

Preamble

Whether it was played or not, this adventure is a follow up to a previous adventure that appeared in *Greyhawk Online's* free online magazine *Oerth Journal* #30 titled "Who Watches the Watchers". It is not necessary to have played the first part but it may be useful. The only change that needs to be made is that, if your players have not played the first part then, the package they receive at the beginning would have been intended for someone else but delivered to your players' characters by mistake. Being a game, they presumably will still try to get to the bottom of things. Additionally, it was made with running it as part of the adventures in the *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* book in mind to give players a break from Saltmarsh and the sea. The first part was intended to be run between the adventures "Danger at Dunwater" and "The Final Enemy" either alongside or in place of one or both of the two adventures between them in the book. This part is intended to be run after "The Final Enemy" and before "Tammeraut's Fate" but could come afterwards. I also plan to write a third part to take place after all the adventures in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*.

If you aren't running this as part of the adventures in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* you might wish to change the names of the locations in this adventure, as well as possibly the NPC names from Saltmarsh. Additionally, as far as timeline wise, while I have not set up a specific year for this to take place in, it is before the razing line in Furyondy is south of Crockport. If in your game that is already the case, then you might also wish to change all references to Whyestil Lake to Crystal River and the City of Lakeharbor (which I made up for this adventure and does not appear on any existing map of Furyondy online) to Riverford. If you are running this adventure not in Greyhawk and in some other world then you would probably know better than I where to put it and what you'd need to change the names to. That said, the travel from the beginning to where the meat of the adventure takes place wouldn't need to be so long.

Prologue

If your players did not play part one...

Some time ago a peace envoy from Zeif was attacked by rogue elements from an order of knights known as the Knights of the Watch. Many of the delegation were killed or injured but ultimately the mastermind of the attacks, Ephraim Argent, was killed. Afterwards peace was negotiated between Keoland and Zeif as well as with many of the Paynim vassal tribes of Zeif. Trouble brews beyond the borders of Keoland and within the nation of one of Keoland's former enemies, Furyondy, as their war with Iuz grows more bloody by the day.

Special Notes

Timeline wise, this takes place sometime between 582-586 because of the extent of Iuz' control of northern Furyondy. However I am not really an expert in keeping track of everything in such a fleshed out setting. There may be inconsistencies, as the *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* book doesn't have a clear cut date for it to be taking place in.

The Keoland standard coinage consists of the platinum griffon (pp), gold lion (gp), electrum eagle (ep), silver hawk (sp), and the copper sparrow (cp).

The Furyondy standard coinage consists of the platinum paladin (pp), gold wheatsheaf (gp), electrum knight (ep), silver sheridan (sp), and copper common (cp).

While these coins look differently and are struck in different dimensions, they somehow have maintained a similar weight and purity and have the same value. Traders and shopkeepers might give you an askew glance for using foreign coin, but gold is gold as long as its purity isn't in question.

Part one: the Package

The characters receive a mysterious package.

The Courier

As the characters are going about their business on a day of much earned downtime they will be approached by a courier with a package (or one of them chosen at random if they aren't together). The courier will be curious as to the contents of the package and will watch it be opened if the party is all together and doesn't ask the courier to leave or take it someplace private. If the courier doesn't stick around to see the contents for whatever reason they will remark, "I think I'll get a drink at a local pub before I ride back to Seaton," before leaving.

The Contents

The package itself is an ordinary satchel, inside it is a wooden strongbox. The unlocked strongbox has inside it something about the size of the fist of a clenched gauntlet wrapped in fabric. Visible as the box is opened is the remnants of a green and yellow surcoat, with a patch, of a green shield with pair of yellow antlers, stitched onto the patch sewn onto the yellow portion of the surcoat. Unwrapping the object reveals that it is a humanoid heart, strangely preserved despite having travelled far enough to have needed a courier. And beneath it all is a piece of parchment that reads...

"Did you think that I could be defeated so easily? That I would be defeated so easily? I have found a new order of knights to bend to my whims. So many broken hearts, hearts turning to my will and when my forces are rebuilt I will turn my gaze upon Keoland, the land that has forsaken me. If you want to try to stop me you should come speak with me at the homestead on the hill ten miles from Saltmarsh. I await your company. Sincerely, Magnificent Arcane Manticore Ephraim Argent."

If the courier is still with them, they will tell the characters that he picked up the package in Seaton but before that it had come from Lake Harbor, a city in Furyondy, and if whomever sent it was coming here anyways they could have saved a lot of coin to bring it themselves. If the characters go find him (roll randomly for which bar he winds up in) he will convey the same information. The characters now have the option of either heading to the homestead, which they should assume is a trap or an ambush, or perhaps heading to furyondy without visiting the homestead. Either option is fine as Argent's assassin will attack them either way, whether in the homestead or on the trip to Furyondy.

The Homestead - Map I

These are the locations for the homestead on the hill. The trip should take about eight hours, half that time if they have a guide capable of traveling the marshes (a ranger PC with swamp or marsh as their favored terrain or an NPC guide such as the now friendly lizardfolk or a saltmarsh native) or if they have horses, or a quarter that time if they have both. If it is daytime, the outdoor lighting is dim. If it is nighttime it is dark outside. The rain halves the distance of darkvision if any members of the party have it. Additionally, there is the possibility that you will need to know how quiet everyone is in general even if they aren't actively using stealth, so it is a good idea to determine everyone's passive stealth ahead of time. A character's passive stealth is 10 plus their stealth skill, characters wearing armor that would grant disadvantage impose a -5 penalty on this passive check.

Area 1- The Approach, outside

Like many days and nights in Salinmoor, it is raining, grey clouds block out any light that would be coming from the sky and the area is dismal and gloomy, up ahead you can see light coming from the closed slats on the windows on a dark blob that you presume to be the homestead spoken of in the note. The muddy yet well traveled path splits in two directions, one towards the homestead and another towards what as best you can tell is an uncovered well.

