

SIX FACES OF DEATH

A dark fantasy adventure for characters of 11th to 13th level



An alien being, dark omens, and vanishing ships send the adventurers to a mysterious island newly appeared in the Sea of Swords. But can the characters uncover the mysteries of the Changing Island in time to save Faerûn from a terror from another plane?

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Beyond the Material Plane lie dimensions where gods and devils dwell, and where pure ideals are embodied in physical form. One such place is Mechanus, the plane of ultimate law, where the geometric modrons maintain absolute order. Another is Acheron, home to endless battlefields of law and evil, where reborn warriors fight eternal conflicts of metal and blood.

No stars or suns appear in the skies of Acheron—only floating metal cubes hurtling through the void. One of these was Cube 1717, designed by a mad derro architect named Avnas, and ruled by a powerful devil named Earl Andromalius—a servant of the god of tyranny, Lord Bane.

Cube 1717's primary purpose was as a battle station in Acheron's endless wars. But it also contained a prison and laboratory where horrifying experiments were carried out upon court-martialed soldiers and other doomed souls. Some became food for horrid monsters. Others were used for weapons testing and destroyed by steel and hellfire. Once, three particularly cunning conspirators who tried to unseat Earl Andromalius were fused together into a horrible undead entity—a skull lord named Vargo, doomed to suffer forever in the prisons of the cube.

UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Not long ago, a planar rift brought an unusual creature to Acheron, where it was discovered by Earl Andromalius's servants. It was a quadrone—one of the cubical warriors of the modrons, left broken in body and mind by being cut off from the order of Mechanus.

When the creature was brought to Avnas, the insane derro subjected it to bizarre experiments that drove the already unstable quadrone completely mad. Under the duress of the testing, the quadrone was corrupted by the magic of Acheron to develop a heretofore unheard-of power: the ability to control other beings and make them into creatures like itself.

Exponentially growing in power and size, the Archquadrone escaped its captivity and penetrated to the engine room at the heart of Cube 1717. There, it fused its body with the cube's engines, creating a living brain whose first task was to instigate the deadly **pixelating curse**—a magical malady that transforms creatures and objects into lawful neutral cube creatures serving the dictates of the Archquadrone.

The infection spread quickly throughout Cube 1717, transforming thousands of Acheronian soldiers into cube-like mockeries of life. Earl Andromalius was killed and overthrown, and with the power of Cube 1717 at their command, the Archquadrone's cube-creatures soon threatened Acheron itself.

To deal with this threat, the princes and dukes of Acheron were forced to seek the aid of the yugoloths—mercenary creatures of pure evil. The strength of their combined forces allowed the devils and the yugoloths to besiege the cube, slaughtering its defenders. In the end, the yugoloths were forced to use the River Styx as a weapon, inundating Cube 1717 with its waters to cleanse both the memories of the dead and the curse that infected them.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Six Faces of Death is a dark fantasy adventure featuring countless fiends, mind control, strange physical transformations, and dead bodies by the thousands. Before running the scenario, you'll want to make sure that your players are aware that the adventure features plenty of dark imagery and horror themes. Even then, you might want to downplay some of the more graphic descriptions contained herein, according to your own sensibilities as a DM and the ages and sensitivities of your players.

The adventure is also a dangerous one—and might prove a challenge even for powerful 11th-to-13th-level characters! On the bright side, though, the scenario also features a lot of humor that you can use to lighten the overall dark tone. And as with many *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures, the difficulty level can be adjusted on the fly by giving the characters allies (the monodrone, the shadar-kai, the drow, and potentially even the oinoloth and the hydroloths), making sure they learn appropriate background information before they travel to the mysterious island, and adjusting the efficiency of the enemies' lair defense.

Before the adventure begins, take note of whether any characters are chaotic. This is important in determining how resistant they are to the Archquadrone's pixelating curse.

To run a particularly dangerous version of the adventure, use pregenerated characters and start the adventure with a shipwreck that leaves the party stranded on the Changing Island with no preparation. Can the characters uncover the island's many mysteries—and how long will they survive as they try?

Attempting to escape, the Archquadrone's pixelated servants tore open a planar rift that sent Cube 1717 hurtling into the Material Plane. In a storm of fire and infernal energy, the cube appeared above the Sea of Swords in western Faerûn before sinking into its depths.

SIGNS AND SURVIVORS

Most of the Archquadrone's servants died and were unpixelated in the Styx's purifying waters. But deep within the cube—at the bottom of the Sea of Swords and still surrounded by a bubble of black Styx water—a handful of entities survived: Avnas the derro, whose chaotic nature had temporarily protected her from the pixelation; a group of abishai priests of Tiamat who were protected by the power of a sacred statue of their god; and the skull lord Vargo, who managed to escape its imprisonment during the chaos of the battle. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the derro, the abishai, and the skull lord.)

Exploring the sunken cube's lightless depths, Vargo came to the central engine room, where it found the Archquadrone failing and close to destruction. With the combined intelligence of its three heads, Vargo discovered that it could attach those heads to parts of the Archquadrone's six-sided brain to bring Cube 1717 back to life—and to make itself the cube's master. The control system Vargo created is called the Six-Face Throne, a complex device that has allowed the skull lord to restore the cube's internal power and gravity systems, and to bring it to the surface of the Sea of Swords.

Word of the cube's destination reached the yugoloths, who became alarmed at it having been reactivated—and doubly alarmed that the Acheronians might ask for their money back. A strike force sent out to finish the job of destroying the cube ended in failure, though—and with the capture of an oinoloth that was one of the force's leaders. The hextons of Mechanus sent their own forces to finish the job, but those too were overcome. Word of this strange new island then brought numerous sailors and explorers into the area to investigate, but all have been killed or captured—with survivors forced to join Vargo's pixelated army.

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

When an important NPC vanishes in the area of the mysterious island, the adventurers are inspired or called upon to investigate. Traveling to the Changing Island with a mad monodrone (a survivor of the modron strike force) as their guide, they must find and rescue their pixelated friend, defeat the skull lord, and end the curse.

But Vargo has been waiting for just such an opportunity, hoping to entice highly intelligent adventurers to the island. By grafting the severed heads of those individuals onto its own body, the undead hopes to become a six-headed skull lord and fully reactivate Cube 1717, turning it into a flying, mobile battle station with thousands of pixel soldiers under its undead command.

Can the adventurers stop the combined forces of pure evil and pure law? Or will all Faerûn become a pixelated wasteland in thrall to the six faces of death?

CHARACTERS AND FACTIONS

The following roster summarizes the key NPCs and monsters the characters are likely to meet during the adventure.

CONTROLLERS OF THE CUBE

Vargo and its servants control Cube 1717, and will do whatever it takes to maintain the skull lord's hold on the cube's power.

Vargo. Created from the bodies of three evil adventurers, the **skull lord**^M Vargo has spent hundreds of years in Acheron. The personalities of the undead's three heads have merged over that time. It commands all the pixelated creatures and controls three faces of the Six-Face Throne—two directly, and the third



SKULL LORD

through its servant, Sladek. Vargo seeks sufficiently intelligent adventurers to graft onto itself, allowing it to activate the cube's full power and conquer Faerûn. See area 6.31 for more information.

Sladek. A genasi mage who journeyed to the island and became pixelated, Sladek is the NPC who inspires the characters' rescue mission—but they are unaware that he is now a pixelated **mage**, one of Vargo's allies, and one of the controllers of the Six-Face Throne. The most intelligent of the pixelated creatures transformed by the cube, Sladek now seeks to spread the pixelating curse to every living creature. See area 6.11B for more information.

