Canvas screens hang along x40 and x60 between y20 and y50; each is an opaque 30-foot-long, 8-foot-high barrier in three 10-foot panels. Walk around the south ends to reach Emmet. The screen at x40 lies within the crane yard but leaves its western work area accessible.

Q5, cage bay: x80-100, y40-60; floor level. Sella's empty 10-foot-square iron transport cage sits at (85,45), its west-facing door open. The cage has wheels, an opaque cover and a latch reachable from outside. The 10-foot-wide approach from Q4 has no steps. The basilisk fits inside without squeezing.

Q6, nest chamber: x80-100, y60-80; floor level, 10-foot-high ceiling. A 10-foot-wide west opening connects to Q4. Two eggs rest in sand at (90,70), beyond view from the rim. At the first floor approach the basilisk rests in Q6 behind the southern jamb, out of sight from the quarry floor; it approaches the opening if noise draws it out. No second creature is present.

Player map: use with the adventure's keyed location descriptions.



Scenes

Scene 1: The Man Who Kept Digging

Runtime: 20 minutes. **Objective:** understand petrification and choose equipment. **Stakes:** the crew's trust and a fair plan for the creature.

READ-ALoud

You reach a row of silent stonecutters' tents. Dust rasps under your boots. A man in a clean waistcoat says the workers have merely wandered off, while Renn points at two names on a work board. Beside a folded canvas cover, a woman counts four small jars onto a cloth. Do you challenge the foreman, speak to the keeper, or inspect the board?

Encounter 1: Two Names, One Lie

Participants: Renn, Garrick and Sella; no monster at the camp. The board lists Lysa absent yesterday and Emmet absent today. Garrick claims they left together. Anyone comparing his account with the board notices the contradiction automatically. If pressed, he admits opening the chamber after the first warning. DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) gets him to promise a public apology now; failure postpones that decision until the workers return, without withholding directions or payment.

Renn explains that he looked at his boots and followed the rope after seeing Emmet stiffen. Sella identifies a basilisk from the eight-footed tracks Renn traced in the dust. She explains its gaze, averting eyes and using an opaque barrier; give the Keeper's Instructions handout. No skill check gates these instructions. A DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check adds that this animal normally stays close to its nest, suggesting relocation; on failure Sella supplies that fact when nesting comes up.

Available loans: four salve doses, 50 feet of rope, two crowbars, two 10-foot poles, the crane, trolley, detachable steel mirror and covered cage. The party selects carriers and agrees who will restore a petrified companion. Sella offers to handle one support task per round, not to command the rescue. She asks for the eggs if they capture the creature. Renn objects to splitting a family; the players may negotiate now or decide after seeing the nest.

Success: everyone understands the gaze and knows where the statues stand. **Fail-forward:** Garrick remains defensive, but supplies, medicine and access are unchanged. **Next:** descend Q2 or devise another entry into Q3.

Scene 2: A Path Without Looking

Runtime: 20 minutes. **Objective:** arrange lines of sight before confronting the creature. **Stakes:** safe movement and a useful mirror position.

READ-ALoud

You stand above pale quarry walls. Canvas flaps between tall posts below, and a crane chain clinks beside a motionless worker. Farther across the cut stone, another figure shields his face with one rigid arm. A hauling rope follows the western ramp. Do you follow the rope, move a screen, or study a route from above?

Encounter 2: Screens and Signals

Setup: the basilisk is still in Q6. Show the players the map and explain that seeing around an opaque screen requires moving past its edge. The screens are intact; they block the creature's sight as well as the heroes'. Averting eyes is declared at the start of a character's turn, before a gaze save. A character doing so cannot see the basilisk that turn: attacks against it usually have disadvantage, and its attacks against that character usually have advantage. Obstacles still provide their normal protection.

Preparation procedure (homebrew): each 10-foot screen panel can be unhooked with one action by a character at its end, then carried by two people at half speed and planted with one action. A carried panel gives total cover between creatures on opposite sides, but has AC 10 and 5 hp; a bite can tear it. A fallen panel stops providing cover. A pole can check the path without looking; do not require an Acrobatics roll on the broad ramp. A deliberately tied guide rope lets one character lead another using normal movement.

The trolley moves 15 feet per action when pushed by one character or 30 feet by two who each spend an action; it holds 1,500 pounds. It can carry both 600-pound statues and the 20-pound mirror within its 1,500-pound limit, although loaded statues block the mirror from being aimed until one is unloaded. Its brakes keep it still on the ramp without a check. Moving it silently needs DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) once; failure makes a wheel squeal. This alerts the basilisk, which moves to Q6's opening on its next turn if rounds are running, or after the party's current declared preparation if not. Announce claws on stone before presenting a gaze. A player can immediately choose to avert eyes when initiative begins unless surprised; this telegraphed approach does not surprise them.