While not cleanly visible due to the rain and the lack of sunlight, in addition to heading to the front door (area 2) or the well (area 3) the characters could also visit the dilapidated fields (area 4) where the former occupants had tried to start a small farm.

Area 2- The Front Door, outside

Just north of the front door of this single leveled house is a woodshed, it is filled with firewood. Additionally there is a stump with an axe on it for cutting wood. The door to the homestead is closed, and the area appears deserted, were it not for a sliver of light under the door and slivers through slats in the windows you would not even assume the place was in use.

If the characters decide to scout out around the building they will discover that there are also windows on the other sides of the house (but not on the walls for areas 5 and 6) but they are all latched on the inside and cannot be opened without breaking the wooden window shutters, which would require a Strength (athletics) check of DC 12 or an attack roll against AC 12 dealing 2 or more bludgeoning damage. They will also smell alcohol all around the house, some kind of whiskey. If a character decides to look for tracks, and succeeds at a DC 16 Wisdom (survival) check, they will find evidence of someone rolling a barrel near the walls of the house.

The woodcutting axe on the stump is the *spirit of vengeance*, a semi-sentient weapon determined to get revenge on the person who wronged it, in this case the assassin here. (see appendix)

Area 3- The Uncovered Well, outside

A sturdy looking stone well juts out of the ground here, there is no cover so the rain falls into it. Beside the well is a bucket tied to a fifty foot long rope. There doesn't seem to be anything else here.

Enemy. If a character inspects the well there is a chance that they might spot the **ashbourne assassin** (see appendix) hiding inside it.

They are trying to hide and have +11 to their Dexterity (stealth) checks.

If a character doesn't spot the assassin, compare the passive stealth of all characters within 30 feet of the well to the ashbourne assassin's passive perception (14), if the assassin cannot hear anyone else within 30 feet of the well they will surprise the character and attempt to pull them into the well and stab them repeatedly. If the character goes after the assassin then the assassin gets advantage on his shove check to pull in the character.

If the assassin is spotted they will leap up out of the well and attack the party.

Area 4- The Dilapidated Field, outside

The ground here looks cracked and dry, seemingly to spite the rain and the marshes, an old wheelbarrow rests upon the ground near several unfinished stone walls intended to one day keep the wildlife out of the plot. A pair of glowing eyes can be seen peering at you from beneath the wooden wheelbarrow.

There is a **badger** under the wheelbarrow taking shelter from the rain. If the characters coax it with some food and have a way to *speak with animals* then they can learn from it that the family who used to live here hasn't been around since a person who smelled like corpse arrived over a week ago.

Area 5- The Entryway, inside

This room is about twenty by twenty feet and has a stack of crates in the southwest corner. On one of the crates has a rushlight in a candle holder burning in it, the rushlight gives off only sparse light but it stands out in the otherwise dark room. A pair of old rugs on the floor looks well worn and a bench with a ratty looking long cushion on it sits on the southern wall near the door. In the northwest corner of the west wall is a door and the north wall also has a door.

The northwest door leads to area 8 and the north door leads to area 6.

Secret Door. Behind the crates is a door to area 7. To spot this door one needs to have a passive perception of 19, unless someone goes to pick up the candle; in which case they only need a passive perception of 14 to see the door hidden behind the intentionally stacked boxes. If a character decides to look for anything the Wisdom (perception) or Intelligence (investigation) DC is 17.

Treasure. If a character lifts up the cushion they will find 12 gold lions and 27 silver hawks. The coins are neatly arrayed so they wouldn't be noticed beneath the cushion. No Wisdom (perception) check can find them, a character must lift up the cushion. If the characters decide to effectively toss the room looking for anything then they will likely find the coins.

Area 6- The Larder, inside

This room is small and cramped, a half dozen barrels and about the same number of sacks lie on the floor in the corner. The sacks all look empty.

If the characters investigate, the barrels contain ale but they also discover with a DC 14 Intelligence (investigation) check that the dust indicates that three barrels are missing.

Area 7- The Closet, inside

The sight in this room is unsettling at best. Three wrapped bodies are stuffed into this small closet area, the bodies seem to be tightly wrapped in blankets and leather hides and there is also what appears to be flour and even some sand packed in with them. A single broom rests in the corner.

The broom is entirely ordinary. The bodies are a man, a woman, and an adult male child; they all seem to have died from murder, either a slit throat (the man and woman) or having been stabbed in the back (adult child).

Area 8- The Unliving Room, inside

This room is large and multipurpose, a fireplace is lit and the fire within it give off light for a considerable distance bathing the entire room with bright light except for the alcove in the corner opposite the fireplace. A pair of rugs near the front entrance decorate the wooden planks on the floor and a lonely bed occupies the northwestern corner atop a bearskin, in the alcove furthest from the fireplace there are a trio of tables. One table has bloody tools on it, another a journal, and the third has a map.

If anyone is barefoot they will notice that the two carpets near the door are damp, an Intelligence (investigation) check of DC 10 will determine that they have whiskey spilled on them, if a character beats that check by 5 they will determine that it is the entire rug and not just splotches here and there.

The north table has a journal, it was kept by the farmer who lived here. The journal tells that he was a soldier for the Keoish military before retiring and being granted land in Salinmoor. Otherwise it is a fairly dull and mundane journal that just stops about eleven days prior.

The middle table has bloody tools, anyone with a background in butchery or who beats a DC 12 Wisdom (survival) check determines that the blood is animal blood and the tools were for food preparation.

The south table has a map of a lake and the surrounding area. A character with the outlander background or who is from Furyondy recognizes it as Whyestil Lake on the northern border of Furyondy. Or a DC 14 Intelligence (history) check will also tell a character the same thing. There is an "X" marked on the map near one of the cities on the map, none of the cities are labeled, the nearest city to the "X" is one called Lake Harbor.