Avnas. This crazed **derro savant**^M is a mad scientist, an architect, and the only survivor of Earl Andromalius's retinue. She serves Vargo out of a mad desire to see what might happen if the skull lord is able to claim the power it seeks. See area 6.17 for more information.

Bunch. A **berbalang** that came to the island to gather the bones of the dead, Bunch is resistant to the pixelating curse because of the creature's extraplanar nature. (The berbalang appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.) It serves Vargo in return for skulls and bones. See area 6.13 for more information.

Balhannoth and Oblex. A **balhannoth** was brought onto the island by a party of drow explorers as a servitor monster. Transformed into a pixelated creature, it now serves Vargo and Sladek. An **adult oblex** is the product of one of the horrid experiments conducted

MONSTERS AND MAGIC

Most of the monsters in this adventure are taken from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. When a monster name appears in bold, it means that creature appears either in that book or the *Monster Manual*. The first time a monster appears in the adventure, the text notes if it appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. If the name appears in bold thereafter, a superscript 'M' indicates that the creature appears in that book.

A number of new magic items found on Cube 1717 are found in the "New Magic Items" appendix at the end of the adventure. All other magic items are found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

in Cube 1717's laboratory. It, too, serves the skull lord. The balhannoth and the oblex both appear in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. See "Face 5: Beautiful Island" for more information.

OTHER FACTIONS

A number of creatures within the cube might prove to be friends or foes to the characters—or both.

'Nameless.' Met by the characters at the start of the mission, this mad **monodrone** has suffered damage that has caused it to go rogue. Terrified of the "bad square boss" inside the cube island, it picks one of the characters as its new boss and latches onto them, following them anywhere—but communication with the creature is difficult. See "Mad Monodrone," below, for more information.

Fern. The only survivor of a shadar-kai expedition to explore the island, Fern is a shadar-kai **shadow dancer** with partial memory loss as a result of contact with Styx water. She seeks to find Astilbe, a fallen friend. See area 1.3 for more information on Fern, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the shadar-kai.

Simak. This **drow house captain** is the only survivor of a drow expedition she led to the island, and has kept herself alive by becoming a kind of court jester to Vargo. Simak originally came to the cube hoping to activate its power and use it as a flying war engine, but her primary goal now is to make a safe escape. See area 6.11C for more information on Simak, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the drow.

By sheer chance, a family-heirloom *amulet of the Styx* that Simak wears makes her immune to the pixelating curse, because of the Styx water it holds inside it. See the "New Magic Items" appendix for more information.

Abishai Priests. A group of **white abishai** and **black abishai** are worshipers of Tiamat whose faith saved them when Cube 1717 was nearly destroyed. Still unpixelated, they have so far avoided Vargo and are desperate to escape the island. See area 6.38 and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the abishai.

Malika Tahoun. This plague-ridden **oinoloth** was the leader of the yugoloth strike force sent to the material realm to destroy the cube. As utterly selfish as all yugoloths, it surrendered to Vargo to avoid being killed. Vargo is keeping Malika around as a backup controller for the Six-Face Throne, in the event that the skull lord can't find a sufficient number of new heads. (It won't graft the oinoloth's head onto itself, because the creature's plagues can infect even its undead body.) See area 6.11A for more information on Malika, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on oinoloths.

Malika wears an airtight outfit that protects it from infection by the pixelating curse, and that also protects those around the oinoloth from its multitude of diseases. The mask and gloves also conceals the oinoloth's fiendish appearance.

Hydroloths. The only other survivors of the yugoloth assault lurk in what the denizens of the cube call "the Styx sea"—the volume of black Styx water that surrounds the island. While they wait for Malika Tahoun to return, they kill any creatures that might

spread the pixelating curse. See "Invisible Guardians" and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the hydroloths.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Six Faces of Death is a wide-open adventure, in which random chance and the players' choices are the only determiners of their progress through Cube 1717.

In the first stage of the adventure, the characters investigate the mysterious Changing Island. This stage plays out largely as a mystery and survival story, as the characters deal with deadly hydroloths, vampiric mist, the random rotation of the cube, and other threats. Figuring out how to get inside is the primary challenge of this section of the adventure—but that challenge can take many forms, depending on which faces of the cube the characters have a chance to explore.

Once they get inside, the characters' primary motivation is to fight the cube's defenders as they learn more about its origin and purpose. Against the overarching goal of rescuing the genasi mage Sladek, the characters might also decide that they're obliged to destroy the cube, wanting to prevent its destructive power from being unleashed in Faerûn.

Alternatively, instead of fighting the cube's defenders, the characters might parley with them. This could be an even more dangerous option, however, since the skull lord Vargo has diabolical plans for suitably intelligent guests. If the characters do parley with the evil defenders of the cube, take the opportunity to roleplay the disturbing, diabolical, and potentially funny personalities of those defenders.

Exploring the cube makes for a classic and challenging "invade the fortress" scenario. Pixelated creatures can all communicate telepathically with each other to a range of 120 feet, making it easy for them to advise other pixelated creatures or the skull lord of the movements and positions of intruders. If higher-level characters are having too easy a time against the cube's pixelated guardians, you can easily add additional guardians or give them maximum hit points to raise the challenge.

Pixelated merregon devils and pixelated veterans serve as the cube's guards (see the "Pixelated Guards" sidebar on the next page). Other pixelated creatures that can join a coordinated defense of the fortress include Avnas and her gray render (see area 6.17), the skull lord's personal army of zombies and skeletons in area 6.21, and the adult oblex and the balhannoth from face 5.

If the characters end up overwhelmed by the threats on the cube, you might want to throw them a lifeline in the form of unexpected help. Perhaps the shadar-kai and the drow expeditions weren't totally wiped out, and their forces are also currently exploring the cube to draw off its defenders or join in during a key fight.

On top of all the other dangers of the cube, the characters must finish their quest and escape the island before the pixelating curse transforms them into pixelated creatures. Only characters who are immune to disease can ignore this threat, and characters who can

cure disease (as well as spellcasters who can cast *dispel magic* or *remove curse*) will be kept busy.

If certain characters become infected, players who enjoy roleplaying might like the additional challenge of having infected characters become increasingly at odds with their healthy companions. Especially when a character reaches mental level 3 of the curse, let the character's player interpret their insanity rather than you telling them what their character is doing.

THE SKULL LORD'S PLAN

As all its heads once were in life, Vargo is intelligent and charismatic, and the skull lord won't foolishly rush into battle with intruders. If at all possible, it tries to approach the characters as potential allies, assuring them that despite its horrific undead appearance, it wants to be a resource for them. Vargo will describe itself as being trapped on the cube, and will encourage characters to work with it so they can all safely escape.

Vargo is never without its bodyguards (see area 6.31). But if the skull lord has the chance, it presents those bodyguards as 'captors', similar to the two pixelated guards watching Malika Tahoun in area 6.11A.

Vargo might make use of any or all of the following deceptions and half-truths when talking to the characters:

- Vargo didn't cause the pixelating curse (true), and doesn't even know where it came from (technically true). The skull lord is as ignorant as the characters are about what's going on (false).
- Vargo's enemies are ruthless evil fiends—the yugoloths—who will also kill the characters if they find them on the cube (true). Vargo and the party must work together to stop them!