Success: the party establishes routes and cover, retaining all actual placements. **Fail-forward:** noise advances the basilisk to its doorway; no instant petrification occurs outside the normal gaze rules. **Next:** rescue the workers in Encounter 3. If the creature advances further, Encounters 3 and 4 run together on the same initiative.

Scene 3: Bring Them Back

Runtime: 25 minutes. **Objective:** recover Lysa and Emmet. **Stakes:** salve supply and exposure while helping someone else.

READ-ALoud

You reach a worker frozen beside the crane, one stone hand still gripping a hammer. The metal is cold; fine dust fills the folds of the worker's apron. Across the floor, the other statue stands beyond the canvas. Do you restore the nearer worker here, move them behind cover, or secure a route to the second?

Arrival variant: if approaching Emmet first, describe his raised arm and the empty strap where his pail once hung instead of the hammer and crane. Renn keeps the pail at camp after showing it in the Hook. If the creature is already visible, add its actual position without claiming the area is quiet.

Encounter 3: Six Hundred Pounds of Friend

Participants: two petrified workers; the single basilisk may join as described in Encounter 4. Touching either statue confirms stone all the way through. Lysa has 9 hp and Emmet 11; both have AC 10, speed 30 feet when restored, all six ability scores 10, initiative +0, all saving throws +0 and no skill or save proficiencies. They use Dodge or Help and do not attack in this adventure. Petrification grants the normal damage resistance, and neither has taken damage. Do not require attacks to test them. Restoring someone in an exposed position works, but exposes the restored person to later gazes.

Restoration: one action within 5 feet applies a salve dose and ends petrification caused by this basilisk. The worker is conscious, with their current remaining hp, AC 10 and speed 30 feet; restoration does not heal damage suffered as a statue. Tell them to avert their eyes and move behind a screen; they follow directions and Dodge if waiting. A character can apply salve to a restrained person beginning to petrify; it ends that gaze effect and prevents its follow-up save, but gives no protection from a later gaze. Lesser Restoration does not end petrification under these rules; Greater Restoration does.

Moving stone: each worker weighs 600 pounds while petrified. Use ordinary lifting limits for carried movement. Two people can sling Lysa with the crane's hanging straps without a check, then one action at the crank lifts her onto the adjacent trolley. The crane reaches Lysa, not Emmet. To load Emmet without restoring him first, bring the trolley next to him, use the two crowbars as levers and spend two characters' actions together; no check is needed. The prepared trolley can hold both statues safely. A worker who falls 10 feet takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage, halved by petrification resistance; there is no instant-shattering rule.

Discovery: Lysa confirms Garrick ignored the claw marks. Emmet saw two eggs before the creature emerged. Both volunteer those facts once safe. If restored later, their testimony waits; the tracks and nest still reveal the same conclusions. They wait behind cover while the rescue continues.

Success: mark each worker restored and safely outside the quarry independently. **Fail-forward:** if a hero is petrified, use a salve token or let that player operate Sella while companions extract them. Retreat with statues is a valid rescue in progress. **Next:** decide whether to resolve the

basilisk now or return after escorting the workers. Going to the nest triggers Encounter 4 if it has not already begun.

Scene 4: The Nest Beyond the Stones

Runtime: 40 minutes. **Objective:** secure the quarry and decide the nest's future. **Stakes:** the basilisk's gaze and the workers' livelihood.

READ-ALoud

You hear claws scrape against limestone. A low, many-legged shape moves near the eastern opening, its eyes catching the daylight. Beyond it, a mound of sand lies inside the chamber. The covered cage stands open a few paces to the north. Do you draw the creature toward the cage, ready the mirror, or keep your distance behind the screen?

Arrival variant: if the basilisk has already moved, use its current position. Mention the eggs only when someone can actually see into Q6. If it was killed, captured or petrified during the rescue, omit the moving-creature narration, skip initiative and resolve the nest decision from its actual location.

Encounter 4: The Eyes in the Cut Stone

Opposition: one basilisk with its existing hp. If undisturbed it starts at Q6's doorway; heroes retain their chosen positions. It bites a visible creature within reach, otherwise moves toward the closest visible intruder within 30 feet of the nest opening. It does not chase anyone past Q2's southern ramp entrance unless an egg is being carried away. If no intruder or bait is visible, it returns to Q6. At 15 hp or fewer it withdraws into Q6 and defends the eggs rather than charging into a prepared line of fire.