Enemy. Unless the **ashbourne assassin** (see appendix) was defeated if the characters discovered it at the well they will attack the characters here after setting the homestead on fire. If not all characters go into the living room the assassin will attempt to lead one away by mimicking an injured person outside. If the ruse is successful, they will try to silently eliminate that character before springing the ambush. After the characters have milled about or waited for a bit or when one of them examines the map on the south table have them roll initiative.

Suddenly you hear the sound of glass breaking and the distinctive *whoosh* of a fire spreading quickly. Some crackling and sputtering can be heard and in almost an instant the walls are on fire and smoke is filling the room. Then the two rugs in the room near the door burst into flame as well as fire licks out from the walls. A

figure can be seen.

The characters have 10 rounds to get out of the building before it collapses on them, the ashbourne is prepared to die again to ensure the characters meet their end here. The 10 round countdown doesn't end when the assassin is defeated, as the characters may wish to loot their body or grab the map from the table. The assassin is ruthless and will prioritize targets whom they perceive to have the weakest Constitution. So as to eliminate them with poison first.

Lair Actions- Area 8

Rounds 1-3. Characters standing near the outer walls of the homestead take 3 (1d6) fire damage, characters standing on the rugs in area 8 take 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Rounds 4-6. Characters standing near the outer walls of the homestead take 7 (2d6) fire damage, characters standing on the rugs in area 8 take 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Rounds 7-9. Characters standing near the outer walls of the homestead take 10 (3d6) fire damage, the rugs burn out of fuel and no longer deal damage.

Round 10. All creatures inside the building take 36 (8d8) bludgeoning damage and are knocked prone, then take 10 (3d6) fire damage. Anything not immune to the prone condition cannot stand while inside the building. All walls become viable exits.

Rounds 11+. All creatures inside the building take 10 (3d6) fire damage and must succeed at a DC 12 Strength (athletics) check or be restrained for the round.

Aftermath

By now the characters should have at least seen the map in the homestead, perhaps they recovered it before the building burned down. If they didn't they might still be able to find the courier unless you decide that they have returned to Seaton. The Courier knows that the package originated from Lake Harbor in Furyondy, and if someone recovered the map someone back in Saltmarsh can tell them where they need to go. Eliander would be interested to know that the family in the homestead had been killed, if the characters killed the assassin (or convince the man that they did with a DC 16 Charisma (deception) check) then Eliander will help the characters to completely finance a trip to Lake Harbor to look into it. If the characters did not manage to kill the assassin then Eliander will still encourage the characters to look into it, he will help the characters find a way to get there.

Hypothetically, your players might feel like they need to be promised payment to do anything. It is a symptom of how some adventures are set up. Remind them that the assassin killed that family to get at them, if their characters are still talking to Eliander then he could be the voice that tells them that. If they still don't want to then don't force it, create urgency by having two ordinary **assassins** attack them some time in a few days, one of them could be the **ashbourne assassin** if the characters didn't kill him. Rationalize it as Ephraim Argent having sent a backup plan to deal with the characters (or the assassins sending more to finish the job). Perhaps then your characters will see a trip to Lake Harbor to get to the bottom of this as a good idea. If they're the kind that absolutely will not do anything without the promise of payment, have the assassins kill or kidnap someone in town that the players deal or interact with on a regular basis and have one of their loved ones beg the characters to find whomever is responsible and do something about it. Obviously that loved one will offer some kind of reward and also if you chose the

kidnapping route entice the players with a note insisting that they come to Aegis Keep to get their friend back.

Part two: the War Torn Nation

The players travel to Lake Harbor, through a kingdom that has been fighting a grueling war.

The Trip

There are two main ways that the players can get to Lake Harbor.

If Eliander is financing the trip entirely then it is likely that he arranged passage on ships as far as the Keoish navy would take them, or the characters could choose to go by sea if they don't have or want Eliander's help. They'd sail around the Pomarj, up the Wild Coast to Hardby on the north coast of the Woolly Bay, a trip that would take would take twelve and a half days in a Keoish warship or ten days in a smaller faster ship; from there Eliander would have arranged passage on a sailing vessel capable of sailing upriver past the city of Greyhawk into the Nyr Dyv and then to the Furyondyan naval port of Willip, a trip that would take three days. From there it would be on foot to Lake Harbor for sixteen days, or eight days if the characters purchase horses or brought horses with them. That total trip would take twenty-one to thirty-one days. Without Elianders assistance the characters can expect to pay 1 gp per day per person (and horse) for each day spent on a boat for accommodations and food (they are welcome to pay more if they wish for better food and private rooms) and will need to pack food for the trip if they are incapable of hunting for the part on foot.

If they opt to go by foot the whole way, then the trip would take approximately one hundred days on foot without horses and still fifty with horses. Most of the trip would be lands safe to travel in, although it's entirely possible that you might wish for an **assassin** or two to show up and bother the characters.

Either way, the part of the journey on foot, make sure that the closer they get to Whystil Lake and the further north they get the more down everything seems in your descriptions. Furyondy is at war with Iuz, their neighbor to the north, and it has taken quite a toll on the kingdom. If the players are opting to have their characters stop at little hamlets and towns along the way too small to be on a map you should make sure that the prices of food, lodging and other supplies gradually increase the closer to their destination that they travel to represent this attrition.

Also if Keledrek the Unspoken owes the characters a favor, he might have heard about their planned journey and offer to repay the favor by offering a one-way teleportation for the party. Of course they get to miss out on the gradual price changes to be surprised by how expensive everything is if they do so.

(Keoland declared war on Iuz on 576 and as such Xendross probably should have been run out of Saltmarsh by the time the events of this adventure are taking place, but I've included this possibility in case you're not adhering to the timeline very strictly.)