PIXELATED GUARDS

Two types of guards now serve the skull lord, and can be found throughout the cube. Merregon devils (from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) originally served as sentries on Cube 1717, and are joined now by humanoid veterans representing both the reborn souls that once fought and died in Acheron and the adventurers and sailors that have been pixelated since coming to the island.

Transformed by the pixelating curse, a pixelated **merregon** or pixelated **veteran** has its original statistics with the following changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

If you add additional guards to the adventure, you can use pixelated merregons or pixelated veterans, as you choose. Pixelated veterans might show differences in their arms, armor, and physical features, and representatives of the drow and the shadar-kai that came to the island might be found among them.

Not all the humanoids who came to the island were veterans, but using the veteran stat block is a useful shortcut during play. If any pixelated veterans are returned to their normal form, you can use other statistics for them that are more appropriate.

- Vargo is a prisoner of the pixelated creatures (false), which seek to capture the characters as well (true).
- The cube is a damaged flying battle station, which Vargo has figured out how to reactivate (true). Only sufficiently intelligent people can interface with the cube (true), and if the characters help the skull lord reactivate it, they can all make use of its power (false).
- The cube is capable of traveling from plane to plane (false). Vargo just wants to reactivate the cube so that it can leave the Material Plane (false; Vargo wants to conquer the Material Plane).
- The pixelated creatures aren't innately evil (technically true but irrelevant; the pixelated creatures' overarching goal is to spread the pixelation curse to all things).
- Vargo was a prisoner in the cube for hundreds of years, cruelly punished for trying to overthrow the cube's devil lord (true). Thus, the skull lord would never inflict such suffering on anyone else (false).

If the characters engage Vargo, the skull lord attempts to use them in one of three ways. First, it wants their aid in defeating the hydroloths that guard the waters around the cube, and in destroying the vampiric mists on the surface. Second, it hopes to see them become pixelated, coming under its control as they join its army of pixelated creatures. Third, the skull lord wants to use characters with an Intelligence of 14 or higher to attune to the Six-Face Throne, making the cube even more powerful.



PIXELATED MERREGON

GETTING AHEAD

Vargo doesn't tell the characters that they can simply plug themselves into the Six-Face Throne to attune to it (see area 6.28), sharing the power of the cube as equals. The skull lord's much more evil plan is to identify a character or NPC with an Intelligence of 14 or higher, take them to the surgery at area 6.22, get the drop on them—then sever the character's head for grafting onto the skull lord's own shoulders. Vargo's shoulders have room for six heads in total, and the skull lord believes that any newly grafted head will be at least temporarily dominated by its own preexisting personality. The extra head will thus simply serve as an extra brain with which to unlock more powers of the cube.

From the moment Vargo and Bunch (the skull lord's berbalang assistant, who knows of its plan) begin interacting with the characters, both try to assess their intelligence. Bunch uses obvious questions and intelligence tests (see area 6.13), but Vargo is more clever. It might ply the characters with questions about history or scholarly knowledge, or challenge them to games in the library (area 6.29). Vargo focuses on wizards for special attention.

Once it has a fairly good idea which characters are the smartest, the skull lord tries to separate them from their companions. Other characters are allowed to roam the fortress (but not to go out onto the surface), with Vargo hoping that they eventually pixelate. Intelligent characters are attacked, incapacitated (the brain donor must be alive before the procedure), and dragged to the surgery so Vargo can operate.

In the interest of not railroading a character into this fate, Vargo takes an NPC as its first target, starting with Fern or Simak (if the drow's subterfuge of idiocy fails). If the skull lord gains a fourth head, its first action is to make that head start drinking the Styx water that one of its own heads must drink to counter the pixelating curse. As a result, it regains its full skull lord statistics (see area 6.31). The skull lord also becomes visibly taller, though this has no immediate game effect.

If the new head is an NPC, Vargo automatically succeeds at crushing its personality and turning it into nothing more than spare memory storage for the skull lord's dominant brains. If the new head is a character, give the character's player a chance for the head to retain its sense of self by succeeding on two out of three consecutive Charisma contests against Vargo. If the character succeeds, the player retains the ability to speak, think, and occasionally control Vargo's body by winning Charisma contests as you determine.

Only a *wish* spell can restore a character whose head has been grafted onto the skull lord. As Vargo adds more heads, its personality becomes more cold and megalomaniacal—even as occasional flashes of the preferences and personalities of the minds it has absorbed come to the fore.

THE SUPER SKULL LORD

If Vargo gains a fifth head, the skull lord continues to grow in stature and power. In addition to becoming taller, its statistics change as follows:

- Its Strength increases to 16. This increases the attack and damage modifiers of its bone staff attack by 1.
- Its Constitution increases to 19. This increases its hit points to 119 (14d8 + 56).

If the skull lord gains a sixth head, it grows even taller and its final statistics change as follows:

- Its Strength increases to 18. This increases the attack and damage modifiers of its bone staff attack by 1.
- Its Constitution increases to 21. This increases its hit points to 133 (14d8 + 70).
- Its Charisma increases to 23. This increases its spell save DC to 19 and its spell attack bonus to +11.

MISSING SHIPS AND TALKING CUBES

The adventure begins in a lawless port city from which the characters set out to the Changing Island, an hour away by ship. The assumed setting is the Sea of Swords, but you can modify the adventure to start out in any chaotic port city in Faerûn or another campaign world.

STARTING POINTS

Any of the following locations make a good start to the adventure in a Forgotten Realms campaign.

Waterdeep. The greatest city of the Sword Coast features numerous guilds, magical orders, mercantile enterprises, adventuring companies, and criminal organizations that might have an interest in exploring the Changing Island. Alternatively, you might decide to start the adventure off in Skullport. This underground city of criminals, slavers, and evil mages lies beneath Waterdeep, and is part of the great dungeon complex of Undermountain.

Athkatla. “The city of coin” is a huge port city of humans and halflings. With over a hundred thousand inhabitants, the city is the capital of the land of Amn, just south of the Sword Coast. Numerous powerful factions here might already be vying for control of the Changing Island by the time the characters set out to explore it.

Ioma. Home to fewer than a thousand people, Ioma is one of several small pirate ports in the Nelanther Isles, south of the Sea of Swords. The Nelanther pirates are cruel and lawless, and Ioma is ruled with an iron fist by a small group of Cowled Wizards—members of a secret arcane order in Amn.

Port Nyanzaru. The capital of the jungle peninsula of Chult, Port Nyanzaru is detailed in *Tomb of Annihilation*. Though not as lawless and dangerous as some of the other cities in this section, it makes an excellent potential starting point for the adventure.

Ajayib. Sometimes called the City of Wonders, Ajayib is one of the “Pearl Cities”—wealthy seaports on the coast of the desert land of Zakhara, far to the south of the Sword Coast.

Dragonisle. Moving the adventure to the Sea of Fallen Stars, inland and east of the Sword Coast, gives you the option to use Dragonisle as a starting point. The largest of the Pirate Isles, the island is dominated by the eight-thousand-foot-high mountain known as the Earthspur.

Some four thousand pirates dwell here, with most found in the city sometimes known as Immurk's Hold.

FRIENDS AND ALLIES

The setup of the adventure assumes that the characters know people in the port close to where the Changing Island has appeared. But if you're playing the adventure as a one-shot, or if you want to give the characters an additional NPC ally in the area, you can introduce them to Lem—a local **priest** of Kelemvor, Lord of the Dead.

