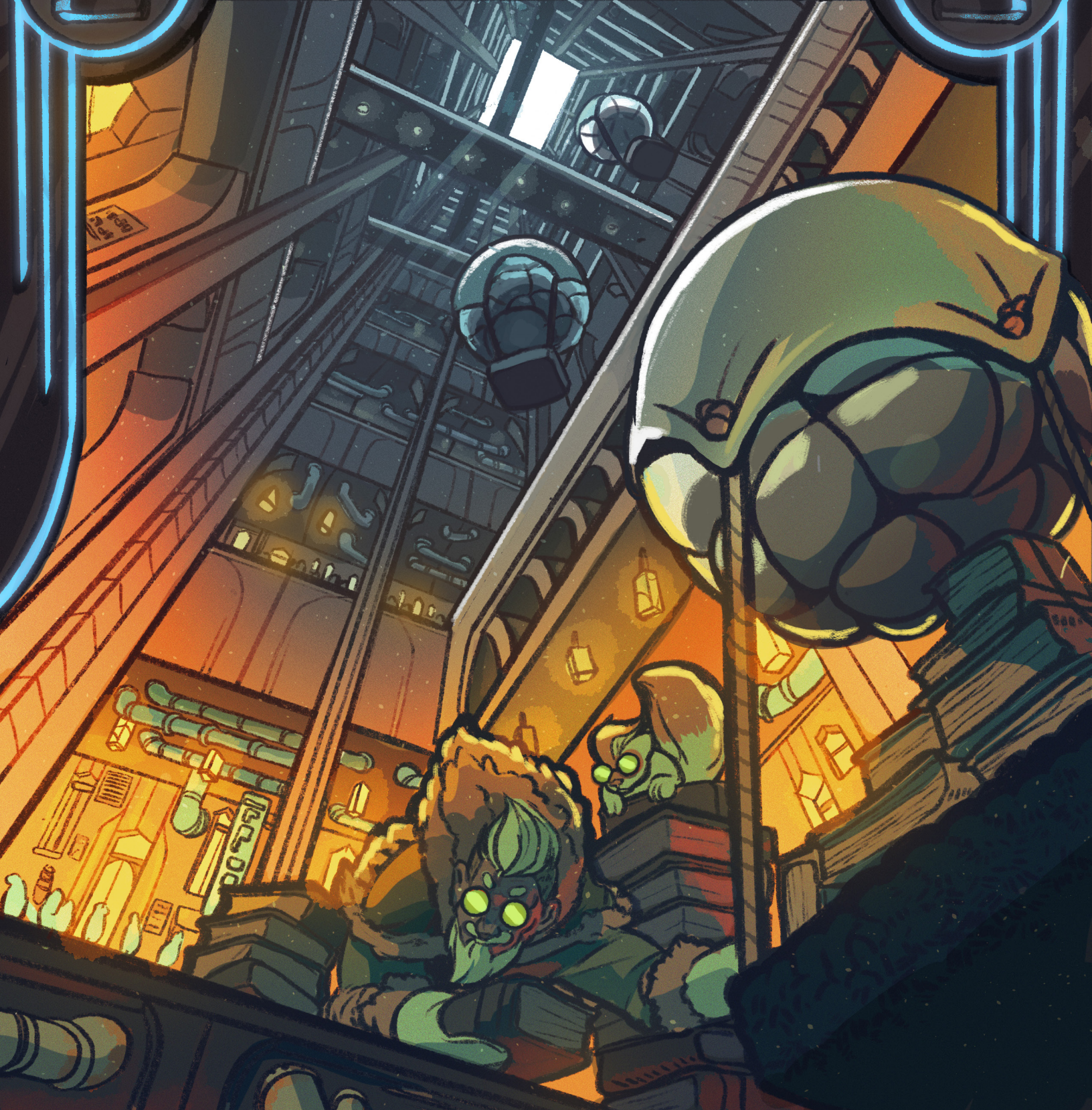


BOROUGH BOUND PRESENTS

# Vyndurvoht



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## DUTY AND EXODUS

### THE STONE LIBRARY OF ACCURSED TOMES



One should not destroy a book. This is one of the few truths accepted by all the peoples of Hjass. Knowledge—even odious, forbidden knowledge—is sacred. To put ink to page is to imbue that page with a piece of yourself. To burn or tear those pages is an act worse than murder, defiling not just the creator, but defaming the gift that elevates man above beast.

That said...

There are texts that should never come to light; infernal texts by wicked, crazed, or possessed creators. These texts—**DARTÖMEN**, as they are known to the Vyndur dwarves—must be sealed, protected from malevolent actors. Dartömen take many forms: dangerous summoning spells, twisted whispers that drive men crazy, and books that perform evil acts of their own accord. All such works must be removed from civilization and taken to a place where they can be safely ignored.

The Vyndur dwarves have taken up this mantle. Far to the north of even the most frigid population centers, the Vyndur dwarves occupy the great library of Vyndurvoht. Here, they safeguard the texts held within, carefully storing, archiving, and eventually sealing away words too dangerous to proliferate. For hundreds of years, sages, politicians, adventurers, and grieving

family members have made the trek to Vyndurvoht to deposit any book deemed wicked. For a small price, the dwarves will accept the text, sort it into their catalogue, and shield it from impressionable or vengeful eyes. When the library is filled, powerful inkbinders use the residual magic of the tomes and their deep wells of svjell ink to encase the entire structure in impenetrable obsidian foam. The ever-vigilant Vyndur dwarves have already completed five libraries. Now, they are approaching the completion of their sixth.

This is no easy task. Dangerous creatures frequently seek out the library in search of cursed knowledge. While previous incarnations of the library were strictly off-limits to visitors, the keepers of this library have found the process to be more easily managed if those seeking access to the archive are instead charged a hefty fee. Researchers, mages, and even strange malevolent beings *are* allowed to enter much of the library, but they will be guarded and subject to all manner of traps, alarms, and failsafes should they attempt any misdeeds within the confines of the tower.

As the library approaches completion, the fabled Exodus is close at hand. While most suspect the inkbinders will fulfill their sacred oath, quarantining the contents of the library for eternity, there are those who fear the Sixth Exodus will not go as smoothly as in centuries past. These are dangerous times for the volatile vault. A mismanaged Exodus could lead to destruction on a scale never before seen in the lands of Hjass.

**From the addendum to *Carlifer's Encyclopedia of the Northlands***

Though it is easy enough to trace the etymology of “Vyndur” which shares linguistic lineage with our word “wind,” many mistakenly assume that “-voht” is a toponym equating to “city” or “village.” On the contrary, “voht” is more closely related to our word “vault.” This may point toward a surprising notion of how the dwarves themselves view the essential function of their great mesa cities.

## THE VYNDUR DWARVES

Not all dwarves in the Vyndur Mountains are considered “true” Vyndur dwarves. Only those that choose to live in Vyndurvoht are given that title. Many dwarves occupy smaller hillocks or *mountaindelfs* scattered throughout the frozen range. Dwarves living outside Vyndurvoht are not afforded the same level of honor as those that take on their eons-old charge of maintaining and protecting the vaults.

Vyndur dwarves tend to be stronger and slightly taller than their non-Vyndur kin. Some have ascribed these physical boons to Wynken’s blessing—clearly, those that accept their God-given responsibility are seen as more worthy in the Forge God’s eyes. However, a more plausible explanation is simply that dwarves living in Vyndurvoht are richer and better fed. Despite the challenges of living in the accursed library, the citizens are well-paid and enjoy a more balanced diet than dwarves living in the rugged countryside, far from human traders.

Less easily explained, however, are the divergent hair colors of Vyndur and non-Vyndur dwarves. All dwarves who live in Vyndurvoht have dark brown hair, whereas those who live outside develop streaks of red and grey. The longer a dwarf lives outside of the library, the more streaks their hair accumulates. Those who were born outside of Vyndurvoht but choose to move to the great library eventually lose the streaks in their hair. Dwarven inkbinders claim this is the result of proximity to the arcane *svjell* ink found within the tower. Even those dismissive of claims of Wynken’s blessings have trouble coming up with an alternative explanation for the effect that the library has on dwarven locks.

There is an equally pronounced difference between the sexes. Dwarves born male and female are noticeably dimorphic, with adult women standing roughly a foot taller than men. Female dwarves also accumulate large, asymmetrical freckles across their body. These distinctive birthmarks are known as “an-

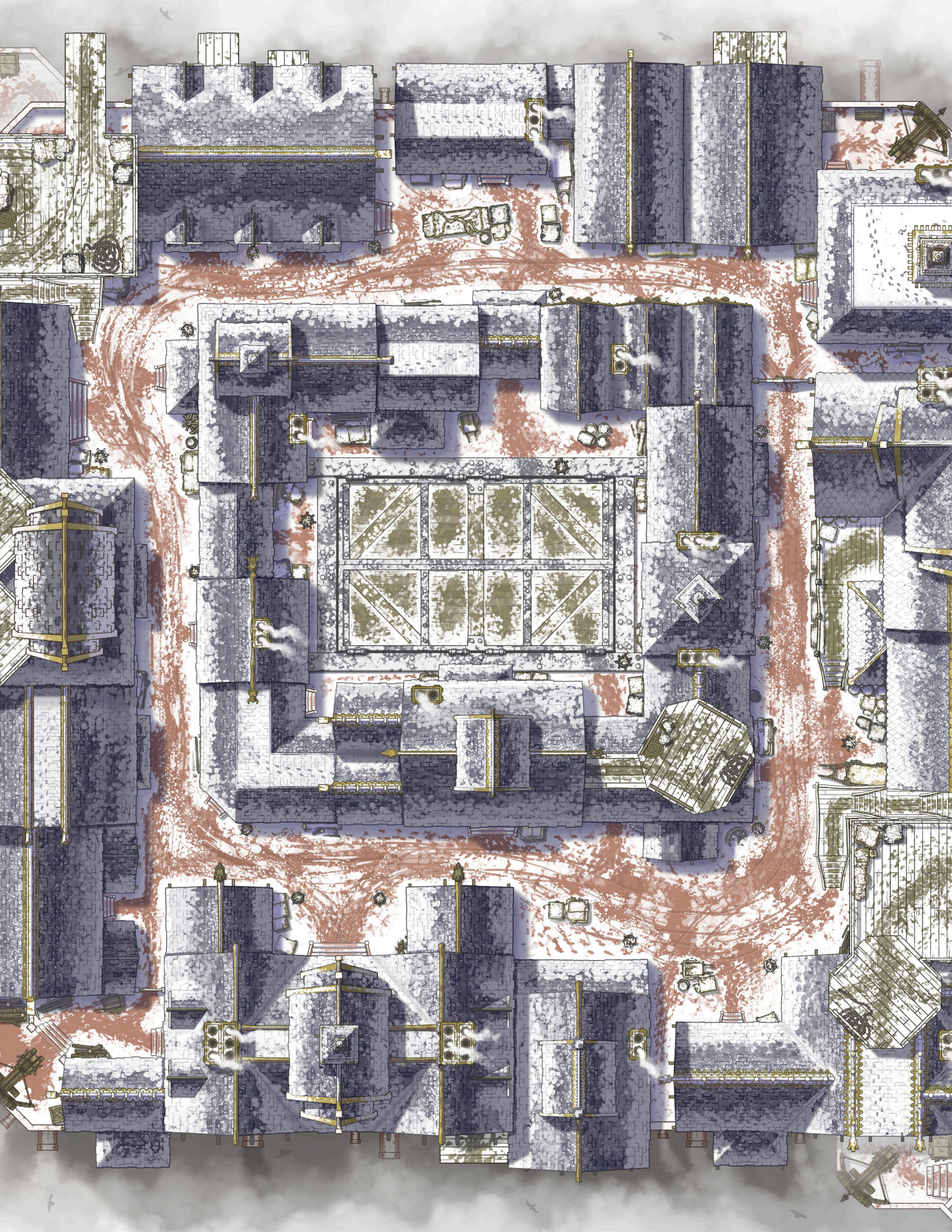
vil stains,” and are considered indications of maturity and wisdom.

Vyndur dwarves typically live between 100 and 150 years, substantially longer than those that live outside the library. Of course, this discounts the nontrivial number of dwarves who die of unnatural causes while working within Vyndurvoht.

### VYNDUR DWARF NAMES

d8	Male	Female	Clan Names
1	Bragi	Eydis	Almast
2	Elvar	Inga	Bornoth
3	Geir	Njala	Durga
4	Pétur	Runa	Methrahg
5	Sveinn	Steinnu	Olin
6	Torsten	Svana	Suhnder
7	Ulfur	Vardis	Timo
8	Vithir	Yifa	Zegla





## VYNDUR SOCIETY

Most dwarves in Vyndurvoht are members of one of three orders: the honorvórn, the inkbinders, and the forgelords. While technically dwarves are free to choose whichever order they feel most suits them, in practice, family ties and societal pressures are likely to drive individual residents into the same line of work as their relatives. Each of the three orders will be described in much greater detail in later sections, but it is worth understanding the basics of each of the three bodies.

- **HONORVÓRN** are the guards of Vyndurvoht. Not exactly an army nor a constabulary force, the honorvórn instead are escorts and wardens, accompanying visitors down into the stacks whenever the foreigners wish to inspect the archives. When something goes awry within the library (e.g. when a visitor accidentally summons some minor imp, or a researcher goes berserk), the honorvórn are expected to resolve the situation as efficiently as possible.<sup>1</sup> If Vyndurvoht is ever subjected to an all-out assault from vandals seeking the contents held within, the honorvórn will lay down their lives to keep the assailants out.
- **INKBINDERS** are responsible for the clerical work inside the library. Though no one—not even the inkbinders—is allowed to read the books, they must at least learn enough about their contents to record the nature of the *dartömen* into the library ledger. Inkbinders are also the only spellcasters amongst the Vyndur dwarves ranks. By harnessing the magic of *svjell* ink, they can create eldritch wards to protect *Hjass* from the dangers of the library. In due time, they will attempt the greatest feat of their order: sealing off Vyndurvoht permanently.
- **FORGELORDS** are creators. Though associated with metalsmithing, the forgelords are responsible for creating *anything* that doesn't grow out of the ground. That includes forging swords and armor, but also building homes, repairing skiffs, and even cooking meals or brewing liquor. In times when resources are plentiful, the forgelords are the most respected and powerful members of dwarven society; after all, without inkwells, quills, shields, and weapons, the other two orders cannot work at all. In times of stability or stagnation, the forgelords descend into cultural irrelevance.

Not everyone in Vyndurvoht is a member of one of the orders. There are still a handful of farmers, though far fewer than in the overwhelmingly agrarian



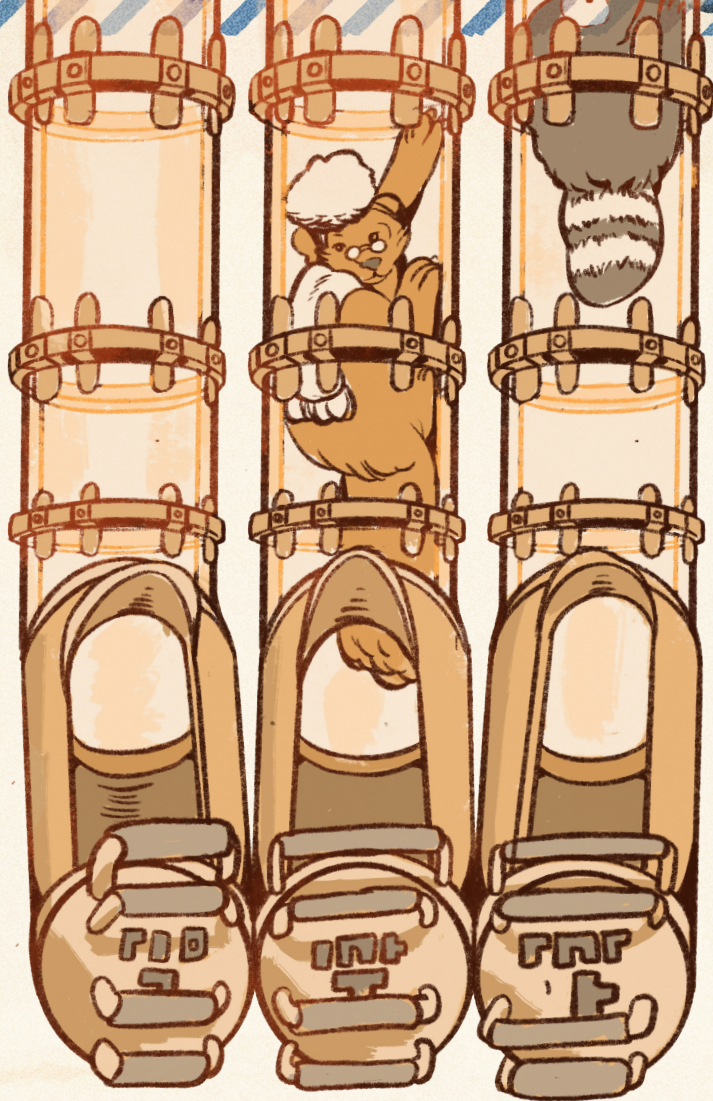
communities of the nearby mountains. These farmers work in hills surrounding the butte, raising yak and growing *vyndgrain*, a hardy relative of barley that can be fermented or baked into putrid but nutritious loaves. Despite feeding the denizens of the library and living just outside the butte, these laborers are not considered “true” Vyndur dwarves, a notion reinforced by their red-and-grey-striped hair. As such, they are treated as second-class citizens, inasmuch as they are considered citizens of Vyndurvoht at all.

Some dwarves also assume roles that don't fall so neatly into the orders: merchants, butchers, and non-magical healers are all positions that exist beyond the delineations of the three orders. Outside of Vyndurvoht, these are common and crucial positions, but within the library, close to 90% of the adult population are members of the honorvórn, inkbinders, or forgelords. Those working in other fields do not fit so neatly into the highly structured society.

Regardless of order, all dwarves contribute to mining. This is as true for those in the library as those in distant mountaineeldfs. When a Vyndurovht butte is young, thick veins of cloudshard must be carefully extracted from the heart of the spire. This work is laborious but exceedingly profitable. The cloudshard in the current Vyndurvoht took most of its first three centuries to harvest. Only recently depleted, the great shafts of valuable metal are crucial to the dwarven way of life.

The one remaining role in the city is that of *Kjag*, a matrilineal inherited position akin to a queen, chief, or spiritual guide. In most generations, the *Kjag* is purely a ceremonial title, as there are few meaningful decisions the dwarves need to make that wouldn't be relegated to the leadership within the orders. The exception, however, is during the Exodus. From the moment the library is filled until the moment a new Vyndurvoht is established, the *Kjag* is the singular ruler of all dwarven society. With the Sixth Exodus approaching, all eyes will be on *Kjag Brimdis Oggra*.

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to what dwarven stereotypes would suggest, the honorvórn will try to de-escalate tense situations whenever they can. Even when dealing with accursed tomes, violence is rarely the wisest option.



## THE SORTERS

Allegedly the Vyndur dwarves once maintained their libraries without any additional help, but this is difficult to imagine today. Many of the most basic operations within the library are handled by the Sorters, a complex network of intelligent mustelids: ermine, polecats, ferrets, and badgers chiefly among them. Though the Sorters are largely indistinguishable from normal mustelids that wander the snowy mountains, careful observation will reveal that Sorters are far more intelligent than those found outside the library. Furthermore, their muscles and skeletons have gradually adapted to form opposable thumbs. These benevolent workers act like the familiars sometimes seen accompanying the wizards of the southlands. They follow commands and seem to instinctively know what the Vyndur dwarves want, even without speech. Again, this is a notable distinction that further separates the library-dwellers from those that live in

humble mountaineelves. The Sorters are only loyal to true Vyndur dwarves.

Sometimes, a Sorter will become bonded to one particular dwarf. The creatures are most often associated with the inkbinders, but they may become bonded to anyone who lives in the butte. A bonded Sorter becomes more intelligent than their unbonded kin. Though even a bonded Sorter is incapable of speech, they share a deep emotional relationship with their keeper. Depending on the work of the dwarf, a bonded Sorter may gain additional abilities as well: a forgelord's Sorter may become proficient at tending to a flame, an honorvörn's Sorter is typically fierce in combat, and an inkbinder's Sorter is even capable of scribing for its keeper.

When a new dartöma enters the library, an inkbinder hands the tome to either a nearby Sorter or a bonded creature if they have one. This Sorter will then enter the labyrinthine system of small tubes and tunnels that connect the various corners of the library, depositing the book in the appropriate stack. While dwarves are more than capable of depositing or retrieving books as necessary, a Sorter can do it in less than half the time. Sorters are both willing and able to fetch, organize, and manipulate any number of objects throughout the city, but it is considered disrespectful to request such tasks from an unbonded Sorter. These benevolent creatures are aides, not servants.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE SORTERS

The history of the Sorters stretches back to the very first Vyndur library, though many of the specifics have been (perhaps intentionally?) lost to time. Supposedly, the first Vyndurvoht had many visitors from far-off lands, including distant realms only accessible via spells found in the dartömen.<sup>2</sup> One of these visitors gifted the Vyndur dwarves with the first Sorters, as a thank you for the dwarves' service.