Additionally, as Iuz is the enemy of Furyondy, Ephraim Argent is a friend to Iuz. If Captain Xendros gets wind of the characters journey (and she probably will) then she will send word to be prepared and will even leverage her cursed items that the party may have that allow her to scry on the characters against them. It is also possible that the player characters might suggest that the Tiefling captain

could arrange for their passage and she will be all too eager to help. She will plan for their betrayal, but in an effort to not have it tie back to her she will have instructed her allies to pose as pirates on the Nyr Dyv and told her sailors to surrender to the pirates. If the characters survive have them wind up in Willip or Critwall after the battle with pirates.

The City

Lake Harbor is a modest sized city, but being so close to the front lines has taken its toll on the city and prices for almost everything will be at least 50% higher than the **PHB** states; with some essentials, especially those necessary for fighting a war, being double the price.

Places of Interest in Lake Harbor and Associated Side Quests

The Tribunal Triumviratus. This is the main religious edifice in Lake Harbor. A modest temple dedicated to three gods, Trithereon, Pelor, and St. Cuthbert, the priests and paladins here tend to wounded refugees as well as train anyone wishing to know how to wield a weapon. Due to the trouble from up north the training is free of cost, but almost exclusively in spears, pikes, and other polearms. Even before the war, the Tribunal was where people would be judged for serious crimes, the three judges are the head priests for each shrine. When judging, Kalatos (CG male human **priest** of Trithereon) judges based on his perception of the accused's intent; Valedis (LG female human **priest** of Pelor) judges based on her opinion of the outcome of the crime; and Corte (LN **doppelganger**, posing as a male human priest of St. Cuthbert) judges based on precedent, both existing and what precedent might be set by their judgement.

Side Quest - recover a reliquary. Kalatos wants the characters to travel to a temple of Trithereon that is in a village that has fallen to Iuz to recover a sacred relic, hopefully before it is found and defiled. This side quest is detailed in part two and a half. Kalatos will offer the players the *dream catcher* (see appendix) for performing this task.

The Lakeside Adventurers Lodge. This building has seen better days. Genlamin (LG male high elf **commoner**) the bartender/lodge owner will reminisce about how before Iuz the Lakeside would be full of adventurers roaming northwest into the vesve forest to fight orcs and search for treasure. These days the main patrons here are some Knights of the Hart that have turned it into their local base of operations after having to abandon Aegis Keep. If the characters ask as to why they were forced to abandon the keep, Carlotta will tell them that a Knight of the Watch with arcane skill tricked many of them into believing him to be an ally and lulled them into a false sense of security. And then when their guard was down his men slew several of the Knights of the Hart while seeming to devour their souls. Each soul devoured seemed to make the man, called Ephraim, appear more and more undead. Additionally, some of the Knights of the Hart helped him in the betrayal. If the characters ask for a map of the keep Carlotta will draw them a crude but workable map of the keep, but without the secret areas of 11 and 13 and without the tents as those went up after they were ousted.

Side Quest - recover the Hart Seeker. Carlotta (CG female half-elf **knight**) will request that the characters, if she hears that they are going to Aegis Keep or that they've been there recently (in case they do part three before talking to her) if they could recover a powerful weapon, the *hartseeker*, in the hopes that it doesn't fall into the wrong hands. The item is in area 11 of map iii - Aegis Keep. Carlotta doesn't know where in the keep it is, just that it is in an old tomb

somewhere. If the characters recover the bow, she will let them keep it, judging them worthy to have it, or will trade it for the shield called the *friend of the hart*, a symbol to all Knights of the Hart that the bearer is an ally. (see appendix for magic items)

The Pearlfishers' Guild. The pearlfishers are a group of people quite adept at locating clams and mussels in the Whyestil lake. The primary source of income these people have is in the selling of the shellfish that have no pearls as most of the bivalve molluscs found don't have a pearl. There are enough pearl fishers still in Lake Harbor that there is still a good supply of pearls as well as nacre for making buttons and other accessories. Any pearls purchased here would be 70% of the cost of most pearls elsewhere, as the demand on the front lines is low. These are the exception to the higher prices mentioned earlier. For example, a 100gp pearl (like the kind needed to cast *identify*) would only cost 70gp here. Pearls are generally graded and valued based on size, shape, color, and smoothness. Larger is generally worth more. The more perfectly round a pearl is leads to a higher price. Black, white, and pink (in that order) are the ideal colors with everything else falling beneath one of those three. And if a pearl is too coarse it will also diminish the value.

Side Quest - investigate the corpse cleaner. Eschel (NE male human **commoner**) will tell the characters that he has heard rumors of giant shell-less terrestrial gastropod mollusc (a slug) that roams abandoned battlefields consuming the dead. He believes that it is possible that such a creature might be capable of producing exceptionally large pearls and wants the players to confirm it for him. He will agree to any reasonable sounding payment that isn't up front to get them to go. This is a deception, he knows that they do no such thing and is trying to get the characters killed for fear that they will put a stop to Iuz' plans for the region. Eschel is a turncoat, bartering information for favors and money, when he is out fishing he secretly meets with agents of Iuz. If the players do investigate they will encounter a number of the **corpse cleaners** (see appendix) that you feel is appropriate for their level, keeping in mind that there will undoubtedly also be **skeletons** to fight as well.

The Blue Pride Trading. The Blue Pride isn't a trading company in the traditional sense, but is more of a caravansary. Although there usually are a few hawkers and costers in front of the yard where the wagons are loaded and unloaded, the primary purpose of the Blue Pride is the formation and coordination of trade caravans and lodging for traders. But during the war it is also an important part of the Furyondian supply lines and logistics center.

Side Quest - dragon from the Vesve. Haldon (NG non-binary halfling **commoner**) expresses concern to the players over the continual harrasment from Xary, a **young blue dragon** from the Vesve forest. Haldon cannot truly offer the characters much to deal with it but will offer them a magical bottle of wine (*port wine*) as payment. The dragon's hoard contains: 24 copper commons, 225 silver sheridans, 74 gold wheatsheafs, 5 platinum paladins, 1 book of dwarvish children's stories worth 25gp or 76gp to the right buyer, 2 bottles of fine wine, 3 white quartz worth 50gp each, pair of jade eight sided dice with a sword carved instead of the one worth 25gp, a silver goblet worth 25gp, and an ivory-framed small mirror worth 80gp, as well as the *dream stealer*. (see appendix for items)

Part two and a half: the Temple of Trithereon

Optional side quest from Kalatos at the Tribunal Triumviratus.