Clad in gray and lawful neutral in alignment, Lem works to prepare dead bodies for burial by bathing them in scented holy water, thus ritually washing away their sins. She gladly offers advice on the afterlife, undead, curses, and similar matters, and can provide *potions of healing* if the characters need them.

When the characters meet with Lem, she confides to them that a few nights earlier, she had a dark dream warning her of evil on the Changing Island. As such, she warns them to be careful on their journey.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHANGING ISLAND

Whatever port the adventurers start out in, they soon hear that a mysterious island has recently appeared in the sea, an hour away by ship. No one has set foot on the island and come back to tell the tale, and sailors have given conflicting descriptions of it, causing it to be nicknamed “the Changing Island.”

The mysterious island was first sighted two weeks before. Since then, the following information has become known to all folk in the port where the adventure begins. Be sure to give the characters this information before they leave port. Establishing the mystery of the Changing Island gives the players a number of vital clues they need before they go there.

- Shortly after the island was first sighted, the sea around it became covered by an unnaturally thick bank of fog. That fog never lifts, leaving the island in a perpetual gray twilight.
- The water around the island is somehow different than the surrounding sea. It is black and silty, offers poor visibility, and feels unnaturally cold. No fish swim in this mysterious black water, which features a clear dividing line from the blue-green sea.
- The island is unnaturally square and about six hundred feet across. A number of hills and valleys can be seen rising beyond the shore, but it's impossible to make out details through the fog.
- A number of explorers have landed ships on the island, but none have returned to tell of what they found. A number of the ships that approached the island have vanished, while others have been found floating with their crews missing. No useful clues have been recovered from these derelict ships.
- “The Changing Island” is so-named because those who pass by it have given a number of conflicting descriptions of it. Some say that the island is nothing but bare stone, featuring terraces of sharp, angular rock in white, red, black, and bronze. Others have talked of the island appearing as a pleasant green atoll of palm trees and plant life, with sandy beaches.

- Most disturbingly, some witnesses have described the island as covered with bodies, as if the place were the site of some terrible battle. A large number of the fallen appeared to be armored soldiers of various races, but most were as naked as the day they were born.

In addition to the well-known lore above, the following information can be discovered by adventurers who research the island while in port. The manner of research is up to you, but might involve Intelligence (Investigation) checks, talking to background contacts, use of the *legend lore* spell, and so forth. Not all the rumors the characters hear will be true. False rumors, or elements of larger rumors that are false, are *italicized* below.

- The island sometimes submerges and rises again. *The crew of one ship saw a giant eyestalk rise out of the water. The island is nothing less than a giant monster!*
- A sailor who fell into the black water was struck dumb in an instant. Even after being hauled out, their mind was like a child's, leaving them not knowing their own name and barely able to speak.
- Monstrous creatures were seen on the island—some sort of two-legged half-dragons with icy white skin and bat wings. They ran to the waterline and howled at the terrified sailors passing by, but didn't take flight to pursue them.
- Not only is the island covered with the dead, *but those dead periodically rise to walk about and reach out to passing ships. There must be thousands of zombies there!*
- A seagull was seen to land on the island to peck at the dead bodies there. It was killed by a tentacle that seemed to grow out of the fog, grabbing the bird and tearing it apart!
- A mighty drow galley was seen in the waters near the island. *Whispered rumors talk of the island as channeling some kind of demonic power, drawing the dark elves from their underground lairs.*
- A mysterious ship carrying those strange shadow-loving folk, the shadar-kai, was seen in the waters near the island.
- *The island is covered with great heaps of glittering jewels!*
- A smoking crater rises at the center of the island. While sailors watched, it blasted out an eruption—not of lava, but of what looked like the bodies of the dead!
- Three days before the island and the black water appeared, a lone fisher reported hearing a great thunderclap and seeing an enormous cube of rock fall from the heavens. Red flames and black smoke followed its passing, as did a shrieking like the voices of a thousand fiends. The fiery cube fell into the sea and disappeared.

RESCUE MISSION

The characters enter the adventure when they are tasked with finding a mage who has vanished while exploring the island. This character might be an old NPC acquaintance of one of the other characters, or

the party could be hired by others who want the mage located and returned.

Sladek is a neutral good genasi **mage** called “Sladek the Blue” for his blue skin and dark blue robes. Local folk know that the mage is fascinated by geology and geography, and that he hired a small boat with six sailors and went to investigate the new island a week before. He and the sailors have not been seen since.

When Sladek ventured onto the island, he was captured by pixelated guards and converted into a pixelated creature. He now serves as Vargo the skull lord’s second-in-command. The sailors were either captured and converted to pixelated creatures or killed by the hydroloths guarding the island, who also tore the ship apart.

If the characters don’t know Sladek, they are hired by the mage’s order to determine what happened to him. Such organizations might include the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors if the adventure starts in Waterdeep, the Cowled Wizards of Amn if it starts in Ioma, or the Zhentarim in any starting point location.

A servant of the order approaches the characters—Saberhagen, a low-level neutral **diviner** whose green robes match his short, dyed beard. On behalf of his order, Saberhagen offers the characters 5,000 gp each if they can rescue Sladek and return his possessions, or 3,000 gp each to bring back his possessions and his body.

IOUN STONES

Chief among Sladek’s possessions—and a big part of why his order wants those possessions returned—is his collection of six *Ioun stones*:

- Awareness (dark blue rhomboid): Wielder cannot be surprised
- Insight (incandescent blue sphere): Wisdom increases by 2
- Intellect (scarlet and blue sphere): Intelligence increases by 2
- Mastery (pale green prism): Proficiency bonus increases by 1
- Protection (dusty rose prism): Gain a +1 bonus to AC
- Reserve (vibrant purple prism): Store up to 3 levels of spells

See chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for more information on *Ioun stones*.

When Sladek was pixelated, his *Ioun stones* were claimed by Vargo the skull lord. Saberhagen gives the characters three *spell scrolls* of *locate object* they can use to track the *Ioun stones* once they get to the island. When the characters use the scrolls, the position of the stones seems to shift as the skull lord moves around within the cube.

Naturally, if the characters do defeat Vargo and claim the *Ioun stones*, whether or not to return them for the reward is up to them.

GETTING TO THE ISLAND

When the characters are ready to travel to the island, they can buy a ship, use their own ship if they have one already, or ask Saberhagen to hire a ship for

them. If they ask for sailors who can fight, the ship includes twenty **guards** (neutral mercenaries). The mercenaries take their orders from any character with the soldier background. In the absence of such a character, they follow the orders of the character with the highest Charisma.

MAD MONODRONE

While the characters make their preparations for the journey to the Changing Island, a portside contact introduces them to an odd creature found by fishers in the waters off the island: a spherical, seemingly mechanical being with a single huge eye, and spindly wings and limbs. Any character with experience of planar travel recognizes the creature as a **monodrone**. Recognizing the creature otherwise requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The only survivor of the modron strike force, the monodrone has lost its connection to Mechanus, and is now a rogue modron stranded on the Material Plane. It knows about the Archquadrone, the yugoloths, the battles that took place on the cube, and the effects of the Styx sea. It doesn’t know about Vargo, Avnas, or any of the recent visitors to the cube (including the drow, the balhannoth, and the shadar-kai).

How much of that information it can tell the characters is another matter, as the monodrone has a toddler’s intelligence and can speak only forty-eight words (see the table below). It cannot count above six, and describes any larger numbers as “six six” or “six six six.” Thankfully, its time on the Material Plane means that the creature has learned to speak those words in Common as well as Modron.