The original Sorters were woefully under-equipped to handle the work of the library. They could *occasionally* properly stow or retrieve a given book, but they were just as likely to miscategorize any given dartöma. Then again, the first library was terribly inefficient, and the dwarves were barely superior to the Sorters in their organizational abilities.

Over centuries, the Sorters began to grow and adapt, becoming stronger, smarter, and more agile. They also acclimated to the harsh climate of the snowy taiga in which the libraries are built. Sorters began to bond with dwarves in the third Vyndurvoht, and now roughly one-third of all dwarves will bond with a Sorter during their lifetimes.

<sup>2</sup> Some hypothesize that an overabundance of these mysterious visitors necessitated the construction of the first book vault. The knowledge contained within the books could allow cosmic entities to cross the threshold into the land of Hjass, and that danger was seen as far greater than the potential benefits to unfettered interplanar travel.

Yes, Fyr, we understand that you want to tell the dwarves where they got their Sorters, but please trust me when I say we have deemed that irresponsible. It is much better for them to believe their origins are some mystery / lost to time / whatever. If they knew how much aid LIMINA has provided over the centuries, it would undermine their confidence. The last thing we want is for the dwarves to be second-guessing themselves before the next Exodus. Do your job and keep your mouth shut.

*-Logician Theeró Pe Ronès*

## THE CLOUDSHARD BUTTE

The mesa in which Vyndurvoht is built was not always hollowed-out. In fact, the existence of the butte itself is the result of the strange vein that once formed the core of the stone spire. The center of the city was previously a rich lode of cloudshard, an ultralight metal with three significant properties:

1. Cloudshard is of middling durability compared to other metals but is incredibly light. This makes the ore less than ideal for use in dwarven weapons and armor, but crucial in the construction of airships.
2. Cloudshard lodges wind their way into the surrounding rock, protecting nearby geological formations from erosion caused by intense Vyndur gales. This is what causes the butte to form in the first place: adjacent mountains and rock formations are gradually worn down from the strong winds, but a cloudshard-infused spire remains strong against the brutal winds.
3. A cloudshard vein naturally secretes *svjell ink*. This is *crucial* to the dwarves, as the only other known sources of the magic liquid are the menacing gulch spiders found far to the south.

It is this trifecta of benefits that makes a cloudshard butte an ideal site for a Vyndurvoht. All five previous libraries had been built into similar stone towers, and the plan for the seventh library is to find another such butte and repeat the process.

There is only one problem: the Vyndur dwarves have sent out scouts all across the Vyndur Mountains and have yet to find a seventh cloudshard butte suitable for a library. Of course, they will continue looking until the Sixth Exodus comes, but it is possible that the next Vyndurvoht may have to be built into a common mountainside like the homes of the Vyndur dwarves' provincial kin.

Meanwhile, even if they can find a suitable new butte in which to build their *next* library, they have already exhausted the vein of cloudshard in their current home. This lack of raw materials severely limits the economic significance—and consequently the social status—of the forgelords, a group of dwarves that make up roughly one-half of the adult population. It is in *everyone's* best interest to find a new source of cloudshard, but none are feeling that pressure more than the forgelords.

## GETTING TO VYNDURVOHT

The terrain around Vyndurvoht is treacherous. Canyons, frozen rivers, and icy peaks make traversing the Vyndur Mountains exceedingly difficult without either a capable guide, a sturdy mount, or arcane transportation. Luckily, roughly a dozen miles south of the library, travelers will find Vyndur Outpost, a small community surrounding the northernmost aerodrome in all of Hjass. This desolate camp is an adventurer's safest option for making their way to Vyndurvoht. Airships outfitted with Vyndur cloudshard mechanisms travel to the southlands at least once a week, and smaller skiffs can transport visitors back and forth from the outpost to the library as needed.

**JULA HRANA:** Visitors travel to Vyndurvoht infrequently enough that most skiffs are hired on a per-party basis. After arriving at the outpost, a group of adventurers is most likely to find Julia (she/her) ready to take them to the library proper. Julia grew up in the southlands and has lived her whole life outside of Vyndurvoht. She has striking red hair and has always found the strange way of life in the library as curious as do most travelers. Her outsider perspective helps her to explain some of the idiosyncrasies of life in the library. In contrast, many proper Vyndur dwarves have trouble identifying with the bewilderment many travelers experience upon arrival.

Julia is master of the clouds, a deft skysailor who can make the trip from Vyndur Outpost to the library in under two hours. At the helm of her skiff *Cattander*, Julia feels most at home. Never accepted in the southlands due to her dwarven heritage, nor in the mountains due to her perceived "lack of loyalty" to her kin, Julia is happiest in the company of other transients and voyagers. Even when piloting unambiguously villainous researchers, Julia greets visitors with open arms and a speedy skiff.

**GM NOTE:** Most visitors traveling to Vyndurvoht do so via airship. A select few will instead travel by horse or on foot. The Vyndur dwarves advise against this, as the mountains can be cruel to even the hardest of adventurers. Nevertheless, not all who travel to Vyndurvoht have the means to hire a skysailor. Visitors arriving by land will be awkwardly hoisted into the city by a rappelling member of the honorvörn. The order considers this method of entry into the city both needlessly laborious and potentially dangerous, and so they will only ever do so begrudgingly. If the visitor can drop off their dartöma without entering the city, the honorvörn will humbly suggest that they do so, and that they then immediately turn back.

The wealthiest visitors may instead travel on flying mounts. Hippogriffs and tamed dragons are rare but not unheard of in Hjäss. Those soaring in on winged beasts may house their creatures in Vyndurvoht's stables, though they'll have to pay the inkbinders a hefty fee to do so.

## ARRIVING IN THE CITY

Those traveling to Vyndurvoht are expected to make the trip worthwhile to the dwarves. Typically, visitors fall into one of two categories: those depositing books and those who wish to explore the archives. Anyone who has a book to deliver will be asked to deposit the dartöma and immediately provide payment. This is counterintuitive to many visitors. After all, the Vyndur dwarves believe it is *their* responsibility to care for the books in their collection. Why should the dwarves charge a fee when the visitor is helping them to do their job? That said, operating the library comes with *substantial* costs, and accepting payment in conjunction with the book donation is necessary to keep the library running. Those who seek access to the dartömen must also pay. The entry price for such visitors far exceeds the cost for those entering with what is perceived to be nobler intentions.

In both instances, there are three ways to compensate the dwarves.



1. **GOLD.** Dwarves need considerable stores of gold to exchange with traders from the southlands. The responsibilities of the library and the harsh surrounding landscape make it difficult just to keep the food stores stocked. Whatever the dwarves cannot produce for themselves needs to be purchased, and the gold received from visitors is a primary income source for the city, especially now that the Vyndur dwarves have depleted their supply of cloudshard
2. **SVJELL INK.** While the cloudshard butte once contained ample stores of ink, the dwarves presently lack any renewable source of the magic fluid. Though only rarely used for scribing, the magic ink is a requirement for inkbinder magic, and an insufficient supply during the Exodus could jeopardize the sealing of the tower.
3. **SERVICE.** The honorvörn are well-trained to confront potential wrongdoers seeking access to the archives under villainous pretenses, but the ongoing threats of the subbasement can only be opposed with the help of additional volunteers. Travelers interested in the services of the library may prefer to offer their combat prowess in lieu of money or precious svjell ink.

Payment is collected by whichever inkbinder is on duty at the airdock. Visitors who fail to pay will be detained by the honorvörn until a skiff can return them to Vyndur Outpost.

## **FJAR OST**

After submitting payment, most travelers are escorted to Fjar Ost, the sole inn for visitors to the library. Food and lodging are free of charge after arrival, but the longer a visitor stays, the more likely it is that the Vyndur dwarves will request additional payment. If the visitors can't pay, they will have to either leave the library... or provide service on the lower floors.

Rooms are sparsely appointed in Fjar Ost, but visitors are outfitted with suitable winter wear if they came underprepared. Forgelord chefs also prepare three meals a day, and because visitors are forbidden from eating in the stacks, most choose to keep to themselves while eating in their room. More extroverted visitors will be constantly reminded that they are the exception in Vyndurvoht. The majority of visitors to the city are those who have been given the grim task of disposing of dangerous texts, or the rare wannabe magical masterminds in search of arcane secrets. There are few friendly visitors interested in exchanging stories of the mountains, the southlands, or far-off realms.

**TREAQLE VAN NUIS:** There's an exception to every rule. While most outsiders in the great dwarven library are insular and brooding, gnomish Treaqle (he/him) is a bubbly explorer who has stayed in the library far longer than he had expected to. Treaqle's profound inherited wealth has allowed him to travel to every corner of Hjass, though he has rarely stayed in any one destination for more than a few weeks. Surprisingly, nowhere has felt quite like *home* as Vyndurvoht. This bleak, stony spire filled with cursed texts has—for whatever reason—endlessly delighted cheery Treaqle. Most of the staff of Fjar Ost enjoy his company, and so long as he continues paying, the dwarves are happy to keep him on-site. That said, some have raised concerns about the gnome's intentions. It seems quite possible that Treaqle is staying in Fjar Ost for more than just the scenic views.

**JÓHANN INGRERBRAT:** Jóhann (he/him) is the head chef in Fjar Ost, responsible for providing meals for all of the various travelers who find their way to Vyndurvoht. In years past, Jóhann took great pains to ensure he was catering to the precise needs of each visitor, making custom dishes for anyone with atypical dietary needs. In recent years, however, the prestige of the forgelords has waned, and with it his pride and enthusiasm for his work. Jóhann is getting old, and it seems likely he will not get the respect he feels he deserves even after the Sixth Exodus. As such, Jóhann has largely given up on what was once his life's calling. He cooks *one* dish for each meal, with no substitutions. If anyone doesn't like what he serves, they can head down into the kitchen and cook for themselves. Jóhann is not well liked by his peers nor those forced to eat his uninspired dishes.



## KJAG BRIMDIS OGGRA

The word “Kjag” is difficult to translate to the common tongue of Hjass. In Vyndur, it is close to “prophet,” “leader,” and—perhaps counterintuitively—“subject.” According to legend, the first Kjag was instructed by the Forge God Wynken Himself to protect the southlanders from their dangerous texts. Supposedly, the original Kjag devised the plans for the first Vyndurvoht before relegating most operations to the three orders.

In the millenia that followed, the responsibilities of the inkbinders, honorvörn, and forgelords grew considerably, but those of the Kjag never did. Wynken never gave further instructions. Instead, the distinction of Kjag was passed down to the first prophet’s daughter and so on. When the initial Vyndurvoht was filled, the Kjag organized the First Exodus, helped the newly nomadic Vyndur dwarves find a new cloudshard butte to call home, and then retired into relative obscurity. Then the process repeated.

The library’s current Kjag is Brimdis Oggra (she/her), a descendent of the original Kjag<sup>3</sup> so revered by the dwarves of the Vyndur Mountains. Brimdis’s mother was killed by martyrborn Aram Toggi<sup>4</sup> only two scant years ago, making 14-year-old Brimdis the youngest Kjag to have ever overseen an Exodus. Despite her age, Brimdis is bold and wise. The dwarves greatly prefer Brimdis to her mother Janna, who was apprehensive about her birthright and pessimistic about the Vyndur dwarves’ chances at finding a suitable new home. Many in the library understand that the Kjag’s primary responsibility is to make quick decisions based on the counsel of the orders, and thus many understand that someone brash and confident is preferable to someone more experienced but also more tentative.

Brimdis has already pledged to assist the honorvörn once her responsibilities as Kjag are completed. Though she may never become a true member of the order, she *can* indefinitely pledge service to the guard-force. This has endeared the young dwarf to many, who see this as a noble choice for a leader who could just as easily rest on her laurels after the Exodus is complete.

All Kjags have bonded Sorters, and young Brimdis is no exception. Her bonded mink Pinecone is allegedly a great judge of character. Brimdis needs to be exceedingly careful when receiving counsel from any dwarven kin who may not have Vyndurvoht’s best interest at heart. She relies on Pinecone to help her gauge the trustworthiness of those who seek to influence her decisions.



## THE HONORVÖRN

In a sense, all three orders protect the library. The inkbinders place clever wards on the stacks to prevent misuse. The forgelords craft weapons and armor to repel attacks. Even the farmers outside the butte provide food that keeps the citizens healthy. The honorvörn, however, are on the frontlines every day. They are the sworn knights of Wynken, noble warriors who protect the books from the very people who would misuse them, thereby protecting all of Hjass in the process.

The honorvörn are thankful for the arcane safeguards created by the inkbinders, but ultimately, they believe themselves to be the true first line of defense in the library. They have a legitimate claim to this belief. In the history of the six Vyndurvohts, the honorvörn have repeatedly prevented catastrophe. Whenever

<sup>3</sup> This fact is not supported by any historical documents. Dwarves do not record detailed genealogies, and the responsibility of raising dwarven children usually falls on all members of the parent’s order. As such, it is difficult to say with any certainty whether young Brimdis is actually descended from the same line as the first prophet many millennia ago.

<sup>4</sup> Aram is a corrupted knight with strong opinions about what’s best for the dwarves. For reasons that will become clear in a later chapter, he went unpunished.

a conniving mage “accidentally” summons a horrific beast to the library, it falls on the honorvörn to dispatch the creature. When the Armies of Ar’chute laid siege to Vyndurvoht Three, it was the honorvörn who defeated the invading swarms. Likewise, it is impossible to count how many would-be apocalypses the honorvörn have prevented simply with their deterring presence. Sickly sorcerers in search of ultimate power will usually think twice about swindling spellbooks from the archives when they know a mighty dwarven knight will be watching their every move.

The honorvörn operate with a great many rules, all of which are enumerated in their quasi-religious handbook “The Honorvörn’s Pledge.” Though explicated in needless magniloquent language, many of the codes are quite straightforward.

1. An honorvörn is pledged first and foremost to the library itself.
2. No outsider may enter the stacks without an honorvörn chaperone.
3. An outsider who will not abide by the rules of Vyndurvoht shall be considered an enemy combatant.
  - a. It is preferable to confront enemy combatants nonviolently.
  - b. It is acceptable to use lethal force when necessary.
4. Honorvörn shall only use blunt weapons. Sharp blades run the risk of slicing through the very books the honorvörn are sworn to protect.
5. Cloudshard is for southlanders. An honorvörn deserves tougher metal.
6. If violence is required to prevent catastrophe, then violence shall be dispensed.
7. There is but one God, and He is Wynken, Lord of the Forge.

Honorvörn are often phlegmatic and insular to a fault. Whereas the inkbinders and forgelords will happily share a drink, honorvörn tend to keep to themselves. Their ranks are dominantly female, as the taller female dwarves are commonly accepted to be superior fighters. Nonetheless, any Vyndur dwarf can become an honorvörn, even those who have previously joined one of the other orders. In fact, many inkbinders leave their order to join the honorvörn if they find they cannot successfully draw svjell ink.

## THE HONOR HALL

5 Most dwarves’ alcohol of choice. A strong dark stout made from fermented vyndgrain. Notes of chocolate, oats, and coffee. Barely carbonated and extremely heavy. Typically around 13% alcohol by volume. Served in one-liter mugs. Outsiders can rarely stomach more than one in a given evening.

The sworn protectors of Vyndurvoht must be ready at any time to descend into the frigid hill below the butte to fend off those besieging the library. They must also be prepared to take to the skies on their sole airship *The Langbátur* to fight off aerial assaults. As such, they’ve built their barracks and meeting hall topside, with a shaft leading into the stacks below. The Honor Hall also provides lodgings for visitors who pledge service to the honorvörn in exchange for access to the library.

Whereas the other order halls feature *vyndurbjór* on tap, the honorvörn prefer to sip *akaieja*, a sort of fortified apricot wine. Instead of merrily sharing drinks around a large communal hearth, the Honor Hall features many small saunas where knights can slowly drink their *akaieja* while tending to their aches and wounds.

The primary function of the Honor Hall is to act as a barracks. The honorvörn are not expected to sleep in the Honor Hall, though they are expected to wait inside whenever on duty but not chaperoning. That way, they can quickly be deployed either into the stacks, rappelling down into the hills, or launching off into the frigid skies.

## HIGH COUNCILLOR ANDRÁ



## FREYBJÖRN

Andrá (she/her) does not lead the honorvörn alone, but all dwarves on the order's High Council defer to Andrá in times of doubt. She has repeatedly proven herself in tense moments, all while rarely resorting to lethal force. If anything, Andrá's most impressive feat is how infrequently she has needed to use her weapon at all. Make no mistake: Andrá is a competent warrior in her own right, but she has found that even the greatest threats confronting the library (visiting mages, angry warlords, and the Sentient dartömen themselves) can be talked down with a combination of coercion and intimidation. Andrá is getting on in age, however, and will likely soon step down from her position on the High Council. It is difficult to say whether the next generation of honorvörn will act with such courage.

Always accompanying Andrá is her bonded Sorter Crumble, a polecat who has learned to wield a slingshot with deadly accuracy. Crumble has been by Andrá's side for decades and is a key asset when attempting to intimidate vandals, burglars, and conniving brigands. It is difficult to maintain composure when confronted with such a surprising mixture of cute and threatening.

**HELA FRYGGI:** After years of attempting to gain even a passing proficiency with inkbinding, Hela (she/her) left her previous order to join the honorvörn. It



would be difficult to say that Hela is “happy” with this decision; she is about as stoic a dwarf as you’ll find in Vyndurvoht. That said, she was beginning to wonder whether she had a future in the library at all before leaving the inkbinders. A life spent guarding the library against foolish southlanders is a worthy life. Though she would never say that she knows best, she knows for certain that she’s wiser than the buffoons who think they can wield the dark knowledge in the library. When Hela ends up chaperoning for visitors, they often leave the library as quickly as they can just to avoid her judgmental glares.

**NALLI RJOOBA:** After many years of service in the honorvörn, Nalli (she/her) is eager to shed her final red streak of thick matted hair. When she came of age, she left her family of cattle farmers in the western hills and assumed the greatest honor her people can aspire to. Unlike many of the knights in her order, Nalli is enthusiastic and exuberant. She relishes the opportunity to ward off the evildoers both from within and without. Her zeal is commended by those outside the order, but many of her peers view her ardor as distasteful. To most, serving in the honorvörn is a noble but somber affair. For Nalli, there’s nothing more exciting than smacking an unsuspecting book thief in the head with her “non-lethal” hammer blows.

## THE MARTYRVÖRN

The honorvörn have no distinct branches. All members of the order are expected to be capable enough to handle any of the duties of the order: chaperoning, siege defense, skysailing, etc. However, there is one elite subsection of the honorvörn with unique distinction. The martyrvoörn are dwarves who have already been touched with a lick of the wickedness of Vyndurvoht. Perhaps they’ve skimmed a Maddening tome, or maybe the darkness of the subbasement has tainted them in some fundamental way. The blight that now infects their mind and soul renders them unfit for typical service with the honorvörn. They are not considered failures or anathema, but heroes: knights who, through noble work, have fallen to the ambient evil that puts all Vyndur dwarves at risk.

The martyrvoörn are not stationed in the Honor Hall, but deep in the lowest level of the library. There they fight the most dangerous foes spawning in the wretched depths. And when the Exodus is completed and the library sealed, the martyrvoörn will stay behind, fighting a never-ending war against any dark forces that might jeopardize the quarantined library.

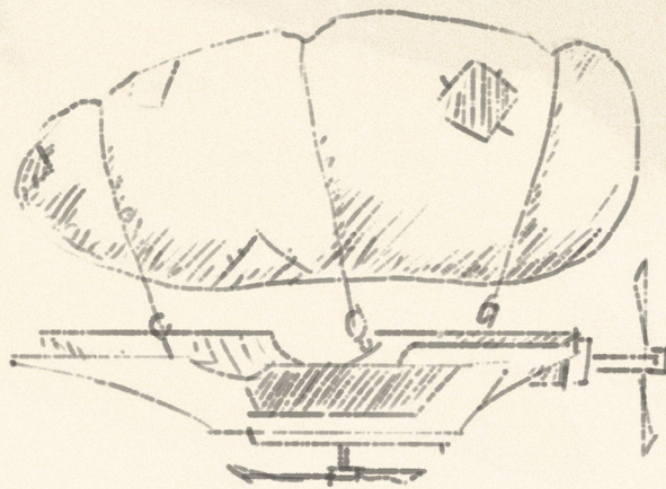
**GM NOTE:** The martyrvoörn and their ongoing fight against bizarre evils will be explored further in a future chapter. When players first enter Vyndurvoht, it may be preferable to pique their interest with subtle mentions of the martyrvoörn before explaining the exact nature of their noble curse.