The Temple- Map II

These are the locations for the temple of Trithereon. The trip should take about four hours, half that time if they have a guide capable of traveling the area (a ranger PC with grasslands or plains as their favored terrain or an NPC guide) or if they have horses, or a quarter that time if they have both. The settlement that the temple is in is ruined and crumbling, parts of it still burn and smoulder. The characters can detect signs of undeath and, if you feel it necessary, might need to fight some **zombies** or **ghouls** while on their way to the temple proper.

Area 1- The Approach, outside

A path of marble tiles heads up into the temple. The massive oak doors are closed mostly, but broken such as that they cannot properly close. Many footprints have trampled through the grass and have tracked mud and dirt onto the marble tiles. Stained glass windows are set on either side of the door high enough that they could provide light into the interior.

If the characters scout around the building there are windows into each of the cloisters for the areas marked 6. The windows are high enough to make looking through them difficult but not impossible to climb up to. Around the back of the temple is a line of planted trees and more stained glass windows, unlike the cloister windows, the stained glass windows in the front and back are high enough that you couldn't try to look through them without being able to *fly* or *levitate*.

Area 2- The Narthex, inside

The floor of this temple is made with the same tile that was outside and, also similar to outside, a plethora of dirt and muddy boot prints has been tracked inside this holy place. Three pillars stand before you with frescoes of three different animals on them, a hound, a falcon, and a lizard. Around you you can see several simple doors leading into side rooms and beyond the pillars you can see some people standing around an altar. The sound of sobbing can be heard as well as laughing.

An Intelligence (religion) check of 12 will tell a character that the animals are: Nemoud the Hound, Harrus the Falcon, and Carolk the Sea Lizard.

A Wisdom (perception) check of 12 will tell a character that the sobbing isn't coming from any of the men around the altar.

Area 3- The Altar, inside

Dirt, rubble, and other detritus litter the floor around the central altar of this place. Four squat pillars that have fires burning in them and censers above the flames are in the room and give off a fair amount of light as well as a foul odor mixed with incense. On the left side viewed from the entrance are a plethora of empty wine bottles on the ground in front of the door to a storage room, another storeroom is on the right side of the altar area. A group of people are around the altar and a hooded person is performing some kind of ritual on a corpse that has been placed upon the altar.

An Intelligence (arcana) check of 13 will tell the performing character that the hooded figure is casting the spell *animate dead* upon the corpse. They will finish casting the spell 3 rounds after a character gets close enough to notice what is going on.

Tied up and seated against the back wall are four **commoners**, two of whom are children, being forced to watch the necromancer here raise people as undead.

Enemies. There are two **tribal warriors**, one **berserker**, and a **journeyman necromancer** (see appendix) around the altar, all but the necromancer will attack when they notice the party, the necromancer will try to complete the casting of their spell but will stop concentrating on it and fight if the berserker is defeated. On the second round of combat the necromancer will summon the undead in the cloisters (areas 6) to join the fray. If the necromancer lives to the third round and is still casting the spell then the corpse will rise and fight with the stats of a **zombie**.

Treasure. The enemies here have little treasure, what loot they had having already been sent deeper into the Empire of Iuz. but the necromancer has a palm sized crystal skull in the shape of a fiend's skull (an arcane spell focus) worth 10gp or 30gp to someone who collects fiendish things and the berserker has a *+1 dagger* that has a handle made from antler. The wine bottles are all empty.

Assuming that the tied up commoners survive, they will thank the characters, and if asked about the reliquary they will tell their rescuers that the priest hid it in the storage room that doesn't have bottles in front. If they perished, the characters can still glean this information from a *Speak with Dead* spell or similar magic.

If any character takes the time to clean the altar and make an effort to tidy up the immediate area they will earn a blessing of Trithereon. At any time for the next week a character with the blessing may, by using a bonus action, spend this blessing to give themselves the benefits of the *bless* spell or the *freedom of movement* spell for 1 hour. This blessing requires no components or concentration. It is a blessing from the god Trithereon.

Area 4- The Wine Cellar, inside

More bottles of wine litter the floor in here and the pair of shelves that once served as wine racks for whatever sacraments they performed here are empty, the raiders who attacked this town having already looted and drank the contents and left the bottles on the ground. A barrel stands in the corner, it has a spigot in it and has also clearly been emptied of alcohol, now it just props up a single lonely candle.

Regardless of how many bottles the players have their characters check, there is no booze to be found here.

Area 5- The Food Pantry, inside

Several crates that once contained fruit sit in this room, judging from the smell they now contain vinegar and decomposition. Hundreds of fruit flies buzz about this room that is otherwise empty.

If the characters have been told of the location of the relic then finding it is a simple matter, it might need to be cleaned off as it was hidden inside a pile of apples that are now mostly rotten. If the players haven't been told then a thorough search of the rotten fruit will turn it up. An Intelligence (investigation) check of 12 or a Wisdom (perception) check of 15 will also suffice.

Areas 6- The Cloisters, inside

This small and spartanly decorated room has a simple bed in it and little else. A window is high up on the wall to allow light in during the daytime.

The first time a character enters one of these rooms, if the battle with the necromancer in area 3 hasn't been initiated yet, they will see a murdered priest or acolyte in robes somewhere in the room. They will look very decayed.

Enemies. The bodies in these six rooms are undead. If a character examines a corpse they will be attacked by a **ghoul** and the five other **ghouls** from the other five rooms will also rise and attack. If the battle with the enemies in area 3 has not started this will probably alert them.