Bad	Good	Soft
Hard	Up	Down
One	Two	Three
Four	Five	Six
Go	Stay	Get
Drop	Give	Put
Boss	Break	Work
Near	Far	Circle
Life	Death	Point
Part	Whole	Lamp
Line	Face	Triangle
Square	Pentagon	Hexagon
Friend	Enemy	Fix
Ear	Resources	Department
Big	Small	Wet
Dry	Eye	Mouth

The monodrone’s mind is so alien that its thoughts cannot be read by magic, and it is immune to being charmed. But it is clearly panicked as it babbles about the “Six Face Bad,” “Bad Square,” and “Bad Boss.” The creature is terrified of the island and doesn’t want to return. However, its need to be part of an order inspires it to instinctively seek a new “boss,” and it quickly latches onto one of the characters in this role. The monodrone becomes a loyal companion and goes wherever its boss goes. However, once it gets to the

island, it is exposed to the pixelating curse just as the characters are, and might begin to transform.

The monodrone has no name, but it answers to a name given to it by its boss. This is the only word it can speak in addition to its base forty-eight words.

JOURNEY TO THE ISLAND

Sailing for the mysterious Changing Island gives the characters their first glimpse of its mysteries—and its dangers.

THE CHANGING ISLAND

As the characters come within sight of the island, roll a d6. This determines what face of the island is up when they approach, and what the characters see.

Five sides of the island-cube—**faces 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6**—feature a barren, rocky landscape of strangely geometrical terraces in various colors. These terraces are built up of square and rectangular lumps of gray, brown, black, and red stone or clay, though some areas glitter as if lumps of bronze are buried in the ground. The thick fog gives the surface an eerie, twilight look.

By contrast, **face 5** of the cube is a lush green jungle island of palm trees and banana plants. Here, sea waves crash against gentle, sandy beaches, and the fog that covers the island seems less oppressive. (In reality, dead bodies cover this face as they do all other faces of the cube, but they are transformed by the power of the creature that creates this delightful vista. See face 5 for more information.)

No matter which face is on the surface, the island is some 600 feet wide. Circumnavigating the island takes 10 minutes, and confirms that it is almost perfectly square except for a few rocky reefs (or sandbars, if face 5 is up) that jut out into the water at irregular intervals. In addition to the fog, rising hills (and trees if face 5 is up) make it impossible to see all the way across the island without going ashore.

Flying characters can travel above the island and see all of its current face from the air. However, any creature that lands on the island and takes off again is attacked by **vampiric mists** that lurk in the fog. See “Mysterious Fog,” below, and see *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes* for more information about the vampiric mist.

Characters who don’t want to risk contact with the black water surrounding the island can use teleportation magic to reach the island safely, and can use such magic on or within the cube. However, the cube’s infernal magic prevents creatures from leaving the island by the use of such magic without the permission of the cube’s ruler, Earl Andromalius—which permission cannot be granted, as Andromalius is dead.

While anywhere within the cube or within 30 feet of its exterior surfaces, a character who attempts to use any teleportation or planar travel magic (including the *plane shift* spell) to leave the cube realizes before the magic is used that it will not work. (A character who persists in trying to use such magic anyway expends its use or wastes a spell slot with no effect.) If the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) is destroyed, this effect ends.

Regardless of which face of the island is up when the characters approach, they also see a derelict drow galley floating several hundred feet away from it. If face 1 or face 2 is up, they see the ship of the ill-fated shadar-kai expedition as well. Countless other bits of timber and floating debris from scuttled ships float around the island, but none are big enough to conclusively identify.

WHAT THE ISLAND TRULY IS

In its true form, the island is a cubical battle station from the plane of Acheron, floating in the Styx sea with only a small portion visible above the surface, like an iceberg. Its form is an iron cube 600 feet on a side, with one to six hatch-like entrances on each face of the cube. The visible face of the cube shows marks of battle: gouges, sections melted from intense heat, and indentations from battering blows. Each face has its own local gravity, though the characters will need to explore to learn this.

The stone terraces of the island are not an illusion. Rather, they are a magical transformation fueled by the pixelating curse. In truth, the surface of each face of the cube is covered with piles of pixelated dead—warriors of various humanoid species, many bearing weapons and armor. Held fast by the local gravity of each face, these are the soldiers of Acheron, including those who were killed by yugoloths when the cube was purged.

Any creature that has the truesight ability, is under the effect of a *true seeing* spell or similar magic, or wears *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) can see the island as it truly is. A *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spell also eliminates the pixelating curse from a 10-foot radius of its false surface for 10 minutes, revealing the true form of the pixelated dead. Those dead are piled to heights of 30 feet in some places, with intermittent valleys between those piles revealing the surface of the cube beneath them.

Characters who set foot on the island without seeing its true form have the disturbing experience of touching what looks like dirt and stone but is actually cubical metal, bone, and flesh. Thinking they are walking on rock or clay, they may not realize they are actually walking on pixelated bodies.

Countless dead cover the cube when the characters arrive, and more are shot out onto the surface every hour. Most are warriors who fell during the yugoloth assault, but the broken soul tap (area 6.14) has also caused a steady stream of new dead to appear inside the cube. Gathered by the pixelated hellfire engine at area 6.41, they are regularly expelled onto the surface of face 1, whereupon the bronze scouts of face 2 drag the bodies around in a futile attempt to inter them, which ultimately distributes them across the surface of the cube. (The hellfire engine and the bronze scout appear in *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes*.)

THE PIXELATING CURSE

When any creature has been on the surface of the Changing Island for 10 minutes, and then each time it finishes a short or long rest while on or within the cube, it must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is infected with the

pixelating curse. Advantage on saving throws against magical effects applies, and chaotic creatures also have advantage on this save. Creatures that are immune to disease are immune to the curse.

The pixelating curse combines aspects of a traditional magical curse and a disease, and has both physical and mental components. If a creature is infected, the transmutation magic of the curse registers within them with a *detect magic* spell. The curse can be negated with a *cure disease*, *dispel magic*, *lesser restoration*, or *greater restoration* spell. Exposure to Styx water also ends the curse, including being fully immersed in the Styx sea or being doused by a bucket of Styx water. Once cured, though, a creature must leave the island within 10 minutes or make another Constitution save against becoming reinfected.

Once a creature has reached mental level 3 of the curse (see below), it no longer wants to be cured, and resists any attempts to cure it if it is conscious. To end the curse with one of the spells above, a spellcaster must succeed on an ability check using their spellcasting modifier, against a DC equal to 10 + the creature's Intelligence modifier. On a failed check, the creature remains pixelated and the spell is wasted.

The curse affects objects as well as living things. The effect on objects in a creature's possession is determined by the rate at which the creature is pixelating. Unattended objects (including things such as tents or gear left on the island while the characters explore) become pixelated within 1 hour. At your discretion, characters might need to attempt Wisdom (Perception) checks to recognize pixelated objects when they return to them. Magic items are not affected by the pixelating curse.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

A creature under the effect of the pixelating curse slowly transforms into a 'blocky' version of itself, becoming more pixelated with each level of the curse's progression. Once infected, a creature gains one additional physical level of the curse at the end of each short rest. It gains two additional physical levels of the curse at the end of each long rest.