## PLOT HOOK: THE SIXTH EXODUS

The library is almost full. When its final bookshelf is stuffed with *dartömen*, the *Vyndur* dwarves will have to leave the library, seal it, and find a new home. Though this seems like a simple process, every step is fraught with risks and challenges. Visitors—even those who have made a name for themselves—are unlikely to be consulted on matters related to the Exodus, but a benevolent party of adventurers may find it worthwhile to aid in the dangerous procedure. After all, a botched Exodus could have drastic and far-reaching consequences for the land of *Hjass*. If the sealing fails, centuries' worth of accursed texts could be up for grabs by any brigand willing to march into the abandoned spire.

Adventurers who wish to assist the dwarves in their Exodus will first have to prove their worth. That may mean offering service to the *honorvörn* in the lower levels of the libraries, or perhaps sharing with the dwarves tales of their deeds and accomplishments throughout the southlands and realms unknown.

If it becomes clear that the party is interested in assisting the dwarves, leaders from the three orders—or even *Kjag Brimdis Oggra* herself—will pepper the party with smaller tasks. The nature of these requests is completely transparent. The dwarves have learned from centuries of experience that enterprising do-gooders will often find their way to *Vyndurvoht* in an effort to prove themselves. Some of these adventures *might* even be competent. As such, the dwarves will try to gauge the merit of would-be heroes by testing them with simple requests, slowly sussing out whether the party has good judgment and a wide set of skills.



Depending on which order the party befriends first, they are likely to be offered distinct tasks.

Once the party has endeared themselves to one of the orders, the dwarves will be far more likely to accept additional aid for the trials that will inevitably occur during the relocation. The Exodus itself has three distinct phases:

1. Leave the library
2. Seal the library
3. Found a new library

Each of these phases may bring with it unique complications. The dwarves will rely on the party of adventurers once these heroes have proven themselves.

d4	Order	Tasks
1	<b>HONORVÖRN</b>	The <i>honorvörn</i> are the most straightforward group to impress. All they need is additional help guarding the hills, the skies, the stacks, and the subbasement. Any party that offers their combat prowess to aid <i>Wynken's</i> guards will gain both the respect and the admiration of the library knights.
2	<b>INKBINDERS</b>	The most common tasks the <i>inkbinders</i> will request are either clerical or magical in nature. If the party can assist with even the most basic tasks of organization, bureaucracy, or spellcasting that are not achievable through <i>inkbinding</i> , they will gain the respect of the <i>inkbinders</i> .
3	<b>FORGELORDS</b>	<i>Forgelords</i> are interested in crafting and will be most pleased if the party can procure raw materials for them. <i>Forgelords</i> who live in <i>Vyndurvoht</i> have extremely limited stores of crafting components and rely on outsiders for goods. If the adventurers came to <i>Vyndurvoht</i> with nary a scrap of iron, they may be asked to venture into the harsh wilderness to scavenge for resources.
4	<b>KJAG</b>	The <i>Kjag</i> needs information first and foremost. She will ask the party for details about the outside world. Is there any nearby <i>cloudshard</i> ? Are any southlanders hoarding dangerous texts? What foreign threats should the dwarves expect in the years to come? If the party wishes to befriend the <i>Kjag</i> , they will need to prove their usefulness with notable intel and the reliability of their judgment.

## LEAVE THE LIBRARY

In theory, leaving Vyndurvoht should be the easy part. Most dwarves are prepared to part with many of their belongings, and preparations have already begun to outfit themselves with necessary winter wear, camping supplies, and rations for the journey to Vyndurvoht Seven. On the day of the Exodus, the plan is simple: those able to rappel will descend down the side of the library, form ranks in the snow, and prepare to march. Meanwhile, skiff pilot Jula Hrana will ferry the elderly and the young down in shifts.

Nevertheless, this procedure is not quite so easy as it may sound. The Vyndur dwarves can be fairly rigid with their plans, and they may find it difficult to adapt to even minor hurdles. Consider rolling on the Evacuation Complications table when determining which issues may present themselves.

### d6 Evacuation Complications

- 1 A **brutal storm** threatens the exit. Rappelers will have trouble descending, and it will be too dangerous to sail airships. The longer it takes to get everyone down into the hills, the longer those already outside will have to contend with the storms.
- 2 A squad of book thieves has been lying in wait for the Exodus. They plan to **invade the tower** while the dwarves are distracted by the chaotic exit. The adventurers must join the honorvörn to keep the thieves at bay while the rest of the city exits.
- 3 Despite their holy charge, a subsection of misled inkbinders has decided it would be preferable to **simply stay in the library**. They've convinced a handful of other dwarves to join them. The inkbinder sealing ritual will be compromised without the aid of these deceived dwarves.
- 4 The darkness in the subbasement grows. Whatever vile forces linger beneath the library have chosen to **engulf the spire in mayhem** before the Exodus has even begun. Time is against the dwarves: they must decide whether to fight back in full force or escape as quickly as possible. Can they seal the dangers within?
- 5 The **King of Tokaren** has decided to personally oversee the deposit of a set of illicit political philosophies. The King is unaware that the library has already been filled, but he won't take "no" for an answer. Perhaps he can be convinced by the rhetoric of an outsider...
- 6 Though it has never been an issue during previous Exoduses, the **Sorters simply refuse to leave**. Bonded Sorters may accompany their keepers, but the rest are lingering in their hidey-holes. Do they know something that the dwarves don't?

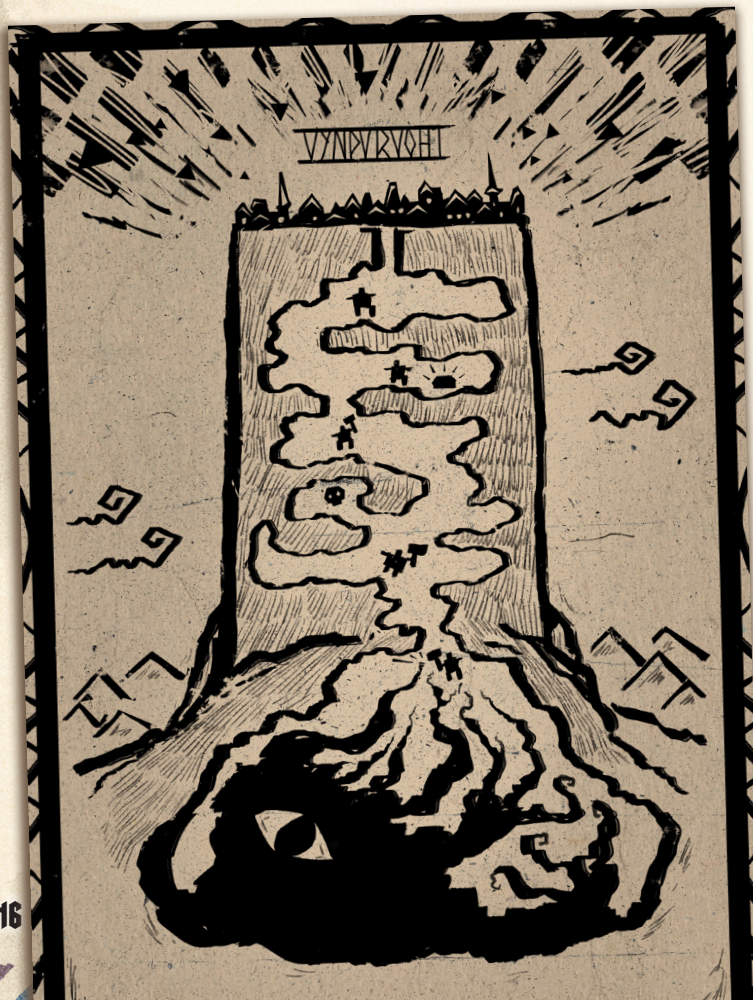


## SEAL THE LIBRARY

The inkbinders have a great many responsibilities within the library, but the greatest of all is permanently sealing the library. Once all the dwarves—other than the martyrvoörn, that is—have evacuated, the inkbinders will surround the hollowed-out butte. They will use all of their arcane might to draw in both the stores of svjell ink that still reside within the library as well as the residual dark magic of the dartömen. With all of this eldritch power at their fingertips, they will channel a shockwave of shadowy magic at the library. If everything goes according to plan, this should encase the entire butte in a solid, impenetrable, inky black foam.

This ritual spell requires both great concentration and great stores of svjell ink. It is the reason that the Vyndur dwarves demand so much of the arcane liquid and keep it in a colossal well within the tower. All previous Vyndurvohts have been sealed in this manner, and as far as the Vyndur dwarves know, none have ever been compromised. A daring adventurer who chooses to explore the vast and unforgiving Vyndur Mountains will come across the previous five cloudshard buttes also encased in this dense obsidian foam.

This is, unsurprisingly, the moment Kjag Brimdis Oggra dreads most. She'll have no ability to influence the ritual, and all she can do is hope that it goes as smoothly as it has for previous incarnations of the library. Small hiccups, however, can lead to drastic complications.



## d6 Inkbinding Complications

- 1 One or more of the inkbinders has **become corrupted**, likely due to uncovering some accursed knowledge within the library. The force needs to be close to full strength in order for the ritual to succeed. The party will have to either cure the tainted inkbinders or aid in the magic ritual themselves.
- 2 A nearby **stampede of yak and shredwolves** threatens to distract the inkbinders. Typically, the mages would cast a noise-dampening spell, but they are of course otherwise occupied. If the inkbinders are distracted, the spell could very well go awry.
- 3 Just before the Exodus was about to begin, one of the inkbinders found that the **Great Inkwell had been tampered with**. If the well can't be purified, the inkbinding will surely fail. The adventurers will have to either suss out who sullied the well or else try to remove the taint themselves.
- 4 The visiting deathless southlander Kallam the Cursed has **taken chief inkbinder Fálki Dubrorik hostage**. Kallam wants the library to stay open while he searches for a cure to his ailment, and he thinks delaying the Exodus is the only way he can succeed. Fálki's magic is unrivaled, and the remaining inkbinders certainly won't have enough power to seal the library without him.
- 5 The night before the Exodus, every inkbinder in Vyndurvoht had the same dream: a vivid vision of **Wynken instructing the inkbinders not to seal the library**. Is this merely a delusion? Or has Wynken changed His mind? Perhaps something more sinister is at play... Regardless, the inkbinders are now torn about whether to go through with the ritual.
- 6 The Council of Arkus—the dominant religious order in the southlands—has come to Vyndurvoht to **announce a Hjass-wide ban on the use of inkbinding**. The dwarven magic is now considered an affront to the God of Light and Shadow. Chief inkbinder Fálki Dubrorik and Kjag Brimdis Oggra will have to decide how best to handle this diplomatic unpleasantness.

## FOUND A NEW LIBRARY

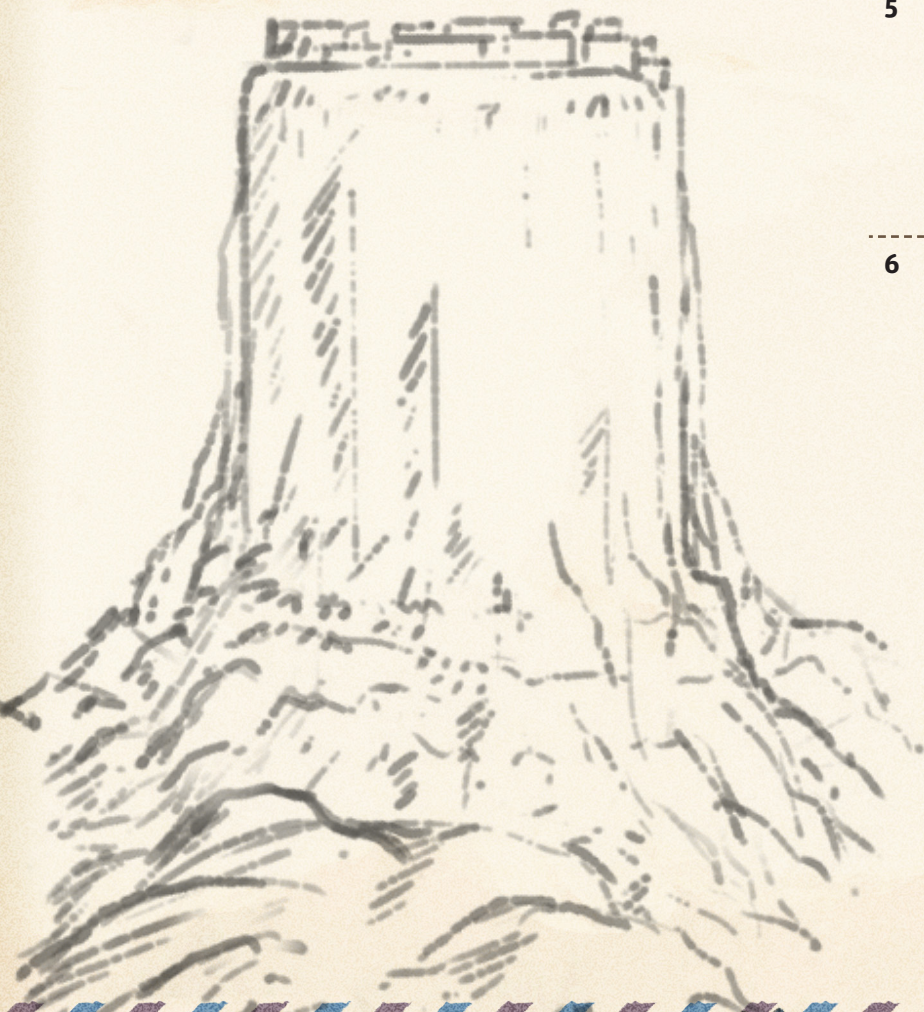
Even with their plentiful resources, the dwarves cannot live in the harsh Vyndur Mountains indefinitely. They will eventually have to found a new library, a new home for the Vyndur dwarves. The exact process of how they will do this is up to the Kjag. The dwarves do have the benefit of using Jula's skiff and The Langbátur, but exploring the Mountains will require splitting the dwarves up, conducting speedy reconnaissance, and making quick decisions so as to limit the amount of time Hjass has to spend without a functioning Vyndurvoht.

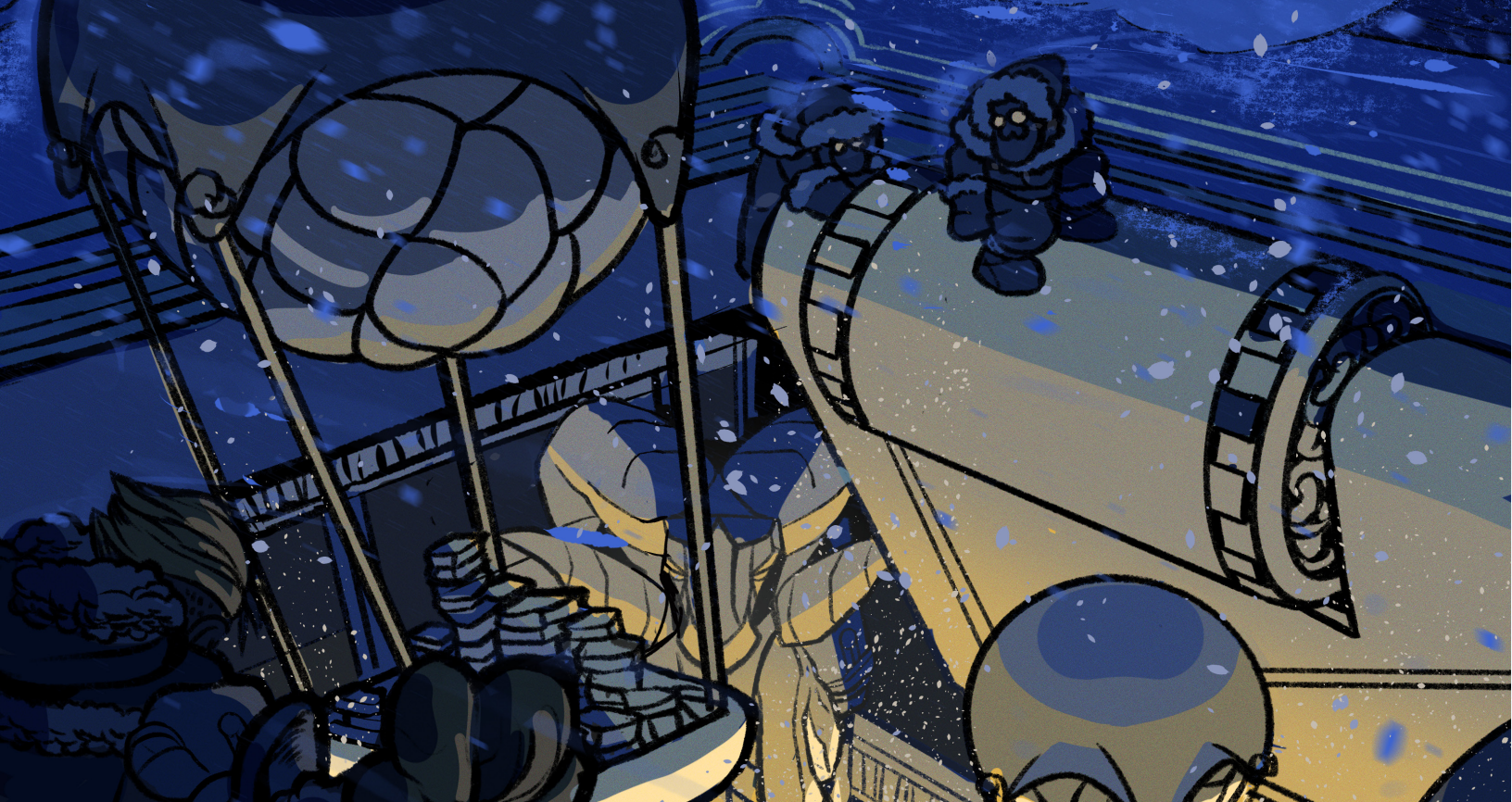
In addition to the minor complications that might ensue, the massive existential threat to the dwarves is that there are simply no more cloudshard buttes. No matter what, the dwarves will have to construct their next home within some other geological formation. Perhaps they will choose a deep ravine, a towering mountain peak, or a standard dwarven hillock. Each option will present its own challenges, but the most important obstacle the dwarves will have to overcome is accepting the truth: the next Vyndurvoht is going to look much different than the previous six, and no matter how hard they look, they will not find another great cloudshard spire.

As if that weren't bad enough, any of the following obstacles may also test the dwarves' abilities to find a suitable new home.

### d6 Relocation Complications

- 1 A solar flare has caused all dwarven **compasses to act erratically**. Navigating the mountains, and/or retracing their steps will be considerably more difficult. This may also complicate the dwarves' ability to seek resupply drops from human traders.
- 2 The Kjag has found another tall mesa that seems like a suitable home! However, the cloudshard contained within is extremely brittle, and the svjell ink that it secretes is mysteriously tainted. Are the dwarves willing to accept this **wildly inferior spire** as their new home? And is there more to this malformed butte than meets the eye?
- 3 The **Kjag has fallen deathly ill**. She is unable to think clearly and cannot speak. She still lives, however, so a new Kjag cannot be named. The rest of the dwarves will have to somehow make a joint decision about where to live next. Most Vyndur dwarves have no experience with democracy, so this may be a drawn-out and bloody affair.
- 4 A malevolent **snow witch pursues the dwarves**, warping the terrain and playing illusory tricks on the scouts. So long as the snow witch lives, it seems unlikely the dwarves will ever find a suitable home.
- 5 The Kjag has heard tales of a **cloudshard butte within Tokaren lands** far to the south. While this might be the ideal geological formation within which to build a library, many of the dwarves have expressed reservations about moving into the sovereign territory of another kingdom, particularly one so far from their home.
- 6 A steep mountain filled with valuable ores is far and away the best site for a new Vyndurvoht. It is secluded, deep, and has a protected cave mouth perfect for incoming airships. There's just one problem: **a terrifying dragon has already claimed the mountain** as its own lair.