Aftermath

The characters should not linger here for too long. In order to convince them to leave you might tell the players that the city proper is teeming with zombies, more than they had seen before and that the battle in the temple seems to have roused them to shamle towards the characters. The zombies should measure in the hundreds, and the players should be lead to believe that there are too many to deal with with such a small force.

Part three: the Crumbling Aegis Keep

The confrontation with Ephraim Argent and his allies.

The Background

Ephraim Argent was killed during his encounter with the characters at the Manticore's Nest, however he had already begun the process of becoming a lich. So his death, in a sense, was just a step he was preparing to make anyways.. He will not be expecting well armed adventurers to come and stop him this time but has taken some additional precautions to be safe. Previously, Ephraim Argent was an unwitting agent of Vecna, but after his defeat in Keoland he has abandoned Vecna and now follows Orcus and, to a lesser extent, Iuz. Ephraim and a group of his Bloodguards, still posing as Knights of the Watch, gained access to Aegis Keep while it was still occupied by Knights of the Hart and betrayed them and the other Furyondian soldiers present to the forces of Iuz. Very few of them managed to escape the treachery. Those that did sided with Argent, mostly through threats against members of their family that had been captured by the forces of Iuz.

The Keep- Map III

These are the locations for the Aegis Keep and the final(?) showdown with Ephraim Argent, now a Lich Knight. The trip should take about six hours, half that time if they have a guide capable of traveling the area (a ranger PC with grasslands or plains as their favored terrain or an NPC guide) or if they have horses, or a quarter that time if they have both. The locations in the wall on the ground level map are 15 feet above the ground.

At any given moment, forces stationed here will be on patrol or raids, so if enough time has passed forces will return but a nearly equal amount will leave. If your players wish to, they could plan to thin out the forces by staging ambushes against the forces after they leave the keep. An example of such a force would be 1d4 random **bloodguards** (without mounts and no duplicates), 1d4 **orc minions of Iuz** (see appendix), 2d8 **orcs**, 1d4 **veterans** and 2d6 **guards**. You

could also replace the veterans and guards with **berserkers** and **tribal warriors** respectively, this will make it an easier fight overall but will increase the likelihood your player's characters will take damage because of how frequently those enemies have advantage on attacks. Reduce the number of enemies rolled by half if the party has fewer than four characters. If the characters successfully wipe out a patrol you should thin the numbers of enemies in the following encounters by an amount you deem appropriate. All equipment is in poor condition and shields bear the markings of Iuz or his vassal states. The Bloodguard's shields are painted with the blazon of their former order, either Knights of the Watch with a red skull painted over the owl's head or Knights of the Hart but with a red skull painted between the antlers.

If the players wish to approach from the north or the west side they will see the walls and might run afoul of archers who will make potshots at them and raise the alarm. Approaching from the south side is the safest, which the players can learn if they reconnoiter first and would offer the easiest way to sneak to the ramp (area 4) if they wish to avoid fighting initially. If they just follow the trail of trampled grass then they will approach from the east and arrive at area 1.

Area 1- The Approach, outside, ground level

As you approach the ruins of the keep, at this point just a tower with a bit of two crumbling walls, you can see a ramshackle yurt built into the patch of ground near the tower. Between the yurt and the longest of the two walls you can see a series of tents that look like they were poorly made from whatever animal skins could be obtained. The wall looks like it had once had a hallway near the ground but it is filled in with gravel and rubble, but there is a hallway higher up that could be accessed. Some humanoids are on guard outside the yurt.

The characters might be able to circumvent much of the defenses above ground but doing so might make their escape difficult.

Enemies. A dismounted **bloodguard knight** and a pair of **orc minions of Iuz** (see appendix) stand watch outside the door to the yurt. The orcs are bored and inattentive and the knight has their weapon sheathed. Fighting here will probably attract the attention of the forces in areas 2 and 3 unless the characters are exceptionally swift and quiet.

Area 2- The Tents, outside, ground level

A quartet of large poorly made tents are pitched between the wall and the yurt, a horrid smell is coming from them. Some snoring can be heard sporadically and occasionally some conversation in the orc tongue.

Sneaking through here without alerting the occupants of the tents will require a Dexterity (stealth) roll of 15, failure will prompt an orc to say in orcish, "that was who?" and then on the next round poke their head out to take a look.

Enemies. Each tent contains one **orc minion of Iuz** (see appendix) as well as two **orcs**, if combat begins here or in areas 1 and 3 and it is loud enough to be heard, most of the orcs will need a round or two to find their weapon and get up from their sleep induced stupor. Each round (including the first round) roll 2d4 and that is the amount of enemies from here that are ready to act in that round.

Treasure. Each tent contains 4d6 silver sheridans and 2d8 gold wheatsheafs as well as a chance to have some other random treasure the orcs have pillaged from settlements. For each tent that a character searches, roll a d10: on a ten, the tent also has a 50gp gemstone; on an eight and nine, the characters find a 25gp art object, and on a six and seven; it contains a 10gp gemstone.

Area 3, The Yurt, inside, ground level

If the players enter the yurt while there are still people inside it...

The inside of this yurt is rather spacious despite its ramshackle appearance. A mess area of tables and benches offer seating for human soldiers of Iuz as well as orcs as they rest before heading out to pillage and make war. A smaller table has seated at it soldiers of higher rank as well as a knight. There is also an ogre here, whipping someone. The yurt has no windows and is lit by a pair of torches and also by candles on the tables. There are bedrolls lined up along one wall and you can see a door on the opposite side you've entered by.

If the players enter the yurt when nobody is inside...

The inside of this yurt is rather spacious despite its ramshackle appearance. A mess area of tables and benches offer seating but none are currently occupied. A smaller table has a few chairs around it. The yurt has no windows and is lit by a pair of torches and also by candles on the tables. There are bedrolls lined up along one wall and you can see a door on the opposite side you've entered by.