- **Physical Level 1:** No outwardly visible effects.
- **Physical Level 2:** Each pixel is smaller than a grain of rice. The effect is subtle enough that others might not notice unless the creature under the curse's effect is touched or closely inspected. Otherwise, an observer notices the effect only with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.
- **Physical Level 3:** Each pixel is the size of a small pearl. The curse is clearly visible to all observers.
- **Physical Level 4:** Each pixel is the size of a grape.
- **Physical Level 5:** Each pixel is the size of a strawberry.
- **Physical Level 6:** Each pixel is the size of a small apple. Once a creature has taken 6 physical levels of the curse, it gains the pixelated template (see below).

When a creature is first infected by the pixelating curse, roll a d6. On an odd result, it becomes infected from the inside out instead of outside in. The creature

NPCs AND THE CURSE

If the characters bring large numbers of mercenaries or other NPCs with them onto the island, you can choose to not roll saving throws for those characters. Rather, simply decide how the curse progresses through the ranks in whatever way seems most entertaining.

seems outwardly normal through the first 5 levels of the curse's physical progression, making it impossible to notice visually. However, if the creature is wounded by a piercing or slashing weapon, it bleeds red pixels of the appropriate size instead of blood.

MENTAL EFFECTS

Pixelated creatures are all linked into a group mind that regulates their behavior. Upon becoming infected, and each time it gains another physical level of the curse, a creature must attempt a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. Chaotic creatures have advantage on this save. On a failure, the creature gains 1 mental level of the curse. Because progression through the mental levels of the curse depend on progression through the physical levels, it's possible for an infected creature to be fully physically transformed but still retain its self-identity, or to appear only partially pixelated but be totally under the curse's mental control.

- **Mental Level 1:** The creature rolls once on the Mental Pixelation table. Additionally, it begins to suffer from hallucinations. To the infected creature, pixelated creatures and objects start to appear normal, while uninfected creatures and objects begin to appear as melting, chaotic, shapeless forms. If some of the characters are infected and some are not, players might have fun roleplaying whose perspective is real.
- **Mental Level 2:** The creature rolls for a second effect on the Mental Pixelation table, in addition to the original effect. Reroll if the original effect is rolled again.
- **Mental Level 3:** The creature's mind completely succumbs to the curse. Its alignment changes to lawful neutral and it suffers all the effects of the Mental Pixelation table simultaneously. In the case of a conflict, higher-numbered effects supersede lower-numbered ones. The creature also refuses to acknowledge that it is cursed, and does not willingly allow its own curse to be removed or help others remove the curse on themselves.

A creature at mental level 3 of the curse begins receiving weak telepathic transmissions from other pixelated creatures. While within 120 feet of another pixelated creature, the first creature can fully understand the transmissions, and is informed that the Archquadrone is their god, and that the skull lord and the pixelated mage are its divinely appointed representatives.

MENTAL PIXELATION

As noted on the Mental Pixelation table on the following page, the mental effects of the pixelating curse twist (or, rather, straighten) the cursed creature's mind toward absolute law. Though it retains its memories, the creature adopts lawful, conformist

behavior that supersedes its original personality. Players should be encouraged to roleplay cursed characters as stereotypical robots and “pod people,” as members of a fanatical cult, or as enthusiastic 1950s suburbanites.

Animals and other creatures of minimal intelligence that succumb to these effects might have them altered to better reflect instinct than intellect, as you determine.

TEMPLATE: PIXELATED

A pixelated creature resembles a crude outline of its original form, composed of individual blocks about

MENTAL PIXELATION

d10	Effect
1	The creature becomes obsessed with monetary value. At every opportunity, it must speculate on the cost in gold pieces of items that it, its companions, and its enemies are carrying.
2	The creature becomes obsessed with assessing weights. At every opportunity, it must speculate on the weight of items that it, its companions, and its enemies are carrying.
3	The creature becomes obsessed with measuring distances. At every opportunity, it must comment on the dimensions of objects, the range or reach of attacks, and so on.
4	The creature becomes obsessed with having a “normal” appearance. It sheds or stores away any unique garments and gear, trying to adopt the average look of most members of the party.
5	The creature becomes obsessed with its speech and mannerisms conforming to established norms. It loses any personal flourishes to its interactions with others, and might adopt the mannerisms of other characters in an attempt to blend in.
6	The creature becomes obsessed with logic and shuns emotional engagement. It focuses on the desire to work, the satisfaction of a job well done, and suspicion of others that look or think differently.
7	The creature develops a distaste of curved things, and avoids their use if possible (for example, stowing a bow or axe in order to attack with a sword).
8	The creature begins to hear happy voices promising a better way of life. (These are glimmers of the telepathy that all pixelated creatures share.)
9	The creature becomes obsessed with hierarchy and social authority. A character with the noble or soldier background might demand respect from allies and enemies. Other characters might speak respectfully of authority figures and become meek in their presence. (This mental effect culminates in the creature recognizing the skull lord as its master.)
10	The creature becomes a religious fanatic if it was already pious, or it becomes a militant atheist if not. When the creature meets the skull lord or sees the Archquadrone, it abandons its former faith (or lack thereof) to worship the Archquadrone as a god.

the size of a small apple. Pixelated creatures have their facial features (including eyes), fingers, toes, and teeth lost in the mass of blocks, although they retain their senses and their ability to eat, drink and speak. Pixelated creatures rarely talk, however, preferring to communicate with one another telepathically.

Pixelated natural attacks and weapons retain any ability to pierce and slash, even though they appear to be blunt and cubical.

Intelligent pixelated creatures seek out the skull lord and the Archquadrone, seeking to serve it as soldiers and stewards in an instinctive hierarchy. Animals and other creatures of minimal intelligence continue to behave normally, following their own instincts. But they defend any pixelated creature they see being attacked by an unpixelated one.

A pixelated creature has the following traits.

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

As with all creatures under the effect of the pixelating curse, being immersed in the Styx sea instantly changes a pixelated creature back to normal. A small splash of the black water causes a pixelated creature distress but has no other effect. Being doused by a full bucket of Styx water will cause one Medium or smaller creature to revert. Treat throwing a bucket of water as a weapon attack (range 5/15), with advantage if the bucket is wielded two-handed.

A Large or larger pixelated creature struck with a bucket of Styx water can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw to resist changing back. Such creatures require multiple buckets of Styx water to change back, as you determine.

THE STYX SEA

As the characters draw closer, the first sign they see of their destination is a low bank of fog obscuring a small, flat island in the distance.

They then see the change in the water. The relatively clear, blue-green water of the sea meets a current of silty black liquid, which doesn’t mix with the seawater. The black water surrounds the island to a distance of a quarter mile on all sides. It is fresh water, although it has a strange smell reminiscent of alchemy and sweet perfume. Colder than the surrounding sea, it is also noticeably chilly to the touch.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check indicates that the water is more like river water than seawater. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check recognizes the water’s scent as similar to cassia (a spice that smells like cinnamon), natron (mineral salts), and bitumen (tar)—three ingredients that are used together in some cultures to mummify the dead. If the Intelligence (Religion) check result is 25 or higher, the character is reminded of old legends of the River Styx—the cold, dark river of the Lower Planes in which the memories of the dead are washed away.

The dark water surrounding the island is a transplanted portion of the River Styx, ritually summoned by the now-dead merrenloth commander of the yugoloth strike team as a way to quarantine the island. The Styx sea is weaker than the pure River Styx, but it still radiates evil and magic. Small quantities of holy water poured upon it instantly turn to steam and evaporate.