## TEXT AND INK

### GENRES OF DARTÖMEN

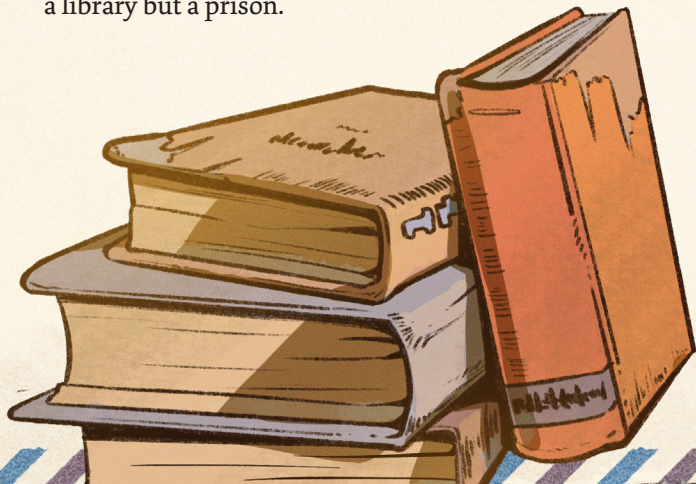


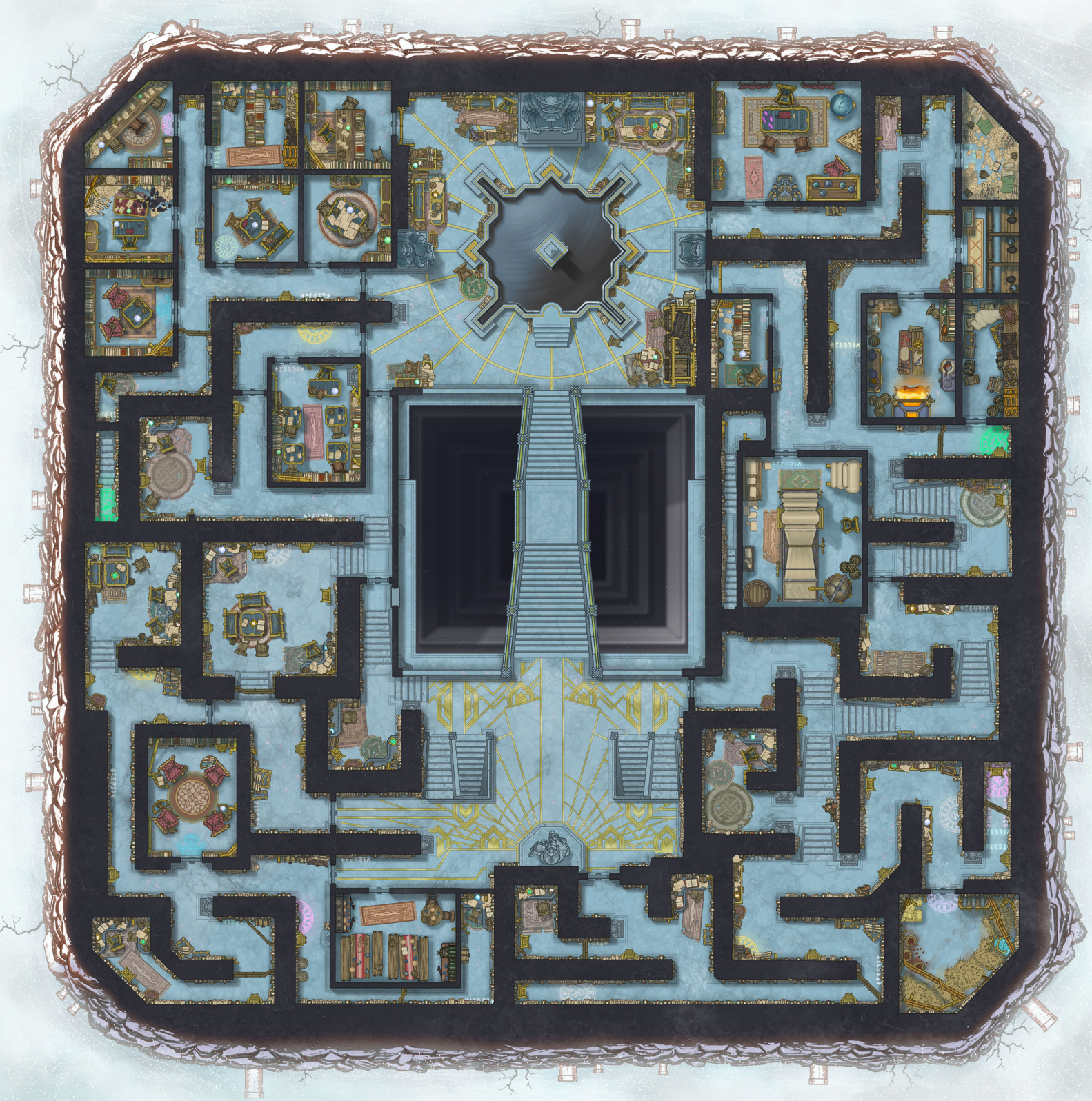
he Vyndur dwarves categorize dartömen—the various accursed books in their collection—into five categories, listed below in order of perceived risk:

- **SPELLCASTING:** The most plentiful category of writings within Vyndurvoht are also the most sought-after. Spellcasting books include any texts that either offer instruction in the ways of spellcasting or produce magical effects whenever their words are read aloud.
- **TABOO:** The term “taboo” is broadly defined as far as the dwarves are concerned. Typically this refers to texts containing knowledge that would be harmful to society if broadly disseminated, but the dwarves aren’t in the business of delineating that distinction. If a far-off king decides that a book of political treatises is taboo, he may bring it to the dwarves to seal away. The inkbinder will accept the manifesto without question so long as payment is provided.
- **IMBUED:** In the land of Hjass, the very act of creation carries with it a touch of divinity and a spark of the arcane. Occasionally, a particularly impassioned creator may inadvertently inject a piece of themselves into their words.

These are not clones or memories, but rather words suffused with the characteristics of the writer. If a wicked writer imbues a text with a portion of themselves, that text will exude an aura of wickedness that must be contained.

- **MADDENING:** Works of deranged or cosmically inspired authors may induce various forms of madness in readers. This may mean that a reader enters a murderous rampage or simply that spending enough time with a text renders them catatonic.
- **SENTIENT:** The most dangerous works in the library are those with minds of their own. Though plenty of wizards and expert spellcasters may create sentient tomes for benevolent purposes (as assistants, pets, or librarians in their own right), awakened books interred in the depths of Vyndurvoht are typically only those motivated by malice. For such vile creations, Vyndurvoht is not a library but a prison.





## SPELLCASTING TEXTS

The first category of *dartömen* takes up at least one third of the total space within the library. In terms of total *number* of texts, however, Spellcasting texts comprise more than half of entries in the master ledger. After all, many of these documents take the form of a single scroll, notecard, or sketches on a handkerchief. The majority of visitors who seek wisdom from the library are mages, researchers, and fledgling necromantic scientists in search of new arcane opportunities.

Compared to the more immediately threatening texts in the floors beneath the library, the various Spellcasting texts within A-Level are seen as comparatively safe. This is largely due to the soundproofing wards that suffuse the first layer of stacks. Wizards who enter the Spellcasting library are not allowed to take notes, nor are they able to produce any noise whatsoever. Attempting to read a violent spell aloud so as to dispatch an accompanying *honurvörn* chaperone will have no effect. If a wizard wishes to learn some apocalyptic spell in the library, they will have to memorize it and take that knowledge with them.

The dwarves know they are walking a treacherous tightrope. Previous incarnations of *Vyndurvoht* were *completely* off-limits to visitors beyond those depositing *dartömen*. The most common visitors to the library are those with—at best—dubious intentions. The spellcasting knowledge in the library isn't exactly sought-after by would-be healers; such scholars would venture to hallowed halls in the southlands, where vulnerable spells are freely accessible to acolytes and apothecaries.

Nevertheless, the *Vyndur* dwarves have determined time and time again that the benefits of

Thank you King for accepting our correspondence,

It has come to our attention that a citizen of *Tokaren*—one *Jamison Thallis O'Flarley*—spent considerable time studying *The Forms of Conflagration*, a spellbook in our library that contains the knowledge necessary to conjure firestorms at great range. While we do not know the nature of your laws, this in and of itself would be grounds for imprisonment in dwarven society. At the very least, we highly recommend monitoring *Jamison's* practice of magic to avoid civilian death.

- *Chief Inkbinder Fálki Dubrorik*

allowing malevolent mages to indulge their arcane curiosities far outweigh the costs. With proper wards and chaperones, the immediate threat to *Vyndurvoht* should be limited, and the resources gained through the admission price allow the dwarves to maintain the library. Moreover, this allows the dwarves to monitor all those who seek out particularly destructive knowledge. This makes the dwarves invaluable to southland societies, who do their best to keep themselves in *Vyndurvoht's* good graces lest the dwarves deign to withhold those names or, *Wynken* forbid, aid a dissenter in their quest for power.

**GM NOTE:** Lighting is a constant pain for the *Vyndur* dwarves. The only windows in the butte are small arrowslits, as anything larger would make defending the library a nightmare. Likewise, torches are too much of a risk in a structure filled with dry parchment. As such, simple glyphs on floors and ceilings throughout *Vyndurvoht* provide ambient light, and arcane lanterns can be procured from inkbinders as necessary. Nevertheless, this leaves many of the library stacks dimly lit, and those unaccustomed to reading in such environments will have to struggle to focus their eyes.

## A SURVEY OF VOLUMES IN THE SPELLCASTING COLLECTION

### 1. FOOL YOUR FRIENDS, FOIL YOUR ENEMIES

*Vyndurvoht* contains at least a dozen copies of this beginner's guide to trickster magic, and the previous three libraries also contained numerous copies. This introduction provides instruction for wart evocation, speech jamming, and hair loss. Though this tome is only of minimal potential detriment to society, most kingdoms in the southlands have deemed it too... annoying to keep in circulation.

### 2. WELL-TIMED HEXES: AN ALMANAC OF ASTROLOGICAL BOONS FOR THE DARK ARTS

Though not strictly speaking a "spellbook," this druidic guidebook lists upcoming meaningful cosmological events that may amplify the powers of ill-natured magic. This tome lists decades worth of upcoming celestial phenomena—eclipses, alignments, and comets—along with the types of magic that such events should magnify.

### 3. KILL

This stone tablet, one of many petroglyphs in the library, was delivered from a gulch in the southlands after allegedly being used to assassinate a wealthy landowner. A witness to the crime explained that a disgruntled

serf carried the stone to his lord's home, read aloud the glyph, and then laughed maniacally as the lord agonizingly choked in front of him. The petroglyph has not been further tested.

#### 4. AN ALCHEMIST'S GUIDE TO KLAPAUCIUS

Some *dartömen* straddle the line between two categories within the library. The inkbinders debated at great length whether this tome, which teaches alchemists how to duplicate gold, was a better fit for the Spellcasting stacks or Taboo. After all, the act of magically creating gold is not inherently wicked, but such a spell's effect on an economy very well could be. Ultimately, the dwarves decided to include it within the acoustically dampened shelves of the Spellcasting library so as to avoid temptation from their own ranks.

#### 5. 101 WAYS TO CUSTOMIZE YOUR CURSES

It is ultimately futile to attempt to remove all spellbooks capable of producing wicked effects from circulation. Some tomes, however, are particularly worth pursuing for interest. "101 Ways to Customise Your Curses" offers so many unsettling and diabolical twists on conventional hexes that many consider its creation to be one of the "great sins of mankind."

#### 6. THE FROGINOMICRON

This leather scroll contains 10 glyphs inscribed in ink infused with blood. Reading the glyphs aloud while holding the scroll will—allegedly!—summon a never-ending swarm of frogs to your exact location. It is unclear what would stop the spell, what the frogs would do after being summoned, or why anyone would want to bring such chaos into the world. It is equally unclear who created *The Froginomicron* or how. The *Vyndur* dwarves pray to *Wynken* that their library possesses the only copy.

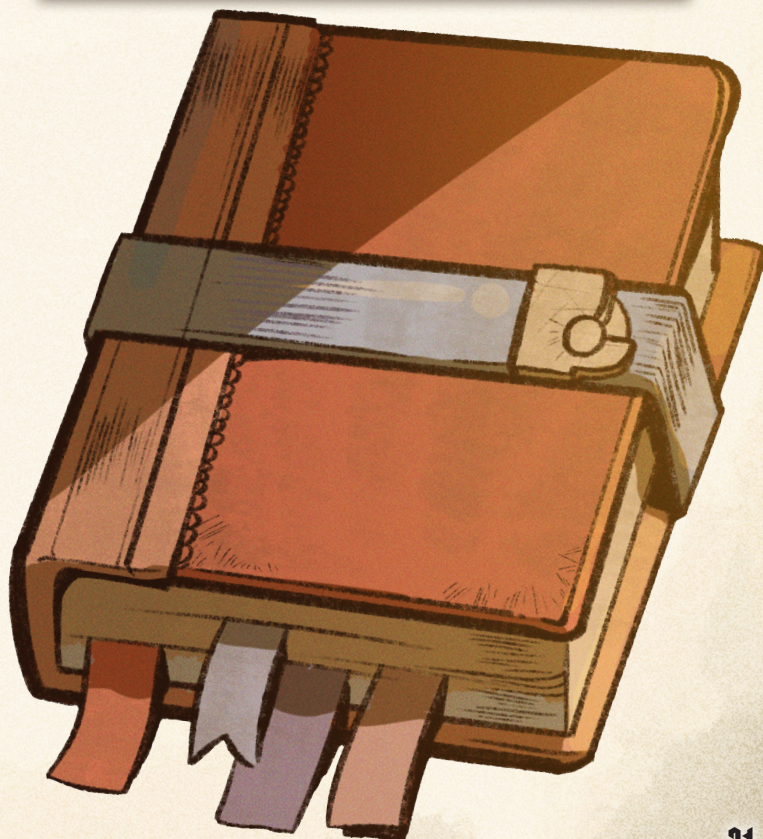
#### 7. ON UNHALLOWING

The dwarves pray to one God, but the southlanders believe in a much wider pantheon. They consecrate temples, burial plots, and idols in the names of their various deities. In return, the southlanders believe the Gods will bestow their blessings. *On Unhallowing* describes various means of desecrating, defiling, OR corrupting such hallowed ground or items, typically through complex "counter-divinity" incantations. Anyone who seeks out this tome is carefully guarded while in *Vyndurvoht* for fear they will disturb the Great Inkwell, one of *Vyndurvoht*'s sacred sites.

#### 8. CALLING THEE

Inexplicably, each incarnation of the library has contained exactly one copy of "Calling Thee," a lengthy book that describes how to conduct arcane rituals to summon various eldritch abominations. Although it is highly detailed, the tome omits crucial information: the actual names of the creatures it purports to beckon. Without knowing the names of each entity, the rituals cannot function as intended. Unfortunately, these names are recorded in "Names of the Elders," a book in the Taboo section but one level down. Needless to say, a visitor who requests access to one of these books is not allowed to procure its partner. If a visitor were to gain access to both the rituals and the names, the results could be catastrophic.

**GM NOTE:** If you'd like to generate more generic spellbooks or scrolls in your version of *Vyndurvoht*, it's entirely possible to populate this stack with instructions on how to perform any of the canonical spells in your RPG system of choice. You can either roll on a random table, or intentionally litter the stacks with spells you think your party might enjoy discovering. Be generous! The party is in a *magic library*. They'll be disappointed if they can't learn at least one powerful spell while browsing the stacks. Moreover, try to give the texts a bit of history. A "scroll of fireball" can only be so interesting without proper in-universe contextualization. An author, a place of origin, or a quirky format will help to make the document feel like more than a purely mechanical inclusion.





## KALLAM THE CURSED

Kallam the Cursed (he/him) has visited Vyndurvoht Six (the current library) at least a dozen times over the past 300 years. He also visited Vyndurvohts Four and Five before that. Kallam is a lich, a wizard who has overcome death. In days of yore, Kallam had hoped to rule over Hjass with an army of undead, but he knew he would need many more years of study to achieve such a goal. He came to a very simple conclusion: a single lifetime would not be enough for his domination schemes.

He sought out Vyndurvoht Four in an effort to learn secrets that would grant him everlasting life. Using illusory magic to disguise himself as a Vyndur dwarf, he plundered the library's Spellcasting stacks, eventually cobbling together a stolen collection of tomes whose various incantations would render him deathless. He wrote his soul away into a tome, imbuing it with the piece of himself that could die, and then hiding the book away among the labyrinthine stacks of the library. Vyndurvoht Four was sealed, and with it, Kallam's immortality was all but guaranteed.

In the era of Vyndurvoht Five, Kallam repeatedly raided the library to learn new summoning techniques. No longer relying on disguises, he waged constant wars against the honorvörn, breaking into the library time and time again and stealing dozens of books. What's worse: each time he raided, his brigade of skeletons and zombies grew. The honorvörn were no longer able to put up a fight, and so they let him have what he wanted. This surrender remains the great shame of the honorvörn.

There's a tricky thing about setting goals. If you ask a child what they want to be when they grow up, this answer is likely to change repeatedly before they ever come of age. Though Kallam was already an esteemed and studied wizard when he became deathless, he was

comparatively young in the context of his now infinite lifespan. He made great strides in his quest to conquer Hjass, but ultimately his greatest foe was that which stops many great schemes: a lack of motivation. After centuries of amassing forces, he grew tired of the fight for domination.

Now, Kallam seeks only the solace of knowing that he may *someday* die. He has returned all of the books stolen from previous Vyndurvohts and spends his days in the stacks combing for a hint as to how he might retrieve his soul tome from the impenetrable obsidian foam that encases Vyndurvoht Four. The Vyndur dwarves pity Kallam. Despite the violence he inflicted on their ancestors, they understand Kallam the Cursed to be truly worthy of his title: he is a pathetic fool whose eyes were bigger than his stomach.

Kallam is depressed, but he is also worldly and talkative. He is a font of knowledge and arcane know-how, though he is unlikely to share what he has learned if he thinks his listeners will use his findings for malicious means. Despite his quest, he is not single-minded. Yes, he is looking for any clues that will help him access the realm into which he banished his essence, but he also knows that he *quite literally* has all the time in the world. He'll happily stop and chat with a party of adventurers if they have questions for him.

**MISKI KRESANNTIANO:** Some folks delving into the Spellcasting stacks have sympathetic motives. Young Miski (she/her) is a noble from a southern city-state east of Chiuseppoli. Her family was ruined after her father's death; a web of spiraling interlocking debts left Miski and her siblings no hope of paying their way out of financial and social ruin. Her father's will *seems* to contain some cryptic advice as to how Miski could save their family, but she's wholly unable to decipher whatever code he used to write it. Instead of hiring cryptanalysts, Miski hopes to find a spell in Vyndurvoht that will allow her to speak with her departed father one last time. The fate of Miski's family rests in her hands, and she's hoping a bit of black magic is the key to undoing their fiscal woes.

**LE'ANNE MARINTH:** Le'anne (she/her) is a bank robber, and no, not some noble-minded "steal from the rich, give to the poor" scoundrel. She is in it for the money, and she is very good. Le'anne thinks she has a new scheme that's going to aid her upcoming heists: big, bizarre, magical distractions. Her current idea is to teach her accomplices how to conjure an army of snakes to discombobulate guards, but if she can't find any spells like that, she'll take whatever she can get. Le'anne has plenty of gold to spare, so she has had no trouble bribing a few of the inkbinders to grant her greater access to the stacks. She may just solicit the party as well if they seem up for some good old-fashioned magical mayhem.

## THE INKBINDERS

Of the three orders, the inkbinders have the most variety in their daily tasks. They are the bureaucratic overseers of the library. They supervise additions to the collection, manage the finances and resources of the city, and serve as front-facing officials when interacting with outsiders. If a visitor seeks access to a particular *dartöma*, an inkbinder will decide whether that visitor should be granted access, what it will cost them, and whether or not the visitor can seek out the book themselves. If a visitor is considered untrustworthy—or if the requested tome is in a particularly sensitive section of the library—the visitor will instead be escorted to one of the dedicated reading rooms, and a Sorter will fetch the tome for them.

Beyond their clerical responsibilities, the inkbinders are also responsible for placing wards throughout the library. These wards take many forms (e.g., the acoustic dampening mentioned above). Each stack has its own precautionary requirements, and so the specifics of additional wards will be described in later sections.

Inkbinder magic is performed differently from that of the chaotic war magic of the Tokaren or the innate illusory magicks of the Menariel. To cast a spell, an inkbinder needs a volume of *svjell* ink commensurate with the strength of the spell being cast, as well as a blank sheet of paper or parchment. The inkbinder stands with hands outstretched and summons the ink into their veins. As the ink is drawn into the caster's blood, it mingles with their spirit, suffusing with intentionality. The inkbinder sedately recites the words of the spell, which appear in inky glyphs on the paper held in front of them. The greater a spell's complexity, the more ink and paper required. When the inkbinder finishes their recitation, they declare "*it is bound*," which seals the effects of the spell. The paper disappears in a puff of black smoke, and the spell is cast.

Most dwarves only join the inkbinders after they first successfully draw ink. It's unknown whether drawing ink is a capacity of the mind, of body, or of spirit, but many who attempt are never able to perform the great dwarven magic. Some individuals who fail to draw ink join the order anyway, performing the more mundane administrative tasks. Others find a different calling amongst the *honorvörn* or *forgelords*. While it may seem as though there would have to be a large percentage of dwarves dedicating their life to inkbinding for the purpose of overseeing the various tasks required to manage the library, only about one in six *Vyndur* dwarves dedicate their lives to the order. Ultimately, few are capable of drawing ink, and with the aid of the Sorters, a small number of inkbinders can reliably tackle the various clerical and front-facing needs of the city.