The human forces of Iuz sleep and eat in this building, and the leaders also use it to plan attacks. If you needed kidnap a beloved NPC to lure the players here then the person being whipped should be that NPC, otherwise it is one of the soldiers of Iuz being whipped for cowardice.

Enemies. The forces gathered here consist of a **bloodguard captain**, an **ogre taskmaster** (see appendix) wielding the *powerline* instead of a normal whip, two **veterans**, eight **guards**, and three **orcs**. Fighting loud enough to be heard in areas 1 and 2 will alert these people who will leave through both doors to head towards the source of the fighting. Because there are only two doors only some of the enemies here can join a battle outside each round. Each round (including the first round) roll 2d4 and that is the amount of enemies from here that are able to leave through one of the doors in that round.

Treasure. The ogre has a magical whip, *powerline* (see appendix), and in addition to that, the veterans and the ogre each have a pouch with 4d6 gold wheatsheafs, 4d10 silver sheridans, and with two random 10gp gemstones.

Area 4- The Ramp, outside, ground level

A wooden ramp some twenty odd feet long is propped up on the crumbling wall to provide a way up to the walls. The ramp is fairly steep but is manageable as it has been carved of thick wood and resembles a crude staircase with wooden supports for armored troops to use it.

There's nothing here other than the ramp itself, characters trying to be stealthy will have to roll better than the passive perceptions of the guards in the area 5 near the ramp.

Areas 5- The Halls, outside, fifteen feet up

The wall of this crumbling old building offer some protection although most the ceiling has been gone for an indeterminate amount of time. On one end of the hall is the broken wall and the other is a tower with a spiral stair that heads up and down. Niches are built into the walls large enough for soldiers with bows or crossbows to fire from towards the land outside the keep.

There are guards here, but they are looking out through the arrow slits.

Enemies. Each niche with an arrow slit has a **guard** that is equipped with a heavy crossbow instead of a shield and a spear. Loud fighting here might attract the attention of the people below in areas 1-3, and definitely will attract the attention of the other area 5 and area 6 as well. Whether or not these enemies get involved in any fighting down below is up to you, as they are used to hearing scuffles between bored and rowdy soldiers.

Area 6- The Tower, inside, 15 feet up

This circular room has several niches built into it so that archers could at one time watch the countryside and defend the castle during a siege. The roof here is mostly intact but you can tell that whatever tower once climbed higher is gone now. There is a single staircase ascending and descending in the center of the room with a single torch providing light.

Taking the stairs up will lead to a roof area that is roughly the same size as this floor but with no walls and a view out across the Whystil, smoke can be seen on the horizon in the areas controlled by Iuz.

Enemies. Three **guards** that are equipped with a heavy crossbow instead of a shield and a spear keep watch out the arrow slits while a **bloodguard shield-breaker**, a **bloodguard halberdier** (see appendix), and a **berserker** converse at the top of the stairs.

Area 7- The Tower, inside, underground

This room is a circular chamber, forty-five feet in diameter. The staircase leads both up and down. The floors are tiled with a slightly reddish brick but this room is otherwise empty of decoration. There are a pair of double doors to the south and the east with a torch on each side of the door, there is also a torch by the stairwell landing. The room is otherwise dark and dim beyond the torchlight.

There is nothing physically preventing the characters from continuing downwards to area 15 but there are guards posted in front of the doors. The orc guards will get out of the way for medium sized characters dressed in the armor of any of the bloodguards from up top as long as they can act the part with a Charisma (performance) or a Charisma (deception) roll of 14 or better. If the entire party is in disguise this way the player making the check can do so with advantage.

Enemies. Each double door has a pair of **orc minions of Iuz** in front of it. If a fight ensues then the orcs will fight until one remains and that one will attempt to flee up the stairs.

Area 8- The Armory, inside, underground

This thirty-five foot by fifteen foot chamber has four tables arrayed with a multitude of weapons, mostly short blades and daggers as the larger weapons are probably in the hands of enemies. A pair of torches are mounted on the shorter walls.

The weapons here are mundane and not particularly valuable, if the players are looking for the *hartseeker* it is not here. The items that are here are as follows: 14 daggers, 3 scimitars, 2 longswords, 2 shields.

Enemies. A single **guard** is in this room, sharpening blades and then putting them back on the tables. If the characters used subterfuge to enter and then start a noisy fight with this soldier the orcs outside will come in to investigate.

Area 9- The Hallway, inside, underground

This long hallway has several doors on the end, three of the four have a torch by them and are on the north wall. The other is directly across from the last door on the south wall. Not a soul can be seen in the corridor.

Not a soul can be seen because the hallway is free from enemies.

Areas 10- The Nice Rooms, inside, underground

This room looks nice compared to the accommodations you saw topside, a torch burns beside a wooden bunk bed with a rug on the floor beneath it. There is a bookshelf on the western wall and a chest between the shelf and the bed along the northern wall.

These are the rooms used by the officers that still need to sleep, before Ephriam and the forces of Iuz took over they were used by the ranking Furyondian forces. The bookshelves contain books on military related history and treatises on melee combat and if a character is quite thorough they will also find a very lewd novel with obscene wood block printed images in it.

Secret. Behind the bookshelf in the westernmost room is a hidden chamber, a passive perception score of 20 is needed to spot the scuff marks on the floor or an active Intelligence (investigation) or Wisdom (perception) check of 15 will spot the scuff marks where the bookshelf has been moved. The door leads to area 11.

Area 11- The Sepulcher, inside, underground

This octagonal room has a torch glowing on the far wall from the secret passage. Inside the room is a single stone sarcophagus carved with a fresco of a Knight of the Hart clutching a bow to their chest.

The torch on the wall is actually an ordinary stick with the spell *continual flame* cast on it, an everburning torch if you will. It can be taken if the characters want it.

Treasure. Inside the sarcophagus is an old dessicated corpse of a woman in old rusted armor. Held to their chest is a bow, the *hartseeker*. Additionally there is the remains of a rotted old hip quiver that has 12 silver tipped arrows in it as well as 12 normal arrows.