A creature that is lightly splashed by or exposed to the water suffers no ill effects. But any creature other than a fiend, a construct, or a plant creature that is immersed in the water or that drinks it must attempt a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. With a success, the creature feels a dark, sleepy sensation that threatens to pull its memories away but quickly fades. On a failed save, the creature's Intelligence and Charisma scores become 5 (if they were not already lower) and it loses all memories of its life. At the same time, all curses, diseases, and magical effects currently in effect upon the creature (including the pixelating curse) are ended.

A character who falls victim to the Styx sea's effects takes on the mentality of a young, meek child. They can speak haltingly, but they have total amnesia and cannot recognize their friends—and might even forget the function of common objects. If attacked, a victim's muscle memory kicks in and they are able to defend themselves with weapons. But a victim of the Styx sea cannot cast spells, concentrate on spells or other effects, use class features, employ magic items, or undertake any other complex action, at your determination.

A *greater restoration* spell restores a victim's ability scores and memory. Failing that, a victim's Intelligence and Charisma go up by 2 points at the end of each long rest, until their original scores are regained. As a victim regains its ability scores, it gradually regains its memories and features as well, with the amnesia ending when the creature's ability scores are restored to normal.

INVISIBLE GUARDIANS

Three **hydroloths**^M lurk invisibly in the Styx sea, guarding the island so that no creatures leave it that might spread the **pixelating curse**. Any character who succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check while scanning the black water can see the telltale ripples of large shapes moving therein. If the check result is 25 or higher, the observer makes out three invisible shapes that are human-sized and that swim more like giant frogs than fish—and that slowly move to intercept the characters' ship.

The hydroloths were ordered to guard the island by their commanders—the oinoloth and the late merrenloth that went onto face 5 of the cube with a force of other hydroloths and never returned. They know that the oinoloth must still be alive because they've seen the vampiric mists drifting through the fog that covers the island (see the *censer of blood* in the "New Magic Items" appendix). However, they have no idea as to the other yugoloths' fate.

If a ship observes the island from a distance, the hydroloths watch but leave it alone. Only if a ship



makes a close approach or a creature flies or teleports from the ship to the island do they react, attempting to scuttle the ship if it touches the island, or boarding it, killing the crew, and leaving it adrift if it doesn't. The hydroloths won't pursue creatures onto the cube. They know from experience that touching the cube for a short period probably won't pixelate them, but they're scared to risk it.

If the characters don't flee at once, the hydroloths use their telepathy to communicate with them, recognizing that powerful adventurers might be of use to them. The fiends can explain the fog (see below), the pixelating curse, the Styx sea, and the outer workings of the island—in exchange for a promise that the characters will try to locate and aid any surviving yugoloths currently within the cube.

The hydroloths make whatever slippery promises they can in an attempt to win the characters' assistance, though they have no intention of keeping those promises. However, they can share other useful intelligence, including that the yugoloth strike team went ashore on the beautiful island (face 5), and that the fiends carried a number of valuable magic items the characters are welcome to if their owners have met their end. (They don't bother telling the characters that the oinoloth will ultimately claim all such treasures for itself, killing the characters once the rescue is done.)

DERELICT DROW GALLEY

Not far from the island, an abandoned drow galley—a black and lavender trireme once rowed by chained slaves—floats aimlessly through the fog. The ship is built on four levels: the main deck (exposed to the weather), the cannon deck (where the main cabins are located), the rowers' deck, and the cargo hold. Its three banks of oars suggest that the huge ship should have a crew of over one hundred. But there is no sign of motion

on the deck, the sails are torn, and numerous oars have been shattered.

Characters who approach to within 30 feet of the ship become suddenly aware of the telepathic presence of other creatures. Three entities contact three individual characters, crying out in rage as they demand to be freed from something. The characters can respond to the pleas, but the nature of telepathic communications gives them no hint that these creatures are three bulezau demons. Likewise, the demons keep that information to themselves as they plead for the characters' aid. The bulezaus are imprisoned in a magic pentagram in a cabin on the ship's cannon deck. See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for details of the bulezau.

FATE OF THE DROW

The ship was captained by a drow named Simak, who used the advice of a drow oracle to seek out a "great weapon" that had fallen to the Material Plane from Acheron. After determining the dangers of the Styx sea when one crew member lost his memory after being exposed to the black water, a drow force went ashore on face 4 of the island under command of Simak and a high priestess, leaving guards and galley slaves behind.

The landing party were all promptly killed or captured by the skull lord's forces. Vargo tried to take the high priestess's skull, but failed when she killed herself first. Meanwhile, the drow forces and galley slaves on the ship were killed by the hydroloths. Simak, the last survivor of the drow expedition, escaped death at Vargo's hands by pretending to be under the effects of the Styx sea, and now lives in the complex under face 6, desperately plotting her escape.

MAIN DECK

This deck holds the ship's two masts, a small empty forecabin and aftcabin, and three sets of stairs leading down open hatches into the decks below. The whole deck is strewn with the gory remnants of a battle: bloodstains (drow, killed by the hydroloths), scattered weapons, some stained with a foul ichor (the hydroloths' blood), and piles of mingled hydroloth vomit and drow bones. A close investigation discerns the bodies of ten to twenty individual drow. The prints of huge frog-like creatures (the hydroloths) cover the deck.

Between the central hatch and the starboard rail, the ship's fungus-wood timbers are damaged and streaked with foul-smelling slime. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check determines that some large creature crawled out of the hatch and went overboard. (This was the balhannoth, currently on face 5 of the cube).

The bulezau's telepathy has a range of 60 feet, and can be heard from anywhere on the ship.

CANNON DECK

The cannon deck consists of a set of cabins to aft and a large open area containing sixteen cannons (see "Siege Equipment" in chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The iron cannons are carved with spiders, demons, and gargoyles.

In the aft cannon deck, beyond a short corridor, are the cabins of the captain, the first mate, and the high

priestess of Lolth. One wall of the corridor features what appears to be a thick growth of fungus. In truth, this is an alkilith demon grown from spores released when the ship was abandoned. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for details of the alkilith.)

Fiendish Ambush. The **alkilith** resembles a fungal growth eating into the wood of the ship. It is visually indistinguishable from a slime or fungus, but its fiendish nature can be noted with a *detect evil and good* spell or similar ability, and it responds if attacked. If its true nature is not revealed, the alkilith waits for the characters to get close so that its Foment Madness can confuse at least one of them. It then attacks at will.

First Mate's Cabin. These utilitarian sailor's quarters contain nothing of value.

High Priestess's Cabin. A rotten stench is noticed by anyone approaching the door to this area. The finely furnished room is decorated with black and red spider-silk tapestries (1,000 gp). On the floor is a large chalk pentagram in which three hungry **bulezaus**^M are imprisoned.

Summoned just before the drow went to the island—then forgotten here when the ship was attacked by the hydroloths—the bulezau cannot escape unless the chalk pentagram is broken from outside. When they see the characters, their telepathic demands for aid become more agitated. The demons make any promises to secure their escape, but they immediately break those oaths and try to eat their rescuers if freed. Any character proficient in the Arcana skill knows that attacking the bulezau from outside the pentagram will break its magic and release them.

Even if the pentagram isn't broken, the characters are still subject to the bulezau's Rotting Presence feature. It takes 5 rounds under the effects of Rotting Presence to fully search the cabin for the treasure found here—a pouch holding thirty-two bloodstone, onyx, and sardonyx gems (50 gp each); various ritual devices and candles (100 gp); a *+3 dagger*; and a *cloak of the bat*.