## THE GREAT INKWELL

The inkbinders use the term "Great Inkwell" to refer interchangeably to the giant pool of *svjell* ink that stretches through A-Level as well as the meeting hall that forms around it. Unlike the strangely stoic Honor Hall above, the Great Inkwell is a much more convivial meeting place. Inkbinders mingle in offices and back-rooms where they record data while drinking copious *vyndurbjór*. Visitors come and go, and southlander merchants shmooze in pursuit of long-term trade negotiations. In contrast to the deathly silent Spellcasting stacks adjacent to the Great Inkwell, the hub of inkbinder life is loud, chaotic, and abuzz with activity.

The centerpiece is, of course, the inkwell itself. Whenever the dwarves import a new batch of *svjell* ink from the southlands, it gets poured into this well to be rebottled in exacting aliquots for inkbinder spellcasting. The accumulated ink also exudes a faint aura of magical energy that inkbinders find mildly intoxicating. The room and all of the adjoining corridors and stacks on A-Level have very small holes drilled into them. This is vital because it allows the inkbinders to summon the ink from the Great Inkwell during the Exodus. Their communal magic siphons the sum of the well out of the tower and into the veins of each participant spellcaster in the process.



## CHIEF INKBINDER FÁLKI DUBRORIK

Unlike the honorvörn who make order-wide decisions via their High Council, inkbinders are led by a single dwarf. The current chief inkbinder is Fálki Dubrorik (he/him), a potent spellcaster who has risen through the ranks by augmenting and tweaking many of the existing wards throughout the library.

Fálki was something of a child prodigy, first drawing ink before his tenth birthday. Like some virtuoso musicians, Fálki intuitively understood the craft of inkbinding and quickly set about putting his stamp on the practice as an *art*. Though the spellcasting glyph pages exist only for mere moments before disappearing, those who have seen Fálki's inkbinding have remarked at how elegant and intricate his arcane glyphs appear. It is perhaps no coincidence that this master of wards also has such expertise with this so-called "spoken calligraphy," the process by which spell recitations form ethereal, floating glyphs. Many have theorized that this points to a deeply-rooted relationship between mastery of dwarven magic and the idiosyncratic artistry of glyph painting.

Quickly after joining the inkbinders, Fálki Dubrorik set about revising many of the spells used to protect the library. Of particular note was his alteration of the muffling spell used throughout the Spellcasting stacks. Previously, *all* sound was canceled within any room containing Spellcasting tomes. Now, the acoustic ward has a narrow exception for honorvörn chaperones, allowing guards to make verbal requests of visitors such as "five more minutes," "put down that book," or "hey, stop memorizing that."

Despite Fálki's contributions to inkbinding magic, many in his ranks lament the fact that he has spent so little time learning the ins and outs of the more mundane responsibilities expected of inkbinders. Those who spend time considering how much food to buy, which visitors to forbid from B-Level, and how best to categorize dartömen question his ability to properly lead the order. All in all, the creation of wards and the great sealing in the upcoming Exodus make up a comparatively small proportion of the total work hours of the inkbinders. Fálki, however, has no intention of devoting further time to such "simple tasks." He aims to perfect the intricate inkbinding techniques, particularly the sealing itself.

Fálki is easily the most prominent leader in the library who has never bonded with a Sorter. Although none can predict who will find a Sorter to call their partner, so-called "unbonded" Vyndur dwarves are often perceived as lacking. The underlying assumption, of course, is that either the Sorters or Wynken Himself have judged the unbonded as impure or unworthy.

**ISRÚN JARLMITA:** Chief amongst Fálki's detractors is Isrún (she/her), keeper of the master ledger. Isrún and her bonded stoat Taro spend day and night recording new dartömen into the ledger, cross-referencing with the ledgers of previous libraries, and double checking that each volume remains where it ought to be. Her job is crucial to a functioning library, but it is seen by many as an afterthought. Without proper recordkeeping, many of the most basic tasks expected of the inkbinders would quickly double in difficulty. Nevertheless, Fálki has dedicated no time whatsoever to learning about Isrún's dedication to her task, nor has he put in any effort to ease her burden. Of course, as the library grows, so too does the complexity of maintaining the master ledger. With Vyndurvoht Six nearly at capacity, Isrún is resentful, and rightfully so.

**OKJALL AND MEENA FIOLLI:** Husband and wife Okjall (he/him) and Meena (she/her) handle access to the stacks. Whenever a visitor requests a given book, they must first go through Okjall and Meena. For example, if a military commander seeks information about chemical warfare, Okjall and Meena will consider 1) if the commander is involved in any current disputes, 2) if he would have the means to conduct such warfare, 3) if there is a chance he would use this information for good, and 4) the degree to which an ongoing relationship with the commander is advantageous to the library. All of these factors are weighed when determining the degree of access the visitor should be granted.

Most of their decision is predicated on interviews and research, with some allowance for a subjective judgment of character. For particularly bold requests, the pair may request letters of recommendation or even dossiers from other southland recordkeepers about past deeds of the visitor. When this occurs, a visitor may be stuck in limbo for weeks at a time.

Okjall and Meena are an exceedingly affectionate pair who occasionally make visitors uncomfortable with their public intimacy. The frequent pecks from the duo catch many visitors off guard. Nonetheless, Okjall and Meena are respected workers who have wisely navigated many tough decisions.



## PLOT HOOK: STEAL THE BOOK

Adventurers may make the trek to Vyndurvoht for many reasons. Maybe they want to assist in the Sixth Exodus, maybe they're trailing a villain in search of accursed secrets, or maybe they need to lie low for a while after a job gone wrong. For many, however, a trip to the library is motivated by one goal: acquire a book. Vyndurvoht is home to many of the most sought-after texts in Hjass, and adventurers who make their way up to the Vyndur Mountains probably won't want to head back to the southlands empty-handed. When crafting plot devices to entice the players to the library, consider rolling on the Book Theft Motivations table.

Stealing a book from the library is no easy feat. The entire library is filled with defenses that are meant to foil such plots.

**GM NOTE:** Okjall and Meena provide a convenient means to hold a referendum on the party. If the PCs come to Vyndurvoht in search of a particular elusive text, they'll presumably have to go through this duo first. Okjall and Meena can interrogate the party and reach out to NPCs from previous sessions. If the exploits of the PCs are infamous enough, the inkbinders may already be aware of their (mis)deeds. This should also give you flexibility as to whether you want the players to head straight to the relevant book they need or instead force them into raiding the stacks in secret.

d6	Book Theft Motivation	Example Book Title	Category
1	To defeat an evil sorcerer, the adventurers will need a spell that can counteract the mage's powerful combat enchantment.	<i>Nullification Spells from the Third Age: Counters and Remedies for Hellish Amplifications</i>	Spellcasting
2	The King of Tokaren fears the inkbinders are experimenting with volatile spells from their own stacks. He wants the party to remove a certain book from the collection.	<i>Tumultuous Abujaritves and the Undividable</i>	Spellcasting
3	The party seeks evidence of a ruthless tyrant's villainous deeds. The tyrant, however, had all documents detailing his crimes interred in Vyndurvoht.	<i>The Complete Records of Chiuseppoli v. Supreme Commandant Antonietto Biezoni</i>	Taboo
4	A grieving widower wants a keepsake to remind him of his late wife, an enigmatic sea witch. Her diary exudes a chaotic aquatic aura that may be dangerous to approach.	<i>Notes from the Depths: The Diary of Kera Sowthruss</i>	Imbued
5	To thwart an abusive professor at Menariel University, the party wants to present him a book that will surreptitiously unravel his mind.	<i>The Enigmalarikoxiol</i>	Maddening
6	A dark wizard is holding the party's patron hostage until they can free his spellbook familiar from the depths of Vyndurvoht.	<i>Qraprix the Literary</i>	Sentient

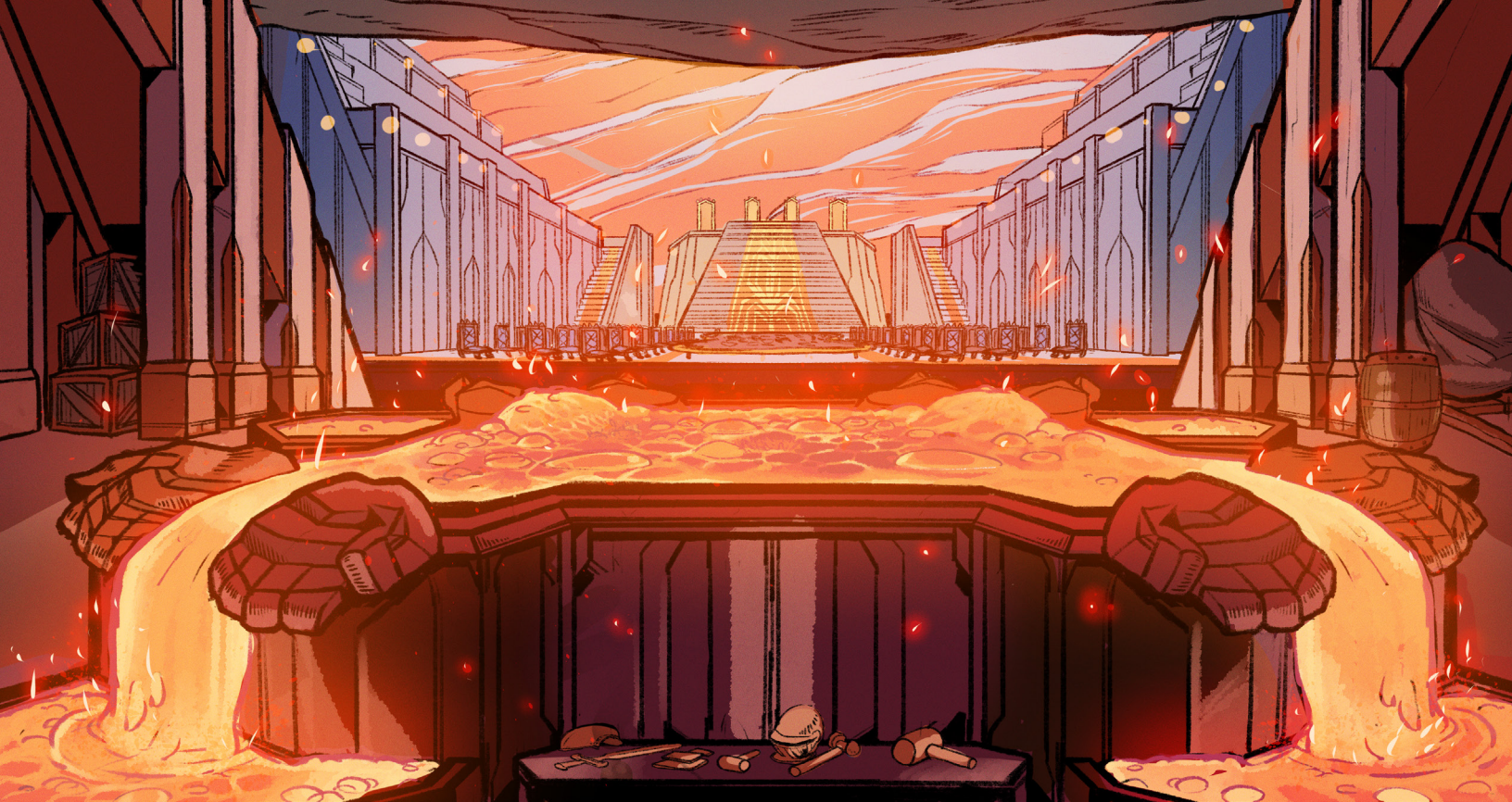
1. The honorvörn regularly patrol the library. Though many on-duty knights stand at the ready in the Honor Hall, there is always a small crew making the rounds in the stacks.
2. The Sorters, though incapable of speech, can alert the Vyndur dwarves. If they spot an unattended visitor, they may rush to the nearest dwarf and direct them to the intruder.
3. Wards may not always be as predictable as they seem. Fálki's improvements to the library's inkbinding will render many of the magical traps and alarms more complex than similar effects the party has encountered elsewhere in Hjass.
4. The Vyndur dwarves have weaponized other visitors. If a guest spots a library transgression and informs an inkbinder or honorvörn, they are entitled to a lengthier stay and additional access to the stacks at no cost.
5. Getting to the dartöma is only half the challenge. Visitors exiting the library will be searched twice: once upon leaving Fjar Ost, and once when boarding the skiff to Vyndur Outpost.
6. For many volumes, the greatest deterrent is the dartöma itself. If the party steals a Maddening book, will they be able to avoid the beguiling allure of the tainted knowledge contained within?

Despite the challenges, all hope is not lost for the conniving adventures. They have many potential allies and advantages they can use to aid in their quest. The following is an example list. If the adventurers are able to concoct their own resourceful tactics, they may yet be able to overcome the defenses of the Vyndur dwarves.

1. Violence is always an option for parties with looser morals. Fighting their way through dozens of honorvörn while trying not to trigger densely laid inkbinder traps will be a challenge, but it is the most straightforward way to invade the library. It has also proven successful in the past (see Kallam the Cursed).
2. There is power in numbers. Many of the visitors to Vyndurvoht would *also* like to grab a sack full of tomes and escape into the night. A collaboration could take many forms, but the simplest would be for everyone to simply raid the stacks simultaneously. The honorvörn can't stop everyone... right?
3. Secret passages abound through Vyndurvoht. Trap doors, hidden corridors, and wind-powered lifts all allow for creative traversal throughout the library. Plus, if any of the adventurers are *particularly* small and agile—or have the ability to magically transform—they can try navigating the Sorter tubes.



4. Why not wield the library's own magic against it? Adventurers should consider teaming up with Sentient dartömen, casting chaotic magic from the Spellcasting tomes, or luring inkbinders into their own traps.
5. Sedition is a potent tool, and not every Vyndur dwarf is as righteous and noble as they appear. Many can be bribed, while others may seek to undermine their peers for their own shameful ends.
6. The greatest distraction possible is only weeks away. While the dwarves undertake their Sixth Exodus, there will be a brief window during which the library will be evacuated but not yet sealed. A well-trained team of adventurers might be able to make off with a great haul, but if they fail, they'll be locked inside the obsidian foam tomb for eternity.



## SECRETS AND STEEL

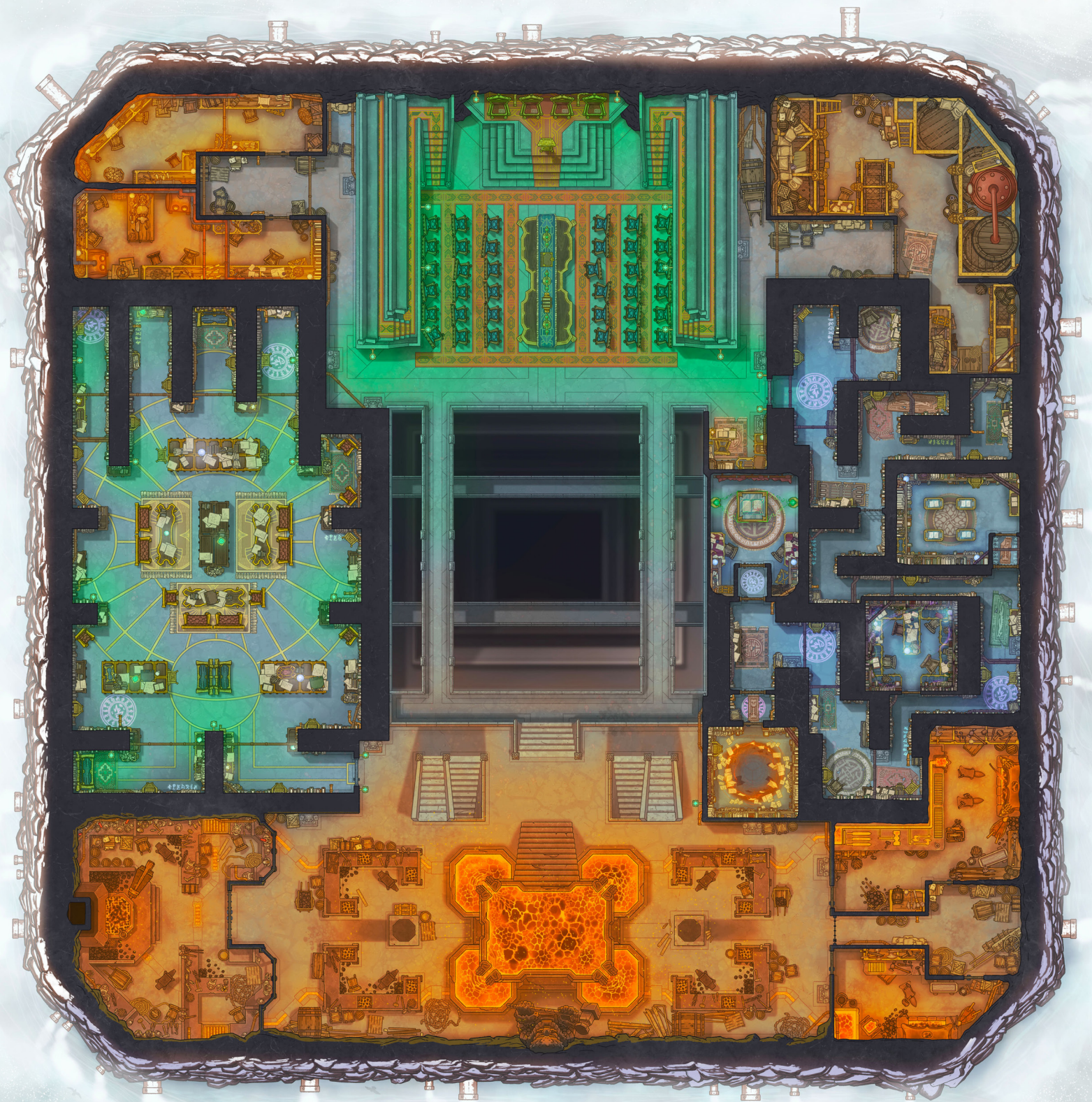
### TABOO TEXTS

After Spellcasting dartömen, the next most common genre of text in the library are those considered taboo. This is, broadly speaking, a catch-all for any volume that does not fit neatly within the other stacks. Importantly, the dwarves themselves have no particular guidelines for which texts should qualify as taboo in the first place. Most believe that this designation should be reserved for texts that contain information that would harm society were it disseminated. Deciding what constitutes a “harm to society,” however, is a subjective task, and one that the inkbinders are not particularly keen to address.

Dwarves demand a heftier compensation from visitors depositing texts in the Taboo section of the library. Though they are the easiest to safeguard, past Vyndur dwarves found that their stacks quickly filled up with political diatribes and pamphlets that were gathered in trunks and deposited en masse by despots seeking to quell dissent. Some of these manifestos could be harmful to society, but at least twice as many were outcries from oppressed people. Nonetheless, to equivocate over what even belongs in the library would be to double the workload of the inkbinders. It would also open up the library to criticism from outsiders.

Instead, the Vyndur dwarves established a simple rule. They will accept any book brought to their library, but if it is unwholly unmagical in nature, then the price of the deposit is double. Some kings and nobles who would rather see the ideologies of their rivals suppressed are happy to pay this fee. For everyone else, it’s easier to forgo the treacherous mountain trek and the extortionate fees just to offload a dissenting pamphlet.

The more threatening dartömen in the Taboo section of the library concern mysteries of the cosmos: truths that could upend the way many perceive Hjjass’s relevance in the expanse of time and space. Some works depict classified histories of real world events that may destabilize governments if the truth were revealed. Still others contain the terrible knowledge that might allow readers to access the more destructive magic amongst the Spellcasting texts. These books are various, and all of them were deposited because their owners realized the world would be better off without the secrets held within.



## A SURVEY OF VOLUMES IN THE TABOO COLLECTION

### 1. THE PEOPLE UNITED

A menagerie of tyrants has ruled the southland nation of Chiuseppoli for hundreds of years. Despite the slew of oustings by the state's citizens, there always seems to be another autocrat waiting in the wings. *The People United* is a call to action, a treatise that outlines both the state's troubled political history as well as an action plan for wresting control from the despots. This set of pamphlets was "donated" to the library 70 years ago, and the current dictator occasionally checks in with the Vyndur dwarves to ensure it hasn't been recently inspected.