Use normal initiative and the gaze procedure in Creature Reference. Tell players before their turns when they are within 30 feet and can see the basilisk. Screens and stone blocks prevent mutual sight; simply closing one's eyes avoids the gaze but makes ordinary combat more difficult. Saving throw failures visibly stiffen a limb before full petrification, giving allies a round to act.

Mirror (homebrew handling of the 2014 reflection rule): a character adjacent to the trolley can use an action to aim its polished mirror at a basilisk within 30 feet in bright light with an unobstructed line between them. The handler may avert their own eyes while aiming if an ally who can see the basilisk spends an action directing them; otherwise the handler must see it. On the basilisk's next turn it targets its reflection, making the normal DC 12 Constitution save and follow-up if necessary. During that turn it does not force other creatures to save against its gaze, though it can still bite. Turning it to stone stops the threat without killing it; restoring it later restarts the danger. The mirror is an option, not a required trick.

Capture (homebrew): Sella supplies one sack of fresh meat. Placing it at the cage's far wall takes an action. If no visible enemy is within 10 feet of the basilisk, it follows visible or freshly placed bait toward the cage; otherwise it continues defending itself. It moves up to 20 feet along the open route each turn, without Dashing. On the first turn it can end its

movement wholly inside the cage, it uses its action to eat. It continues eating for three turns unless attacked, allowing the heroes to latch and cover the cage. An action at the outside latch shuts the door; another action pulls the opaque cover into place. An uncovered cage contains the body but not the gaze. The iron cage has AC 19, 80 hp, poison and psychic immunity; no bars are wide enough for the creature. Once covered and fed, it settles and stops attacking. If attacked through the bars or uncovered, it resumes biting the cage. Sella and her two noncombat teamsters transport a properly covered cage after the party withdraws; they do not enter an active encounter.

Relocation: moving the covered cage and both eggs to Sella's isolated hollow ends the threat here without selling the eggs. She agrees if the party helps her settle the animal; resolve that offscreen after the session. If allowed to keep the eggs, she promises to raise them behind covered pens. Renn favors keeping parent and eggs together. The players can insist on either humane arrangement without a social roll; Sella states that eggs cannot safely remain beside an operating quarry.

Success: a dead, securely captured, relocated or petrified basilisk makes the quarry safe once the eggs are also moved to Sella's care. **Fail-forward:** retreat up Q2 while leaving eggs behind ends pursuit. Workers already rescued stay rescued. If the basilisk is petrified, Sella can transport it as cargo without spending salve. **Next:** resolve payment and Garrick's accountability at Q1.

NPCs

NPC: Old Renn

A wiry stonecutter with chalk-white eyebrows and an excellent memory for lunches. He wants both coworkers home and fears their families receiving excuses. "Stone doesn't forget a careless cut." He offers maps, the hauling rope route and the reward purse. He knows who disappeared when and hides nothing useful. Respect gets steady assistance; threats make him insist on witnesses. If betrayed, he tells the workers precisely what happened. He will wait at the rim with blankets rather than fight the basilisk.

NPC: Sella Marr

An adult keeper in a battered leather coat, with small medicine jars slotted into a belt. She wants a live specimen and a reputation for competence. She fears an escaped animal hurting someone. "First cover the eyes. Then argue about the price." She provides the salve, cage and animal knowledge. She openly wants the eggs; there is no secret buyer. Practical help wins flexibility, reckless handling makes her withdraw to Q1, and cruelty ends her voluntary capture assistance. She still supplies emergency salve. In danger: AC 12, hp 16, speed 30 feet; all six ability scores 10, initiative +0, all saving throws +0, no skill or save proficiencies. She uses Dodge, Help, a mechanism or salve, never an attack. These are simplified homebrew support statistics.

NPC: Garrick Vale

A foreman with clean cuffs and quarry dust on only one boot. He wants to keep his job and fears the owners hearing he ignored a warning. "We had a schedule" is his first excuse. He offers payroll records and access to the tools. He knows the chamber was newly opened and hides the earlier disappearance. Evidence makes him admit it; threats without evidence make him defensive. If the heroes protect his lie, Lysa tells the crew herself. His surname is common in the valley; he is not related to Hollow Keep's captain.

Creature Reference

Basilisk

Medium monstrosity; unaligned. AC 15; hp 52; speed 20 ft. STR 16 (+3), DEX 8 (-1), CON 15 (+2), INT 2 (-4), WIS 8 (-1), CHA 7 (-2). Darkvision 60 ft.; passive Perception 9; no languages, additional saves, resistances or immunities. CR 3 (700 XP).