Area 12- The Store, inside, underground

This square room is stocked with various provisions, enough to last quite a while for a small force. A single torch keeps the place lit well enough to gather foodstuffs when needed.

The barrels and sacks in the room contain salted meats, beans, flour, beers, wines, and other supplies that generally won't perish.

Secret. Underneath the barrels in the northwestern corner is a trap door leading down into area 13. No perception check will find it under ordinary conditions, the characters will have to physically move the barrels to see it.

Area 13- The Oubliette, inside, deep underground

This room is completely dark without a light source...

This room seems dry and musty and contains the skeletons of four humanoids with chains and a large weight on their ankles. They very clearly died here forgotten.

This room will only contain enemies if the characters disturb the bones.

Enemies. If the characters move or touch the bones in any way then from the ground a **ghost** will rise and attack them. Only one, but the player who disturbed the remains has disadvantage against the ghost's possession ability which the ghost will do first.

Area 14- The Banquet Hall, inside, underground

This long room bears signs that it once contained many more tables than it has now. Currently there are only a pair of tables on the far end of the massive dining hall. Six knights are seated and enjoy a feast together before a pair of suits of armor on pedestals and torches on the back wall.

Unless the players are exceptionally stealthy the knights will see them and then don their helmets and prepare to fight.

Enemies. In this room, a **bloodguard captain**, a **bloodguard knight**, two **bloodguard halberdiers**, and two **bloodguard shield-breakers** guard the crystals needed to break the barriers in area 16. If your party is on the smaller side, you should remove one each of the bloodguards that there are two and replace them with **guards** but with the same weapons and AC as the replaced bloodguards. Or if your party has been stomping through everything and is on the higher side of power level then consider making the two suits of armor actually be **animated armor** that will step off the pedestals to join the fray.

Treasure. The enemies each had a crystal, 2 blue, 2 green, and 2 pink crystals. Additionally the feast is served on some nice silverware: a silver ewer worth 25gp filled with water, a silver bowl worth 25gp with some dirty water in it, 2 silver pitchers worth 20gp each with wine in them, 4 silver platters worth 20gp with food on them, 6 silver goblets worth 10gp each with wine in them, 6 silver plates worth 10gp each with food on them, 6 knives worth 1gp each, 6 spoons worth 1gp each, and 6 forks worth 1gp each. The silverware looks like it is from all different sets as though it was looted from everywhere.

Area 15- The Tower, inside, deep underground

An ominous chill fills the air in this torchlit room, a single door on the east wall stands closed with no guards.

The door is unlocked and assuming the characters have dealt with everything topside, this would be a fine place to take a short rest.

Area 16- The Laboratory, inside, deep underground

This twenty-five foot by sixty-five foot room has an arcane laboratory on the far end. An undead knight missing its left hand works on something while a spectral hand from its belt holds up a book. Between here and there there are a trio of energy barriers with crystals by them on the north and south walls, a pair of crystals for each barrier.

The barriers are different prismatic walls attuned to a different color as well as a wall of force reinforcing them, the only way to bypass the barriers is to defeat the six lieutenants in area 14 and recover the crystals needed to drop the barriers.

Entering this room, Ephraim Argent will ignore the characters after glancing at them unless they begin to drop the barriers. If your players encountered Ephraim Argent before, he looks considerably more dead than he did at that time. Once they destroy the first set of crystals, Argent will cast *shadow blade* and then prepare a readied action to throw the shadow blade at the opponent that he assumes is the primary healer as soon as the final barrier drops.

Enemies. Ephraim Argent is a **neo-lich knight** with the following changes.

1. He does not fight fair.
2. He wears plate instead of chain, so his armor class is 20 instead of 18
3. His left eye socket is covered with an eyepatch, when he was alive he was blind in that eye but as a lich he only keeps it for the aesthetic.
4. His left hand is severed, when he casts shadow blade, it visually manifests as himself growing a shadow skeleton hand which then manifests the illusory blade, additionally if he throws the blade it appears as if the skeletal hand is still holding the blade while thrown.
5. He is a ritualist and has the following spells in his ritual book, they can't be used to transcribe spells into a spellbook but anyone capable of casting wizard spells as rituals can use his book to cast these spells as rituals: *comprehend languages*, *detect magic*, *find familiar* except that the ritual can only summon a left **crawling claw** that is a fiend and when you perceive what it does you only can see what it sees through your right eye and are blind in your left, *identify*, *unseen servant*, *gentle repose*, *feign death*, *phantom steed*, as well as a desecration ritual that is similar to the spell *hallow* except it cannot exclude undead and its extra effect is that it gives undead advantage on saving throws versus turning and in addition to its normal material components also requires fifteen pints of sacrificial blood, and finally it has the ritual for *create bloodguard*. There is also some evidence that the ritual book might be his phylactery, it is not per se, but acts as an anchor point allowing him to manifest near the ritual book if the phylactery is still intact. An Intelligence (arcana) check of 21 will let a character know that the book isn't a true phylactery.

Treasure. Ephriam Argent has no need for treasure yet, his method for feeding his phylactery is by fighting in this war on the side of Iuz. So, as such, the only true valuables he has is the equipment on his person, which includes the *helping hand* (see appendix) and his ritual book. If the players defeat him and don't destroy the ritual book they will be in for quite a surprise when he comes back. If the players manage to keep the ritual book but somehow damage it in such a manner that it cannot be his anchor or copy the rituals and then destroy the book then they could sell this information to unscrupulous wizards if they wished. It is the information, not the book itself, that has value.

The equipment and books in his laboratory might be of value but they are large and bulky things that would be difficult to transport.

Aftermath

By now the characters have defeated Ephriam Argent, but deep in everyone's hearts, there's this feeling that you haven't seen the last of the Lich Knight. The characters can head back to Lake Harbor and complete any unfinished side quests and probably get asked to continue to help the war effort. What happens then is up to your players.