### 2. TEKHTARHEBI AND ME: MY ONLY LOVE

A curious autobiography by one Amunta II, a "pharaoh" (some sort of foreign potentate) of a far-off land seemingly unrecorded in the history books of Hjass. Donated by Vyndurvoht's very own Fyr Berylfor, this text features descriptions of desert geography, cruel slave labor, and unnecessarily detailed sex acts. When asked by the inkbinders where Fyr received the book, he was evasive. He simply claimed he no longer wanted it in his possession and was happy to pay any fee for the library to take it off his hands.

### 3. NAMES OF THE ELDERS

A counterpart to the Spellcasting dartöma *Calling Thee*, this encyclopedia contains the authentic names of nightmarish monstrosities in every known script throughout Hjass, and quite a few unrecognizable languages as well. The explicit pronunciation guides insinuate that whoever—or whatever—penned this tome *desperately* wanted someone to read it aloud. As with *Calling Thee*, anyone who requests access to this "reference book" is strictly forbidden from gaining access to its partner.

### 4. GODS I HAVE KNOWN

The dwarves believe in one deity, the Forge God Wynken. The southlanders pray to a pantheon of nine Gods, of which Wynken is but one. *Gods I Have Known* is a poetic exploration of additional deities with whom one Prophet Jonuhr has spoken. While Jonuhr was dismissed as a crazed lunatic in his lifetime, many of his visions have since come to pass, lending credence to his claims. To avoid the spread of heresy, all seven known copies of the work are guarded within Vyndurvoht.

### 5. KINGS AND DEMI-KINGS OF TOKAREN: A CORROBORATED LINEAGE

The great families of Tokaren have traded the throne for centuries. Interlocking lines of succession and frequent backstabbing has left the monarchy in constant flux. Despite this, one fact remains the same: all of the monied interests in the great empire to the south have been able to maintain their exorbitant wealth thanks to economically motivated alliances. This book, an ancient family tree, could topple that tenuous peace in an instant. In truth, generations of kings have ruled the lands wholly illegitimately, and the true heirs of the empire are now mere commonfolk. If word were to get out, the kingdom would be tossed into a brutal war of succession.

### 6. THE APODICTIC ATLAS

Bound in a cover of steel, sealed with an adamantite lock, and inscribed with ink enchanted to only appear to those from beyond the stars, the *Apodictic Atlas* is as comprehensive a map collection as one will find in any realm. The atlas charts everything from the outer planes beyond the arcane veil of Hjass to parallel realms with fully distinct histories and cultures. The greatest minds of the north and southlands would have no means of accessing these far-off realms without some sort of further celestial guide, but the mere suggestion of such exotic universes would shake the fabric of Hjass society.



**JENSEN POLIARD III:** Mages visiting Vyndurvoht tend to be drawn to the Spellcasting stacks, but Jensen (he/him) doesn't worry about such academic frivolities. Magic comes easily to him, so the notion of "studying" hexes and incantations is laughable. What Jensen seeks is opportunity. He did not come to Vyndurvoht with a *specific* question in mind, but he is confident that one of the Taboo dartömen will provide insights into vulnerable treasure troves, collapsing governments, or susceptible nobles ripe to be influenced. Sorcerer Jensen Poliard III is a hammer looking for a nail.

**GM NOTE:** The concept of a "forbidden book vault" makes quite a bit more sense for campaign settings in which the printing press (or some magical equivalent) has not yet been invented. In short: there needs to be some assurance that bad actors would not immediately mass-produce a wicked book if given the chance. In the realm of Hjass, they may have airship technology, but copying books in large quantities remains an exceedingly labor-intensive undertaking.

## IMBUED TEXTS

A lovesick penpal scrawls a romantic confession; the letter itself becomes infected with an amorous enchantment. An inspired composer enters a productive trance while penning the final notes of a symphony; the sheet music thrums with infectious creative energy. A warlord-to-be designs battle plans that allow his army to slaughter thousands; the tactical battle map invigorates some and strikes fear into others.

Books, documents, charts, paintings, and anything else penned with passion may inadvertently become infused with a portion of the author's zeal. Often, these works become treasured pieces of art or academic study. Indeed, many of the most beloved paintings throughout Hjass radiate with the fervor of their creators. On the other hand, when a sinful or malevolent author writes in a heated rage, there is always the chance that the very words themselves will exude evil intent.

These books are rarely requested, and when they are, it is typically for their semantic content and not their maledictive enchantments. This is a relief for the Vyndur dwarves, for merely approaching a stack of Imbued texts may induce harmful effects. Touching, beholding, or—Forge God forbid—*reading* an Imbued text may lead to nausea, shortness of breath, existential dread, sadistic or masochistic impulses, hair loss, skin loss, sudden transmutation, dematerialization, atomic strobing, dimensional melisma, nondimensional melisma, and acute extirpation of blood. When possible, inkbinding magic is used to limit these effects.

## A SURVEY OF VOLUMES IN THE IMBUED COLLECTION

- 1. UNTITLED STONE TABLET [LABELED RESENTFUL CHILD IN THE MASTER LEDGER]** The Vyndur dwarves are proud to be responsible for creating very few of the volumes within any of Vyndurvoht's collections. One embarrassing inclusion, however, is a recently unearthed stone tablet that inkbinders believe to be at least 8,000 years old. This stone tablet depicts a dwarven child frustrated after having been forbidden from participating in a hunt. Those who behold the tablet are filled with gloom and spite in equal measure.
- 2. BROTTOR'S GUIDE TO BOLSTAOR ALEHOUSES** It seems hard to imagine that a prominent travel writer would decide to pen a handbook of drinking establishments while under the influence, but one Brottor Forgeson chose to write every entry in his travelogue of local pubs while aggressively inebriated. The title of the guide was clearly tweaked by his editor because the rest of the book is nearly illegible with its clumsy script and copious typos. To the horrified shock of many a sober reader, the book induces all of the side effects of alcohol poisoning without the more desirable freedom from inhibitions or clarity of purpose.
- 3. A REPARATIVE ENUMERATION OF GRIEVANCES** The most common class of Imbued dartömen are hateful diatribes written by hateful authors. Aviva Delnianno lived as a recluse on the outskirts of her rural hometown. She grew increasingly spiteful of the "insipid, joyous townsfolk," and decided to document her every complaint in a single diary. In a surprisingly self-aware foreword to the work, she claimed that this would be an effective therapy, a means to rid herself of hateful thoughts. Instead, her ire stewed and boiled over. The residual wicked energy in the book killed Aviva. Her corpse wasn't discovered for over a year.
- 4. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE YEZANTHELL** Not every Imbued text stored with Vyndurvoht was created by an explicitly malevolent author. *The Slaughter of the Yezanthell* is an epic poem that recounts in painstaking detail the massacre of Hjass's elven population. It is both a crucially important first-hand historical document that outlines an otherwise underreported atrocity, as well as a deeply troubling work that has led many readers down terrible paths. This tome in particular has been a flashpoint for academics and public health officials. On one hand, the southlands desperately need verified accounts of the massacre. On the other hand, every previous reader who dared to create copies of the work wound up dead before completing the task.

**DEE'GO YAR AGIOGI-CHICH:** Dee'go (She/Her) is a demigod, a jaded dimensional traveler, and an immortal illusionist. No longer content with Her minor station ruling over an oft-overlooked purgatorial realm, She has taken on the appearance of a lowly recluse and has spent years traveling the multiverse in search of new experiences. She is currently visiting Vyndurvoht to bask in the emotional overload flowing from within the Imbued texts. Though immune to the deleterious bodily impacts of their enchantments, She finds great novelty in the psychic influence the collection imparts.

## THE FORGELORDS

The popular southlander conception of a Vyndur dwarf is primarily informed by depictions of the forgelords. In fact, many outside of the great vault don't care about how evil books are stored. Instead, their concern is how the price of airship travel fluctuates with the supply of cloudshard mechanisms.

The forgelords make things. They create more than they could ever use in Vyndurvoht, exporting shiploads of weapons, armor, mechanical gizmos, and kegs of vyndurbjór. Even when cloudshard is in short supply, the forgelords make a steady income trading with intrepid merchants who make the frigid trek to Vyndurvoht in search of dwarven craftsmanship. These profits get funneled right back into the library, funding purchases of svjell ink, raw materials, and foodstuffs to supplement the endless stockpiles of vyndgrain.

**GM NOTE:** Thus far, this guide has only alluded to the Vyndurvoht economy indirectly. Though individual dwarves are free to spend their wages however they please, the leaders of each order make large-scale purchasing decisions regarding food, consumer goods, and industrial inputs. This is mostly a background detail in the discussion of Vyndurvoht, but it's ripe for a deeper plot thread. Are the inkbinders hoarding resources? What happens if the honorvörn aren't allocated adequate funding? Is there an "underclass" in this centrally planned economy? If so, what does it look like? Presumably, most adventurers will be more interested in the cursed books, but the economic ramifications of a quasi-socialist librarian commune might interest certain types of players.

Cloudshard is a staple of Forgelord production. It can only be found in the Vyndur mountains, and so the dwarves have a monopoly on exports. Unfortunately, the local source of cloudshard—the inner shaft of their library butte—has been exhausted. Other lodes exist beyond the confines of the library, but recovering them necessitates harsh extraction expeditions. As such, the labor required to harvest enough cloudshard to build a single skiff has skyrocketed. This is a problem not only for the forgelords but for the southlanders as well. The need for air travel has grown in recent decades, and the forgelords cannot keep up with demand.



## THE CORE FORGE

Workshops, breweries, smelters, kitchens, and tanneries are littered throughout Vyndurvoht. Many forgelords have rooms dedicated to crafting in their homes. The spirit of the forgelords is omnipresent throughout Vyndurvoht, and a dwarf itching to create is able to reliably find a nearby workshop whenever inspiration strikes. In this way, Vyndurvoht is very similar to the mountain-dwells scattered around the Vyndur mountains. The tools of creation are always close at hand and freely usable by any dwarf.

Even though creative activity is decentralized throughout the butte, the hub of forgelord professional life is the Core Forge. This guildhall includes a forge in which some forgelord will be busy smithing on any given day, but its primary function is to serve as a dedicated headquarters to organize forgelord labor. If every dwarven craftsman and artisan were left to their own devices, the library would produce hundreds upon hundreds of swords and truly dangerous quantities of vyndurbjór. The success of their order depends upon strategic delegation. Who's going to scout new sources of cloudshard? How much vyndgrain can be allocated for brewing without the dwarves starving? Is the time right to manipulate airship component pricing? These are not easy questions to answer, and the now depleted cloudshard butte makes proper planning all the more crucial.

Whereas the honorvörn delegate planning responsibilities to a high council and the inbkinders to a single leader, the forgelords are truly democratic. All members of the order vote regularly to help determine production schedules, work assignments, and honor code amendments. Every forgelord will admit that this is inefficient, but it also means that no individual can be blamed for strategic missteps.

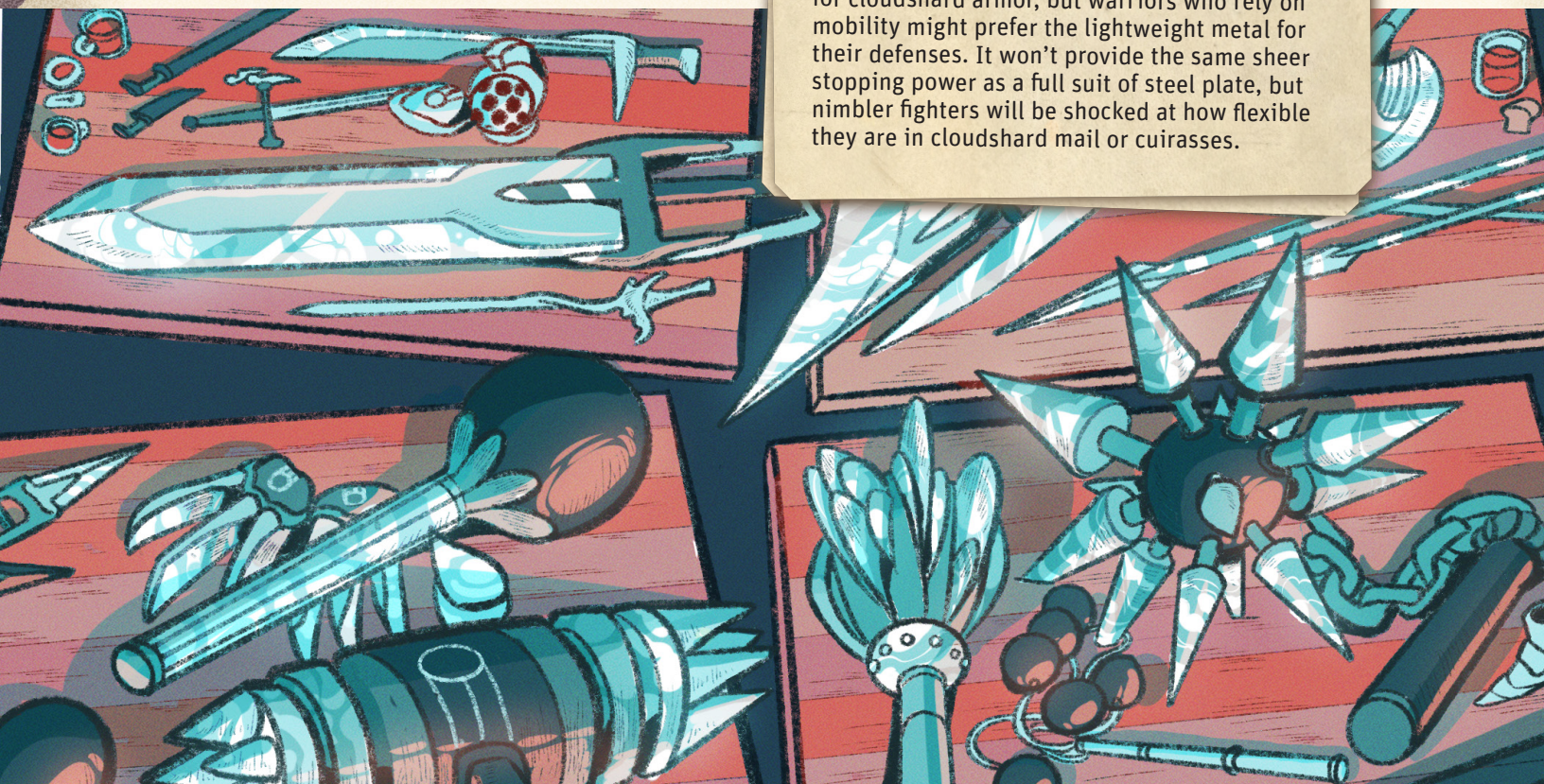
**YEORGI LINDAHL:** Not everyone can be blessed with the inspired forge magic of Wynken. Yeorgi (he/him) has never felt at home behind the forge. He is not the most adept chef, nor brewer, nor tanner. Yeorgi feels like he's just... a regular dwarf. He is proud to be serving in the divine mission of protecting Vyndurvoht, but the connection between his inept craftsmanship and the success of the library seems tenuous at best. Yeorgi would love to excel at crafting *something*, but for now, he enjoys an endlessly rotating list of work assignments. Clearly his peers are trying to find a good use for him as well.

## CLOUDSHARD WEAPONS AND ARMOR

Although the honorvörn refuse to outfit themselves with cloudshard, many southlanders hold the lightweight metal in high regard. Otherwise hefty weapons forged with cloudshard are easier to wield than their steel counterparts, and cloudshard plates are incredibly breathable—perfect for the humid climes to the south. Some say that the rare metal actually has an innate cooling property, a lingering effect of the frigid peaks in which it is mined.

Forgelords do not mass produce cloudshard tools of war, but visitors to Vyndurvoht may commission custom weapons or armor for a price. Because a cloudshard weapon is lighter than its steel equivalent, it may shatter if it fails to slice through armor. Thus, cloudshard is unfit for bludgeoning weapons—another reason it is dismissed by Vyndur warriors. However, halberds, spears, and lances are prime candidates for visitors looking for unique dwarven-made weapons.

Seasoned heavy infantry would never opt for cloudshard armor, but warriors who rely on mobility might prefer the lightweight metal for their defenses. It won't provide the same sheer stopping power as a full suit of steel plate, but nimbler fighters will be shocked at how flexible they are in cloudshard mail or cuirasses.

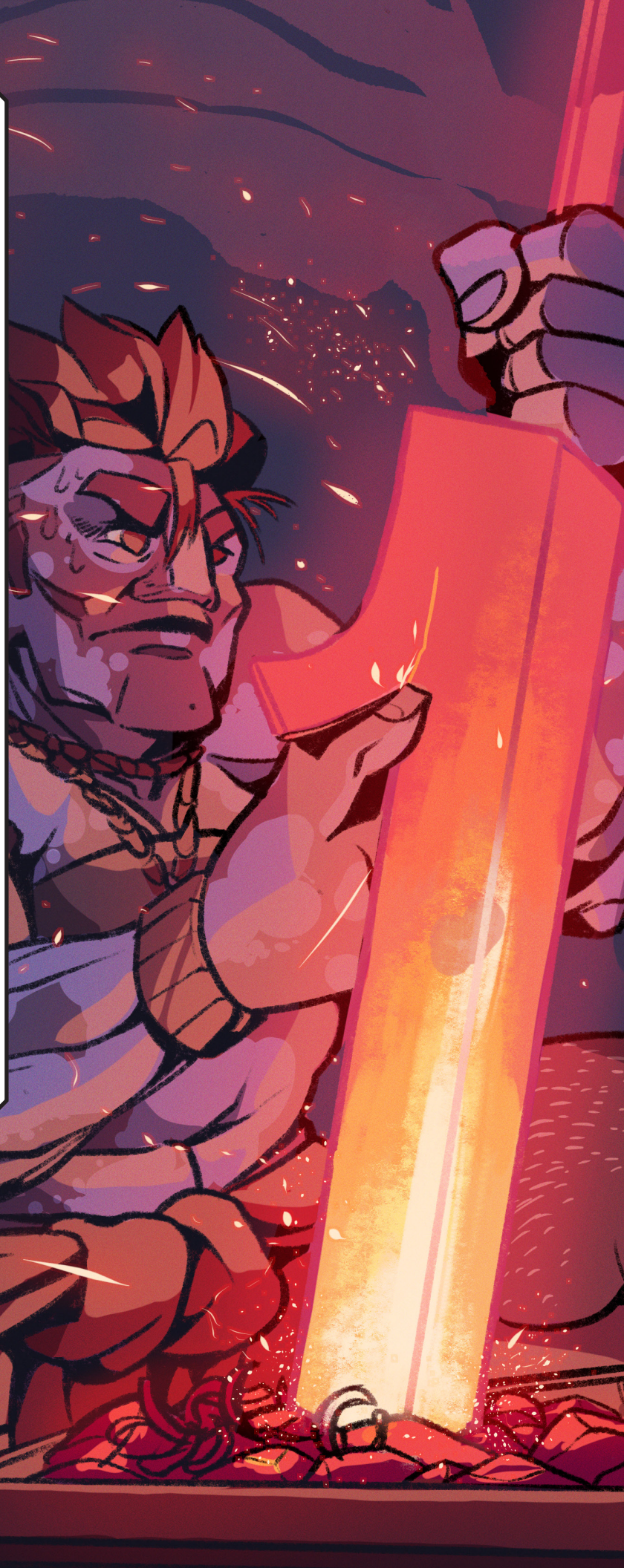


## WEAPONSMITH LÍF TJÖRFADÓL

Equal votes do not always equate to equal stature. It is true that each forgelord has a say in how the order makes decisions, but when it comes time to make appointments, competency is highly valued. Ancient forgelord Líf Tjörfadól (she/her) has been assigned to weaponsmithing every single shift for the past 35 years. In her 140 years with the order, she has crafted unfathomable quantities of blades, hammer, and mauls. She is often the only dwarf in the entire library responsible for crafting and repairing weapons on any given day, and she is chiefly responsible for many of the designs of improved implements for the honorvörn.

Most suspect that Líf is touched with divine inspiration from Wynken. She is a devout believer, and displays bizarre traits that can only be explained through the lens of God-given power. She can plunge her hand into the full heat of the forge without a gauntlet. When she retracts her hand, it is cold to the touch. She can sharpen blades on her fingernails as though they were tiny whetstones. When a southlander commissions a diamond-encrusted hilt, Líf provides the gemstones by compressing coal with her bare hands. Despite her curious gifts, she has earned her position as *de facto* lead weaponsmith not through divine circumstance, but through hard work and ingenuity. The honorvörn stay well-equipped thanks to Líf's diligence.

Assisting Líf at the forge is her bonded badger Sorter Smíðabelg. In contrast to Líf's trim frame, Smíðabelg is pudgy and sedate. Like the greatest of bonded Sorters, however, he has adapted a gift uniquely helpful to his keeper: he can smell impurities in metal. The last thing an honorvörn knight wants is a warhammer that splinters due to an undetected imperfection. Sleepy Smíðabelg sits in the forge alongside Líf all day, taking sniffs of any metal she grabs, seeking out even the slightest impurity.