Petrifying Gaze: if a creature starts its turn within 30 feet and it and the basilisk can see each other, the basilisk can force a DC 12 Constitution save unless incapacitated. Failure restrains the target as it starts turning to stone. Repeat the save at the end of that target's next turn; success ends the effect, failure petrifies it until Greater Restoration or other appropriate magic frees it. Leaving range after the first failure does not cancel the follow-up save.

A creature not surprised can avert its eyes at the start of its turn to avoid the initial save. It cannot see the basilisk until the start of its next turn. Looking at it during that time immediately triggers the save. In bright light a basilisk that sees its reflection within 30 feet mistakes it for a rival and targets itself; the encounter's mirror procedure specifies timing for this table.

Bite (action): melee weapon attack +5, reach 5 ft., one target; 2d6+3 piercing plus 2d6 poison. One bite each turn, no Multiattack. Gaze is not an action and does not replace the bite except as the mirror procedure states for other gaze targets.

Scaling: three heroes: 40 hp, bite poison reduced to 1d6. Five heroes: 65 hp, normal bite. These are homebrew adjustments, not new CR calculations. Keep the same gaze and four initial salve doses. If a hero is immobilized, describe available cover and medicine; do not secretly waive a rolled result.

Items

Item: Stonewake Salve

Homebrew consumable supplied in four labeled jars. An action within 5 feet applies one complete jar to a creature petrified, or restrained while beginning to petrify, by this adventure's basilisk. The affected creature returns to its previous organic state and the gaze effect ends; hp are unchanged. It restores worn and carried equipment transformed with the creature. It heals no wounds, gives no immunity and cannot restore a shattered or dead victim. No attunement, check or charge recovery; one jar is one use. Sella owns unused doses and lends them without a fee. If the initial four are exhausted, her teamsters deliver the eight-dose emergency reserve at dawn as described in Stakes. The reserve is only for surviving victims of this incident, not general loot.

Resolution Paths

Both workers and safe quarry: 100 gp total, 25 gp each for four heroes. Killing, relocation, capture and transporting a petrified basilisk qualify equally if the eggs are removed from the worksite.

Workers only: 30 gp per worker safely returned, to a maximum 60 gp; the quarry stays closed. A statue delivered safely to camp is not yet a restored worker for payment; the dawn reserve completes that objective without another expedition.

Quarry only: 40 gp when the animal and eggs are secured, even if one or both workers await restoration. Later rescue payments bring the total up to 100 gp; never pay the safety component twice.

Accountability: if Lysa or the party reports Garrick's lie, the crew votes to suspend him pending the owners' inquiry. If he admits it voluntarily and funds a secure boundary, Renn supports retaining him under supervision. This decision changes management, not the heroes' reward.

Rewards and Follow-Up

Each hero earns a cumulative adventure award: 350 XP if the quarry is secured and both workers restored; 250 XP if the quarry is secured but zero or one worker restored; 150 XP if at least one worker is restored while the threat remains; otherwise 0 XP. If later progress improves the outcome, award only the difference from XP already earned here, to a maximum of 350 XP each. These are alternative flat adventure awards, not added monster XP. For milestone play record a completed adventure once all objectives are resolved. Supplies and equipment are loans; unused salve returns to Sella. Eggs are living creatures, not an additional cash reward.

A recovered Lysa offers to carve a sign for the heroes' lodgings. Emmet insists they share a proper lunch. The owners can commission stone for a repaired Hollow Keep or Blackwater Mill if those sites need it; those connections honor previous outcomes without making this session depend on either adventure.

Rules and Credits

Use 2014 fifth-edition rules. Basilisk statistics and underlying rules derive from the System Reference Document 5.1 by Wizards of the Coast LLC, <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>. The salve, machinery, capture behavior, mirror timing and scaling are original homebrew. Do not apply a later edition's cone-gaze rules to this adventure. This is not an official Wizards of the Coast product. Player maps omit eggs, creature positions and the workers' identities until discovered.

Handouts

Handout: The Keeper's Instructions

Visibility: player-safe. Give before entering the quarry.

A basilisk's eyes can turn you to stone. Keep an opaque barrier between you and it, or avert your eyes at the start of your turn, before the gaze save. Looking away makes fighting harder. If a limb stiffens, call for help: a jar of stonewake salve can stop the change. Killing the creature does not restore its victims.