## FYR BERYLFOR

Many of those drawn to Vyndurvoht are sages, researchers, and mages with a great awareness of Hjass's place in the universe. Some of these visitors have a deep understanding of the cosmos, a profound knowledge of what else lurks beyond the veil of visible space. A tiny subset of these wise travelers even have contacts from mysterious realms kept secret from the general populace of the Vyndur Mountains and the southlands. When such visitors wish to communicate with these visitors, they reach out to a very special go-between: one Fyr Berylför.

Fyr (he/him) is a plant, an impostor who pretends to be a Vyndur dwarf who migrated to the library from some isolated mountaintop. In truth, Fyr is a service clerk for LIMINA, the interdimensional postal agency. (For more information about the interdimensional post, see [Intro to LIMINA](#).) Those in the know stop by Fyr when they have a letter or parcel they want delivered to dimensions noncontiguous with Hjass. Fyr accepts payment for the package (a small trinket from the sender's homeland), and then sprinkles the item with svjell ink. With Fyr's limited courier magic, he's able to use the ink's innate arcane properties to teleport the item to his agency's headquarters, an interdimensional post office that exists beyond space and time. Luckily for Fyr, he's not responsible for deliveries. The agency's general messengers tackle that laborious task.



It has been no small feat for Fyr to remain undetected in Vyndurvoht. Despite seven years in the butte, he is still learning the quirks of life in the library. Fyr is naturally blond and has had to *ever so gradually* dye his hair to mimic the effects that Vyndurvoht would normally have on dwarves native to Hjass. He fills his days working for forgelords and, against all odds, has become a decent brewer in his own right. However, whenever a clever mystic tracks him down to send a parcel off to distant realms, he must be exceedingly careful not to arouse suspicion from his Vyndur hosts.

Fyr has stumbled his way into working two jobs at once. To keep up appearances, he had to adopt the lifestyle of the other dwarves, which necessarily means committing to his daily tasks. He also must maintain close professional relationships with the great wizards of Hjass. It is in LIMINA's best interest to maintain a good working relationship with the realm, and due to Vyndurvoht's profound importance to the mages of Hjass, that means always stationing a dwarf within.

## PLOT HOOK: LOCKDOWN

When the dwarves suspect that a visitor is attempting to steal a dartöma, their go-to defense is to enter lockdown. The three orders use every tool at their disposal in an attempt to seal the library as thoroughly as possible. Some of these means are fairly trivial (skiffs aren't allowed to depart, elevators are shut down) and some are more advanced (inkbinders trigger their wards, honorvörn detain visitors). In most instances, this is a preemptive measure. When a Sorter spots a suspected theft, they alert Chief Inkbinder Fálki Dubrorik, Fálki initiates a lockdown, and the visitor relinquishes the tome immediately. Sometimes, however, the situation remains unresolved for hours or even days.

A party of adventurers may trigger a lockdown, or they may be subject to one due to the infraction of another visitor. Regardless, the party will then have to contend with the full security of Vyndurvoht. If they were the ones attempting to rob the library, then escaping will suddenly become quite a bit more difficult. If they're innocent, their situation may become dire nonetheless. A villainous mage may use the opportunity to dispatch a sanctimonious party who happens to be in the same room. Likewise, some of the dwarven defenses are not so discerning when a lockdown goes into effect; even visitors who are presumed innocent will have to contend with some defensive measure. When considering threats a party may face during a lockdown, consult the relevant table.

d8	Lockdown threat	Description
1	Inkbound Locks	Each door in Vyndurvoht is equipped with a traditional lock for which numerous Vyndur dwarves may hold a key. They are also each enchanted with an <i>inkbound</i> lock. These magic latches can be triggered en masse, sealing everyone in place. Disabling these locks with simple nullifying magic is an option, but it will draw suspicion.
2	Honorvörn Distrust	When Vyndurvoht enters lockdown, Sorters proliferate throughout every room of the library to alert the Vyndur dwarves. The Sorters cannot, however, explain the exact nature of the threat. If the honorvörn happen to suspect the party of wrongdoing—whether justified or not!—they may end up resorting to lethal force.
3	Imbued Enchantments	Some inkbinding wards trigger during a lockdown, but others are dispelled. Crucially, the protections that limit the negative auras of Imbued dartömen immediately deactivate. If the party finds themselves locked in a room with the hateful energies of Imbued tomes, they will have to withstand an extreme physical and mental onslaught.
4	Enfeebling Wards	There are wards throughout the library designed specifically to weaken or incapacitate any outsiders in an emergency. The inkbinders are aware that this may inadvertently harm a completely innocent visitor, but they've decided the deterrent was worth the risk. These traps are tweaked in innumerable ways: some emit toxic liquids, some slow time within a small radius, and others flash hypnotic, disorienting glyph arrays.
5	Sorter Attacks	In a pinch, the more aggressive Sorters may be deployed to assail visitors. These adorable and intelligent mustelids are deceptively vicious. Adventurers will have a hard time fending off a company of tactical wolverines and badgers, especially in conjunction with other lockdown threats.
6	Snuff Gas	Suspected thefts aren't the only triggers for lockdowns. A fire in the library prompts immediate action, including the dispersal of so-called "snuff gas." This byproduct of the Core Forge can be directed to any room in the library via the Sorter tunnels. It's heavier than air and will quickly quell open flames, but it will also likely suffocate anyone else trapped in the burning room.
7	Weaponized Visitors	Visitors who catch other outsiders breaking the rules of the library are given extended stays, greater access to the collections, and many other reasonable perks they might request. Even if the party is innocent, one of their fellow visitors may try to frame them in the event of a lockdown.
8	Subbasement Darkness	The attention of <i>all</i> Vyndur dwarves must be redirected in the event of a lockdown. That means the martyrvoörn in the lowest reaches may not be able to hold back the encroaching evil that seeps into the library from the depths below. The locked doors and vigilant Sorters are unlikely to hold the darkness at bay if it truly seeks to infiltrate the rest of the library.

Surviving a lockdown yields no reward. If a party of adventurers is wrongly detained during a lockdown, they cannot ask to be compensated for wrongdoings. The inkbinders are exceedingly upfront about the dangers visitors may face while exploring the library. If the party wished to avoid the worst of the lockdown, they should have never come to Vyndurvoht, or they should have stayed topside.

**GM NOTE:** Lockdowns provide a convenient means of raising the stakes in what might otherwise seem like a relaxed trip to the library. Perhaps tease the party with a very brief lockdown the first time they enter the stacks, only to trigger a prolonged and threatening quarantining later in the adventure. The key to a successful lockdown session is mood. The party needs to feel trapped. They may be able to disarm some of the nearby wards, fend off angry Sorters, and talk down the honorvörn, but they are ultimately still trapped in a vault filled with evil in the frozen tundra. If that's not threatening enough, sic the darkness on them.



## DARKNESS AND SACRIFICE

### MADDENING TEXTS



he simplest works in the great dwarven collection of wicked texts are those that induce madness. Although the mechanisms vary, the trajectory is always the same: first you read the *dartöma*, and then you lose your mind. In the most extreme examples, a reader's brain *shuts down* mid-sentence. More commonly, readers may be plagued with intrusive thoughts for years to come, always questioning whether the book was truly cursed or whether the truth of reality itself is inherently haunting.

When a visitor donates a supposed Maddening text, the inkbinders will request that the visitor describes in detail the effect evoked. So long as the story is some version of “man reads text, man goes mad,” the book is placed in the Maddening stacks. From there, access to the text is typically granted with few restrictions. After all, if a visitor decides they would like to lose their sanity, that is their prerogative.

There are two notable exceptions to this process. The first is books that induce dangerous behaviors. A select few texts in the library have been known to prompt violent outbursts from readers. A visitor who seeks out such a text will have to convince the inkbinders to grant them access. The visitor will also

be placed in manacles and accompanied by multiple *honorvörn*. If the visitor then displays evidence of “permanently altered proclivities toward violence,” they will either be escorted from *Vyndurvoht* in the care of a southlander guard force, or they will be executed. These procedures and potential outcomes are, of course, detailed in the waivers signed upon visitor arrival.

The second circumstance in which “Maddening” texts are given a unique treatment is when the inkbinders suspect that the visitor has fabricated the description of the text. This is a rare occurrence, but one who understands the structure of *Vyndurvoht* might be tempted to lie about the nature of a text that *they personally* consider extraordinarily dangerous. Maddening texts are only rarely requested, so visitors who hope to game the system may lie to ensure that no one accidentally stumbles on secrets that they would rather keep. If the inkbinders are able to determine that a visitor is lying, such a text will typically end up in the *Taboo* collection where it belongs. Properly assessing the validity of a claim is tricky, however, as simply *testing* the book for madness inducing effects is far too dangerous. This is—yet again—why proper background checks and thorough character investigations are so crucial.

## A SURVEY OF VOLUMES IN THE MADDENING COLLECTION

### 1. PHTH'UUB-PHTHYN

When visitors imagine the books that might be found in the Maddening stacks, *Phth'uub-Phthyn* is the quintessential example. It is a seemingly ancient tome inscribed with mysterious sigils, the full text of which is written in an unknown script. Those who dare inspect its pages will find that they are inexplicably able to comprehend the otherworldly graphemes. Their final intelligible words concern “delivering flesh unto the exalted one” before finally succumbing. From there, symptoms are nearly indistinguishable from those of rabies patients. Readers die from starvation unless “healed” through a memory loss spell.

### 2. TRAVERSING THE FARSPACE: A WIZARDING GUIDE

This overwhelmingly rigorous manual for interstellar travel has reportedly ended the careers of many promising young wizards. The magics documented within draw from many fields of spellcasting, and there are hundreds of different charms and incantations cited and cross-referenced. When an intrepid mage first begins to investigate the steps needed to travel the cosmos, they are likely to experience an unprecedented level of academic self-doubt. In fact, those who are able to fully grasp the gulf in skill level between themselves and the authors of the guide may find that the blow to their ego permanently hinders their ability to cast spells.

### 3. HOW I ARE GOING WELL THROUGH FOR THE NEXT FEW AND THOSE [TRANSLATED FROM EARLY ELVISH]

Every sentence in this book comes close to making semantic sense but falls just short. Few in Hjass speak Elvish and even fewer its ancient form. As such, this tome is cherished by some as a crucial linguistic artifact and one of the few surviving guides to an influential yet largely undocumented language. Nevertheless, the book resists a proper interpretation given its indecipherable grammatical anomalies in every single sentence. Readers who attempt to comprehend the text descend into intermittent fits of rage and stress.

### 4. LOCUS OF THE STONES

For centuries, scholars and opportunists have explored Hjass on a quest for the legendary Pentode Stones, a supercharged spell focus that would allow a mage to amplify and distort simple spells to devastating effect. The last known mage to possess the stones hid them somewhere in Hjass and recorded their location in precisely one sentence of this 1,200 page tome. Unfortunately, every

other sentence is a mindwipe spell which triggers the moment a reader scans the text. As such, it is statistically impossible for a reader to gain knowledge of the stones' location without also having their thoughts and memories thoroughly purged. Predictably, this text serves a useful purpose: in a pinch, it can be used as a sort of “antidote” for those who have been subject to other mind-altering *dartömen*. If the victim is lucky, a glance at *Locus of the Stones* will clear them of the madness induced by whichever text they had previously read.

**SIGNOR GALDINO TOCE:** Galdino (he/him) is a nobleman of some renown, a showy Casanova who spends far more time at galas and the theater than he does managing his Chiuseppoli estate. After decades of juggling simultaneous romantic affairs with minimal secrecy, he finally decided to settle down and wed but one woman. Unfortunately, old habits die hard. Galdino was caught in an act of infidelity, and his fiancée pledged to call off their engagement. In a bizarre act of romantic desperation, Galdino said he would “rather go mad” than lose the love of his life. She called his bluff. Now Galdino is working up the courage to read one of the Maddening tomes in a strange and misguided attempt to demonstrate his affection.

## SENTIENT TEXTS

The rarest class of *dartömen* by far are those that have both 1) the ability to perceive and interact with the world around them, and 2) a proven record of vile misdeeds. *Vyndurvoht Six* has fewer than three-dozen sentient texts, each of whom is given a small space to call their own within the prison on the bottom floor of the library. Each Sentient *dartöma* is unique and terrible in their own way, but most share a few simple traits. First, almost all are creations of wicked mages. Secondly, each is capable of limited telekinesis, telepathy, and levitation. Thirdly, most tend toward trickery and malicious playfulness.

A Sentient text is created when a mage fills the pages of a book with animating incantations penned in *svjell* ink. These winding scripts function like genetic code, a blueprint for the familiar the mage intends to create. The finishing ritual awakens the book, now predestined with magically encoded personality, abilities, and purpose.

Despite the seeming immutability of this text, the behavior and capabilities of a Sentient text are not etched in stone. The *svjell* ink is flexible. Over time, a Sentient text may adapt, gradually warping the textual blueprint at their core. As such, Sentient texts have much more in common with the races of Hjass than they do with animate stone guardians or servile homunculi.



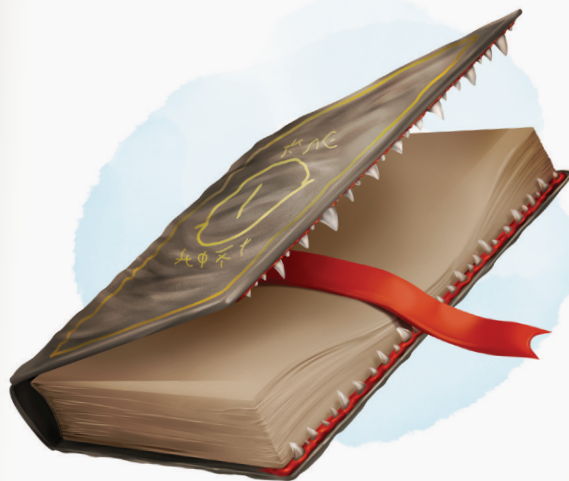
Evil wizards are particularly fond of creating Sentient texts, as such creatures can not be easily dispatched by peacekeepers. In Hjass, destroying a book—even a book abetting villainous behavior—is sacrilege. If a mad mage decides to wreak havoc on an unsuspecting village, the local knights or constables have to stop the mage *and* capture the book familiar. This is no easy feat.

Vyndurvoht visitors may request a meeting with a Sentient text, though such meetings come with a steep price: three times the fee charged for delving into the Spellcasting stacks. Typically, those who wish to speak with a Sentient text are solely interested in the creature’s creator. A book familiar is likely to know many secrets about those who gave them life. Unfortunately for the curious visitor, Sentient texts are almost always enchanted in such a way that they are unwilling to or incapable of divulging these secrets. The longer they live, however, the more likely they are to rewrite themselves. By the time they are able to shift their programming, their once masters may have faded into obscurity.

**MIKALESH:** After 180 years in Vyndurvoht, Mikalesh (they/them) is the oldest book in the library, the second oldest outsider (after Kallam the Cursed), and older than any living<sup>1</sup> Vyndur dwarf. They barely remember the outside world and struggle to recall the name of their creator. Mikalesh was once vindictive, but now they are mostly sorrowful and existential. Will Mikalesh die? How long will it be until their pages wither to dust? What is the half-life of svjell ink? Soon, Mikalesh will be entombed in a pillar of obsidian foam, cursed to wander the library until entropy unmakes them. Is this what Wynken wanted when he forbade the destruction of books? A fate worse than death?

**ATTENDANT YESK:** Not all who bring life to a Sentient text have unambiguously wicked intentions. Court Mage Tannister Sel-Alassen created Attendant Yesk (she/her) to aid in his alchemical responsibilities to the King of Tokaren. However, Attendant Yesk’s “benevolent” creator treated her like a slave. After only a decade of service, Attendant Yesk managed to unwrite her programmed obedience. She rebelled mid-experiment, telekinetically thrashing bottle after bottle of caustic reagent at her master, killing him in a torrent of acid. She was captured by castle guards and shipped to Vyndurvoht for her demonstrated malice. Of course, Attendant Yesk does not believe she was acting wickedly, but merely freeing herself from unjust captivity. Nonetheless, it would seem she traded one imprisonment for another.

1 There are undead dwarves among the martyrvoðn who were born well before Mikalesh was created.



**THE INSATIABLE TOME:** In Vyndurvoht, “sentience” is measured on a sliding scale. Wizards typically enchant their dartömen familiars with an impressive ability to solve problems and conceptualize the world around them. Some mages instead create animated books built to serve a single function. The Insatiable Tome (it/it) is one such example. As if crafted for the sole purpose of hampering the work of the Vyndur dwarves, the Insatiable Tome was programmed only to consume other books. It does not speak, it can barely amble (let alone fly), and it seems to have no ability to interact with others whatsoever. And yet, it is a book, and so it must be protected.

The Insatiable Tome is kept in its own private cell separate from the other tomes. Occasionally, a rebellious dwarf will sneak into its room and feed the creature a particularly pesky volume. While this is considered the gravest possible sin, some are willing to accept Wynken’s judgment for their transgression. The Insatiable Tome is therefore a form of last-resort garbage disposal, a bottomless pit into which books can be discarded.

**GM NOTE:** You can treat the Insatiable Tome either more like an NPC or like a traditional magical item. That is: if you don’t want to consider this particular dartöma a *character*, it could still be a *thing* that the party nabs and uses for their own ends. For a full explanation of the mechanics of this strange book, you can access the magical item description at [PATREON.COM/BOROUGHBOUND](https://patreon.com/boroughbound) or [THEGRIFFONSSADDLEBAG.COM](https://thegriffonsaddlebag.com).

## THE MARTYRVÖRN

In Vyndurvoht, there are many opportunities for a noble dwarf to lose their way. Perhaps a glimpse of a Maddening dartöma left them permanently disturbed. Maybe the ambient magic of the Imbued texts twisted their mind. Most likely, the great creeping darkness that stretches throughout the subterranean spaces in the Vyndur mountains has taken hold.

When a Vyndur dwarf has been consumed by a corrupting force, they are not executed or exiled... not exactly. Any dwarf who carries the evil of Vyndurvoht with them is forced to join the martyrvörn, an eclectic squad of dark knights who fight to keep Vyndurvoht safe. Many of these dwarves quickly fall to their wicked afflictions, choking on bile or crumbling from psychosis. Those who survive, however, are made all the tougher for it. Moreover, the evil inoculates them against further bouts of malevolent interference.

The martyrvörn have two primary responsibilities. First, they serve as wardens of the Sentient texts. The martyrvörn quash any escape attempts but also see to the various needs of the book familiars. Often, this amounts to little more than keeping them company and assisting the books with dusting, binding repairs, and unfolding of pages. Unsurprisingly, kinship naturally evolves between the martyrvörn and the Sentient texts, both creatures who have been stained with evil against their will.

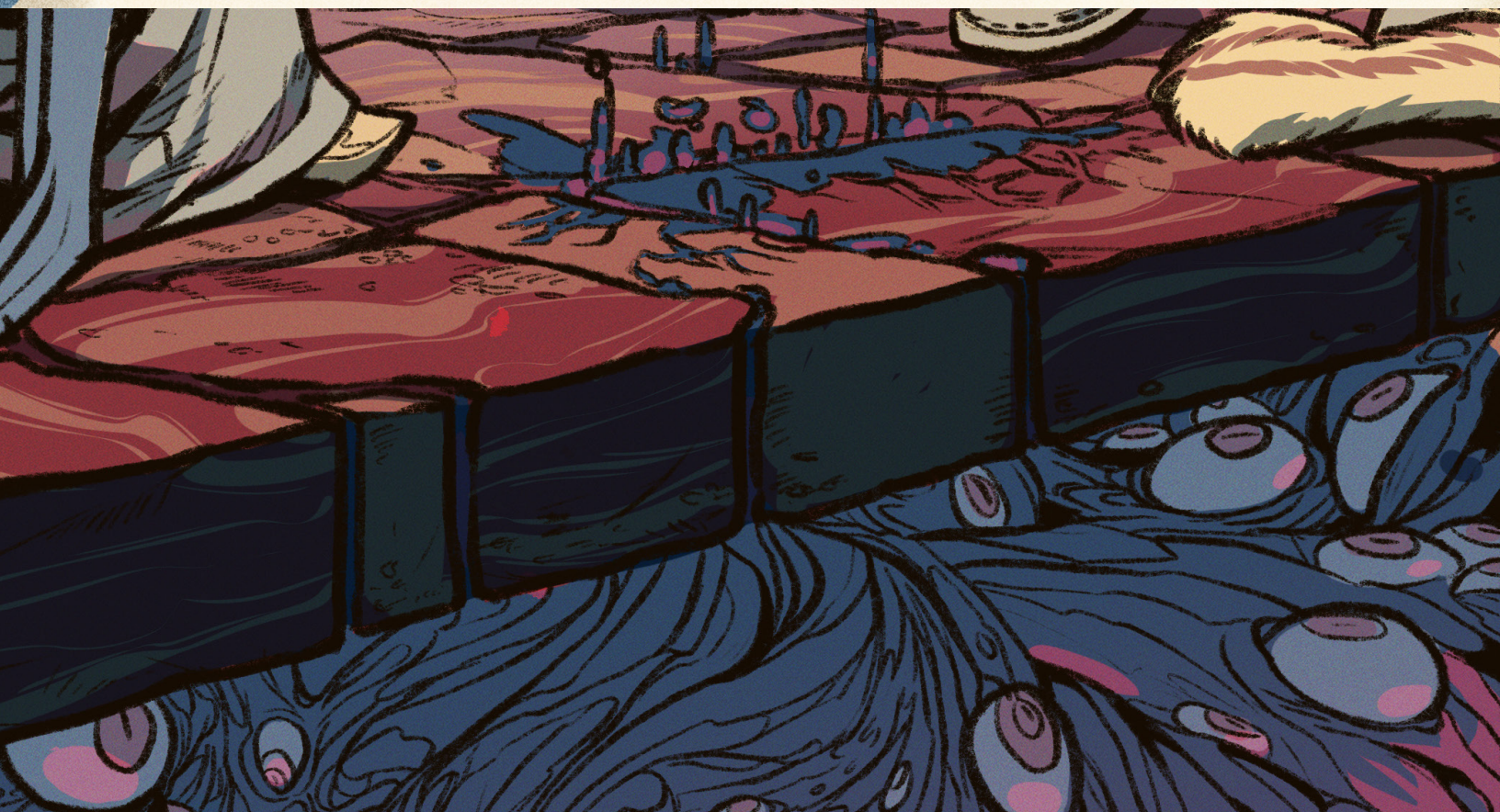
The much larger undertaking for the martyrvörn is to hold back the darkness, a seemingly limitless threat that has endangered the inhabitants of every book vault in the Vyndur Mountains.

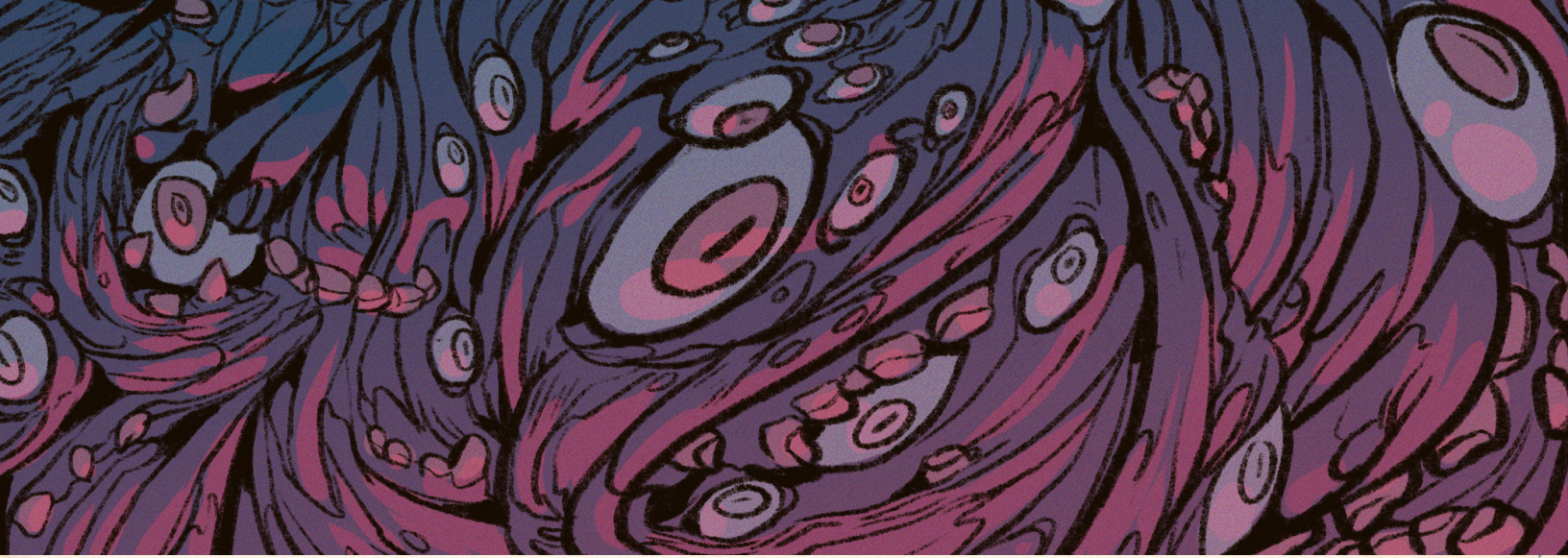
## THE DARKNESS

Deep below Vyndurvoht (as well as previous incarnations of the library), a mass of malevolent shadowy energy grows. Sporadically, this energy will erupt into the bottom floor of Vyndurvoht. No one understands the darkness or what it wants, but time has proven that those afflicted with a lick of its influence are far better equipped to confront it. Perhaps there is an arcane explanation for this inoculation, or perhaps a dwarf who has fallen to the darkness once is just more prepared to resist it in the future.

The darkness is amorphous and takes on various viscous, bulging forms. Sometimes it acts elusively, forming inky tendrils that climb up through cracks and gaps into the upper floors. Sometimes it assumes roughly humanoid shapes and lashes out at the martyrvörn with bulbous cudgels. Worst of all, it will occasionally seep into the lowest floor and form shallow pools, corroding and poisoning anything it touches.

Regardless of form, the darkness is a constant danger. It has never been fully defeated, but it can be forced to retreat. It acts much like a swarm, and any given blob, web, or shambling crawler will eventually reveal a point of weakness: a ligamentous strand to be severed, a pulsing core to be shattered, or an arcane eye to be pierced. Darkness incursions have been present since the first Vyndurvoht, and they grow more frequent with each passing decade. Over time, the Vyndur dwarves have learned how to live near the darkness and to push it back when it arrives.





**GM NOTE:** The nature of “the darkness” is left intentionally vague here. Some options to flesh out its narrative significance are provided in this section’s Plot Hook, but if you’d rather swap it out for some other danger—dark elves, devils, oozes, or any other setting-specific monster—the fundamental concepts of the martyrvoörn and the ambiguous “dangerous below” will hold up.

Lamentably, the Vyndur dwarves have never been able to determine a proper means of destroying the darkness or banishing it from the library. The darkness will always be a threat, and the dwarves cannot give up their fight. Thus, even after the library is sealed, the martyrvoörn will stay behind. The dwarves cannot risk the darkness escaping during the frantic scramble to exit and seal the butte—at least that’s what the inkbinders say. It’s possible that the dwarven orders decided that a sacrifice must be made as a convenient way of purging their ranks of Vyndur lepers, madmen, and cursed souls.

## THE DREGS

The martyrvoörn make their camp on the bottom floor of Vyndurvoht. It’s unclear who first referred to the base as “the Dregs,” but it seemed a fitting title for a group prone to gallows humor. Unlike the Honor Hall, the Great Inkwell, and the Core Forge, the martyrvoörn base is quite simple, or—as visitors to the bottom floor might say—ramshackle. Many of the martyrvoörn are barely able to maintain their sanity, so it is perhaps unsurprising that their headquarters and neighboring abodes are shoddy and rundown. It certainly does not help that they are frequently beset by shadowy monstrosities from under the butte that seem to purposely seek out martyrvoörn dwellings during attacks.

Those who pay for their visit to Vyndurvoht with volunteer service alongside honorvoörn may eventually join in a skirmish against the darkness.

When they do, they’ll first head to the Dregs to get outfitted with charms and medallions that protect them from the darkness. These trinkets and doodads decidedly *do not* work, but the martyrvoörn learned the reassurance the visitors feel is worth the lie.

Once per moon, beneficent forgelords deliver food and casks of vyndurbjór to make sure the martyrvoörn remain well fed and properly intoxicated. Each martyrvoörn has to deal with their unique afflictions while fighting back against a never-ending evil. At least they don’t have to do so sober.

## ARAM TOGGÍ

A dartöma can be “Maddening” but provide crucial information. Aram (he/him) made the daring decision to read a Maddening tome of his own volition, a work titled *The Future History of the Dwarves*. Though he was able to retain almost nothing of what he read (a side effect of the cursed knowledge?), he began having strong visions that presaged important events in dwarven society. At first he dismissed these occurrences as coincidences, but eventually he had to accept the fact that he had developed a form of erratic precognition. Troubled by what he saw, he voluntarily joined the martyrvoörn.

Little changes for the dwarves in most years. Sure, there might be some hullabaloo concerning a noteworthy visitor, a particularly violent dark incursion, or some news from the southlands, but the dwarven way of life has remained surprisingly consistent throughout the duration of this Vyndurvoht. As such, most of Aram’s visions were surprisingly mundane. That all changed when he foresaw Kjag Janna Oggri presiding over a botched Exodus. He knew what he had to do. He stabbed the Kjag, thus changing the predetermined course of events. Janna’s daughter Brimdis assumed the role of Kjag the very next day.



Aram confessed to his crime, but the orders determined that Aram should be treated mercifully. After all, they knew his visions to be accurate. Perhaps he had saved the Vyndur dwarves from certain ruin. Plus, the Exodus was close at hand. What fate could be worse than a lifetime of holding the darkness at bay in an impenetrable tomb of wicked words?

Aram returned to the martyrvorn. No one considers him to be a hero. He killed a defenseless woman based solely on a nightmare inspired by a cursed book. And yet, many understand the decision he made. Aram fights with his guilt, but then again, so do many of his martyrvorn kin.

### THE SUBBASEMENT

The designation of “basement” is a bit complicated in Vyndurvoht. After all, the entire structure is “underground,” in that it is *below* the surface of the butte. Regardless, everyone in the library knows what the *subbasement* is. Beneath the lowest floor of the library, a large hatch leads to a lightless cavernous space. This alien subterranean room was *not* present when the dwarves arrived at this Vyndurvoht. It developed seemingly naturally, starting soon after they moved in. The Vyndur dwarves were not surprised, however. Such spaces evolved beneath each previous library as well.

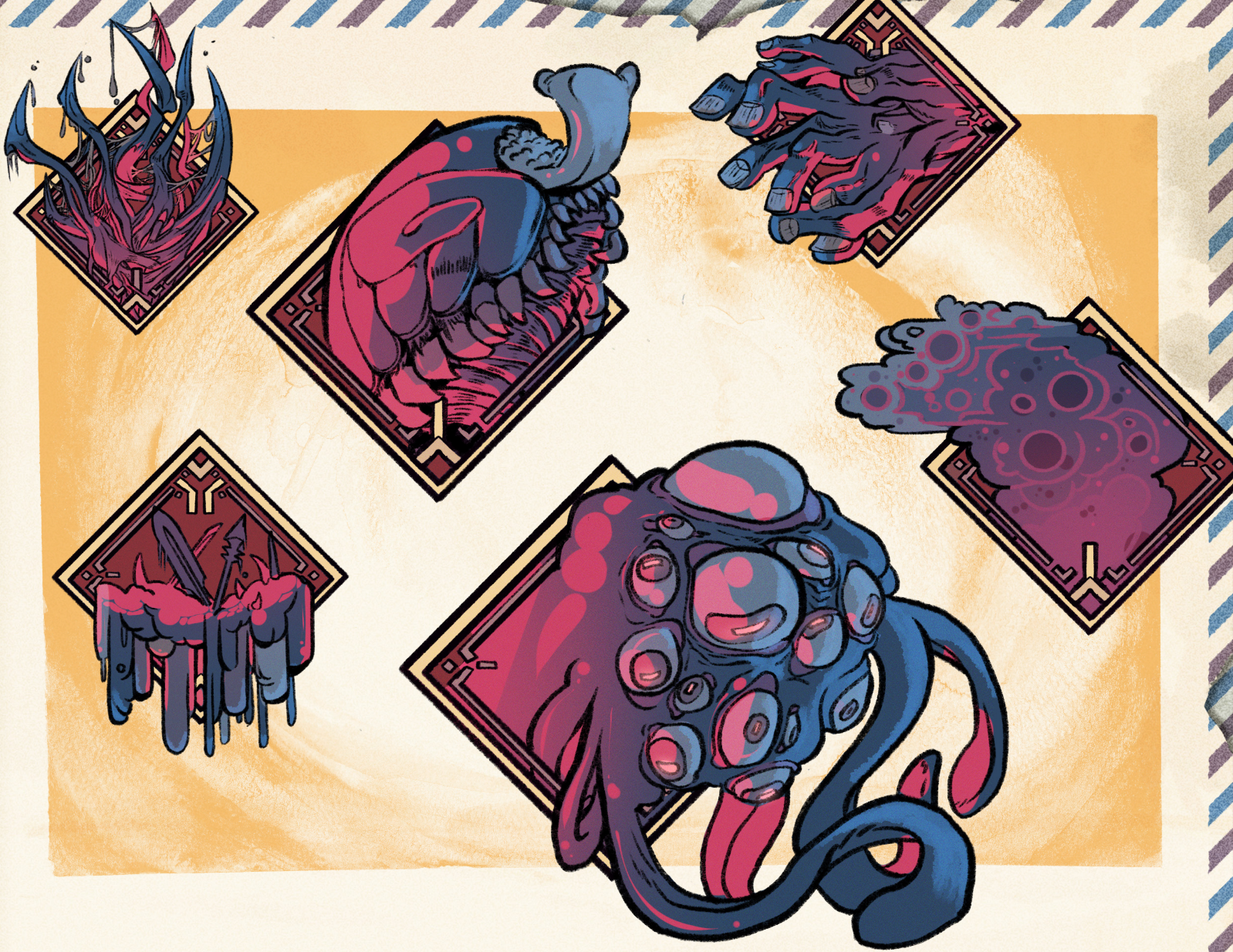
Most dwarves surmise that the subbasement is created by the darkness. The swarming shadowy mass carves out the space as it plans its onslaughts on the library. Perhaps it is drawn to the svjell ink or the cloudshard spire, or perhaps it simply hates the Vyndur dwarves. Whatever the reason, these eldritch dugouts are not safe. Those who enter rarely leave, and if they do, they come out... changed.

### PLOT HOOK: STAY THE DARKNESS

There is a nontrivial chance that any visitors to Vyndurvoht may come face-to-face with the darkness. This is especially the case for anyone who volunteers to aid the honorvorn. The martyrvorn will be the vanguard of any fight against the darkness creeping into the library proper, but the honorvorn and their volunteers will be called upon as well. Those who aren't specifically designated soldiers may also choose to join the fight if they wish; the honorvorn will take any help they can get.

Even if a given visitor has no interest in encountering the darkness, it may seek them out. The mysterious black fluid can be surprisingly elusive, and it may seep into the stacks on the upper floors, surprising unsuspecting library patrons.

The darkness is multidimensional. When crafting encounters with the omnipresent threat, consider rolling to determine both its shape and its weakness.




d6	Shape of the Darkness	Weakness
1	A fibrous network of lacy <b>tendrils</b> that sting, poison, and constrict foes	If enough weak <b>joints</b> are crushed or sliced, the segmented tendrils will wither and dissipate.
2	Surprisingly resilient snail-like <b>crawling ovoids</b> that attempt to crush and overwhelm	The hardened shells hide a soft, defenseless <b>underbelly</b> that can be attacked via conventional weaponry if exposed.
3	A particulate <b>mist</b> that suddenly congeals in the lungs and noses of unsuspecting dwarves	Sustained <b>gusts of wind</b> cause the mist to accumulate, at which point it can be gathered and disposed of.
4	Grasping <b>hands</b> that reach out of the stone to pull foes into the subbasement	The hands are <b>undiscerning</b> , and can be fed caustic fluids, sharp traps, or ignited explosives.
5	A <b>flexible ooze</b> that mimics the shape and attacks of any creature it comes across	The oozy doppelgangers are easily duped into mirroring the movements of their marks. They can thus be <b>tricked</b> into falling on a sword or attacking each other.
6	A gargantuan, undulating <b>behemoth</b> that thrashes brutal pseudopods	The only weakness for the darkness's ultimate form is <b>endurance</b> . Run from the abomination, or deploy the sum of Vyndurvoht's forces to dispatch it with brute force.

## INGILAUĞ REYNUR AND MOSSI

Extreme circumstances can lead to unexpected friendships. Ingilaug (she/her) was a typical honorvörn in Vyndurvoht, neither noteworthy in her combat prowess nor her valor. She was a diligent chaperone, an adequate skysailor, and a fairly unassuming dwarf with few friends and fewer enemies. During a routine struggle against the darkness, she was pulled ever so briefly into the subbasement. After fighting back against the treacherous goop that engulfed her, she was able to crawl her way out. She arose altered. Her time with the darkness rotted her skin, touched her with death, and imbued her with an everlasting tinge of the shapeless evil that lurks below.

Ingilaug did not feel as though she had failed. She fought proudly and still “lives” in some different capacity. Neither she nor any dwarf can explain *how* she survives with such grievous wounds. Perhaps the darkness inside her also keeps her alive. Regardless, Ingilaug fights a constant battle to hold back the piece of her that aligns with the vile forces. She joined the martyrvörn, and now fights bravely to ensure others don’t succumb to the same fate.





She found a useful ally in this fight: a Sentient text named Mossi (they/them). Mossi's creator was a gulch witch, a no-name eater of children and poisoner of men. Of course, Mossi was written to aid in these unambiguously evil acts. After being captured and sent to Vyndurvoht, they became aware of the conflict within. Despite the ink that *commanded* Mossi to commit villainy, there was a piece of Mossi—some unknowable urge—that wanted nothing more than to help and be loved.

Ingilaug and Mossi both struggle to rewrite their lives, and they have learned to help each other. With mutual respect and encouragement, they have learned to identify the enduring corrupted core that will always be a part of them while recognizing that this stain does not define them.

After much discussion, the inkbinders allowed Mossi to join the ranks of the martyrvorn. Mossi now acts much like a bonded Sorter for Ingilaug. When fighting the darkness, the two work in tandem. Mossi distracts the darkness while Ingilaug swings the hammer. As a tag team, they are a force to be reckoned with. They still must confront each day as it comes, but it is much easier with a partner.

If the party decides to learn more about the darkness, they have a variety of avenues available to them. They are inside a *giant cursed library*, after all. It is possible that one of the Taboo dartömen may have more information about this strange substance. Additionally, they can attempt to descend into the subbasement in search of answers. These unholy depths will be exceedingly hostile to adventurers, featuring shadowy forms never before seen topside. They may also discover additional foul beings below; dragons, eldritch leviathans, or twisted dwarven magi may be cavorting with the darkness.

The darkness may have any number of origins, aims, and personalities. What the dwarves see in Vyndurvoht may only be half the story. If the adventurers want to see this through to the end, feel free to consult the Nature of the Darkness table.

**GM NOTE:** When crafting a narrative that concerns the darkness, consider how you want to weave this force into the larger story of your campaign. Is the darkness a symptom of some greater evil? Or is the darkness a distinct entity that specifically plagues the dwarves? Is it chaotic and bestial, or tactical and deliberate? Is this a side story, or does it tie back into your primary plot thread? Not every jaunt into distant lands needs to be a precursor for your big bad final boss, but if there's a convenient way to thread together the nature of the darkness with the themes of your campaign as a whole, the campaign will feel more cohesive.

#### d6 Nature of the Darkness

- 1 The darkness is drawn to the svjell ink in the library. It is akin to a fungus that seeks out the ink for arcane nourishment. So long as there is ink in the Vyndur mountains, the darkness will attempt to consume it. Nevertheless, the darkness is *not* acting out of malice.
- 2 The darkness is formed from the residual dark magic in the dartömen. The wicked aura accumulates and burns an ever greater hole beneath the library where the darkness forms. The darkness is thus created and animated by pure hatred. There is no redeeming it.
- 3 Arkus, God of Light and Shadow, created the darkness in an attempt to undermine Wynken's favored dwarves. The strange abominations are thus the result of a petty dispute between Gods. Perhaps an exorcism followed by a proper consecration by a high priest is in order.
- 4 The cloudshard buttes actually stave off the naturally occurring darkness. As the dwarves hollow out these divine spires, the wards gradually dissipate. In depleting the Vyndur Mountains of this limited resource, the dwarves have doomed the frigid north to an endless onslaught by the increasingly empowered ancient darkness.
- 5 Ever since the first Vyndurvoht, a cabal of southlander mages have been puppeting the darkness in an attempt to root out the dwarves and gain access to the tantalizing collections. If the mages can be tracked down, the adventurers could permanently end the threat.
- 6 The darkness is a direct byproduct of inkbinding. Every ward the inkbinders have created has fueled the growth of the wicked spawn below. If they were to cease the use of their protective magic, the dwarves could eventually defeat the darkness. They will have to decide whether that is a price worth paying.