The polished mirror may turn its gaze back on itself in daylight. A covered cage can contain it. Keep hands clear of its mouth even when its eyes are hidden.

Handout: Quarry Work Board

Visibility: player-safe. Give when the camp board is examined.

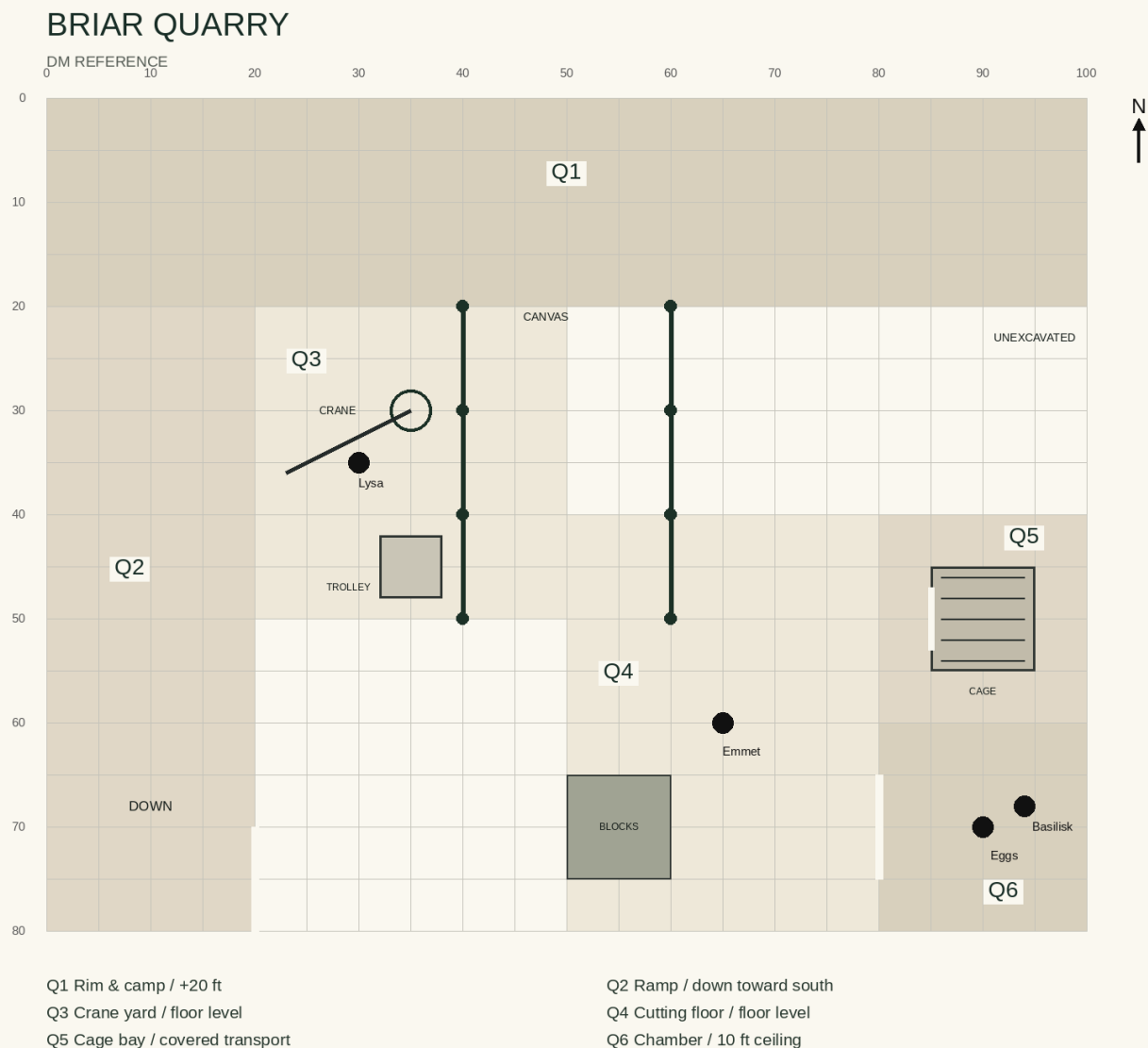
Yesterday: Lysa - lower cut, absent at close.

Today: Emmet - lower cut, absent at meal bell.

Renn - hauling crew, returned without tools.

STOP WORK UNTIL THE MISSING ARE FOUND.

The Statues in Briar Quarry - DM map



Map key: DM reference. Use the keyed location descriptions in the adventure. Reveal discoveries during play.

Session Notes

Decisions, discoveries, and the next adventure.

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