Captain's Cabin. Decorated in white and cream puffball colors with coral-like fungus candelabra, this area contains the ship's charts and the captain's log (written in Elvish). The charts show that the ship originated in the Underdark, traveling to the sea by way of secret underground rivers. They are worth 500 gp to a sage or a well-heeled Underdark explorer.

The log identifies the ship's commander as Simak, the head of a minor drow noble house. Two weeks earlier, a drow oracle told her that a great weapon had fallen out of Acheron, crashing from the Nine Hells to the Material Plane. The weapon is described as a giant battle station—a flying fortress of immense power with cannons that can destroy cities. Simak quickly gathered a secret expedition to find this weapon, seeking to increase the glory of her house. The last entry in the log identifies this mysterious weapon as the island, confirming that it had been sighted, and that the crew were planning to go ashore.

The cabin also contains a *+1 shortsword*, a *potion of vitality*, 800 gp, and a collection of fine spider-shell dishware worth 1,200 gp.

ROWER'S DECK

The bodies of over a hundred unfortunate human, kuo-toa, and myconid galley slaves are still chained to rows of filthy benches, where they were killed by the hydroloths. Near the central hatch, the bodies have been dismembered in gruesome and imaginative ways. Toward the edges of the fray, they are each killed with a single blow to the head or chest, as if whoever massacred them began to grow bored.

CARGO HOLD

A rank smell fills this area, and can be noted by characters as they descend the stairs. The hold contains barrels of food, fresh water, and fungus wine, along with nonmagical weapons and armor, rope, sailcloth, glowing fungus lamps, and other supplies.

In the center of the hold is a great 10-foot-by-10-foot iron cage, empty and seemingly melted open. Foul-smelling lavender slime sticks to the bars of the cage, and drips along a trail of damaged floorboards leading to the stairs below the main hatch. Iron amulets bearing the mark of Lolth are bolted to the sides of the cage. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes them as wards against transmutation, though their magic has failed. The cage once contained Simak's 'pet'—a balhannoth that escaped to the island after the rest of the crew was killed, and which now lairs on face 5.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

If the characters drop a line or an anchor to test the depth of the water near the island, they don't find bottom. The island seems to rise vertically out of the depths like a plateau, giving no sign that it's floating. Its edges are like a short cliff that rises out of the water, but any character who inspects the edge or has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notes something disturbing.

Where the dark waves crash against the cliff, an irregularity appears in the stone, with the rectangular terraces seeming to break down into something like mangrove roots or coral. Getting close enough for a careful inspection reveals what those 'roots' truly are—uncountable close-stacked bodies that are piled over one another as they disappear into the black depths.

This grotesque vision appears because the black Styx water dispels the pixelating curse. Where the upper surface of the cube is exposed to air, it is pixelated. Where the other faces are under the Styx sea, they return to their original form of iron covered by the fallen dead.

RANDOM ISLAND MISHAPS

All the ground on the island is difficult terrain. For each 10 minutes that a character spends walking around, they must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, roll a d6 to determine the outcome.

1—Spike Step. The character impales their foot on something that looks like a three-foot-long spike of shining gray shale, which deals 3 (1d6) piercing damage and breaks away from the ground. The spike is a longsword. Close examination shows that despite

appearing to be made of cubes, the spike's tip and sides are extremely sharp.

2—Unexpected Fall. The character falls down a previously unseen hole and is trapped by something that feels like thick roots. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, the character realizes that the roots are the cold, clammy arms and legs of the dead. The character is restrained, but can escape or be lifted out with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

3—Slippery Slope. A chunk of hillside collapses under the character, who falls prone and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. The ground breaks apart into six-foot-long, log-like chunks—a number of bodies that roll downhill before coming to a stop.

4—Cubed Loot. The character trips across a gray metallic object that separates itself from the ground and can be picked up. If the characters wash the object in the Styx sea or see it through *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix), roll a d6 to see what it is:

d6	Object
1	A silver bracelet worth 75 gp
2	A small platinum idol of Bhaal worth 300 gp
3	A silver-plated githyanki hand worth 200 gp, and which can be used to open the locks of the doors into and inside the cube (see "Exterior Doors")
4	A silver medallion worth 125 gp
5	A figurine of wondrous power—silver raven
6	A cursed amulet resembling a medusa's face. The amulet petrifies any creature within 30 feet of it that looks at it, as if the creature were targeted by a <i>flesh to stone</i> spell (save DC 15). The amulet has AC 15 and 10 hit points. If it is broken, any creatures it has petrified or restrained have those conditions ended.

5—Foul Slime. The character steps into something soft, releasing black pixelated slime and a foul smell. The character and all other creatures within 10 feet of them must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute or until they intentionally vomit as an action.

6—Armor Pile. A character slips on an area of metallic gray cubes, rectangles, and tubes (a pile of weapons and armor stripped from the dead). The character falls prone and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

MYSTERIOUS FOG

The eerie fog that surrounds the island rises 100 feet above the water and extends 1,000 feet across. The area of the fog is lightly obscured, and it has a red tinge in places. Creatures that suffer negative effects in sunlight ignore those effects on the surface of the island while the fog is present.

A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check confirms that the fog is supernatural in origin, though it creates no ill effects. But the fog hides a deadly threat in the form of the red-tinged areas within it, which manifest in response to any creature that first sets foot on the island, then flies while on its surface. The first creature to do so is attacked by seven **vampiric mists**^M created by the oinloth's *censer of blood* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix). One mist attacks the first

round, followed by two the second round, and four on the third round until all the mists are engaged.

The oinoloth's orders to the mists were to destroy any creature that tries to fly away from the island. If a flying creature returns to the surface, the vampiric mists stop attacking, hovering above the creature for a few moments before returning to the fog.

If any of the vampiric mists are destroyed, they don't refresh. Only the *censer of blood* can create more.

A flying character who explores near the center of the fog notices that it appears to thicken at that center, congealing into a strange, disc-like black shape roughly 6 feet in diameter, hanging 50 feet above the island. The disc feels soft to the touch and can be grabbed. A strong yank pulls it out of the air and into the character's hands, causing the fog to instantly dissipate. If this happens by day, sunlight shines upon the island, causing the deaths of any remaining vampiric mists within 3 rounds. The disc is the *handkerchief of darkness* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix).

BODIES REVEALED

The actions of the skull lord and other creatures within the floating cube cause it to periodically rotate, exposing new faces of the island while dunking others. When this happens, the freshly exposed face initially appears covered with the dead. But as the Styx water that soaks the bodies evaporates, the curse seeps out of the cube to gradually transform the dead into the pixelated terraces. The full conversion takes about 4 hours, during which time the in-transition terraces slowly lose the appearance of the bodies they truly are.

While fully under the effect of the curse, the features of the bodies can't be discerned, but they retain their true texture—bronze, iron, bone, and flesh, reshaped into perfect cubes. Walking over the island is an awkward and disturbing task, as the 'ground' slips around in large discrete chunks (bodies tumbling about) and randomly changes texture from hard and metallic to soft and squishy.

Submerging the bodies or their gear in the Styx sea unpixelates them. But unless they are immediately removed from the island, the dead quickly become reinfected, showing signs of pixelation within 10 minutes and becoming completely repixelated within 1 hour.

The bodies show no signs of being nibbled by fish (which are repelled by the Styx sea) or gulls (which have been attacked by the vampiric mists and now give the island a wide berth). Though the dead are uniformly gray and cold, they are not currently rotting, as the Styx sea both preserves them and covers up their smell. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check allows a character to sniff out the cloaked smell of slow decay.

SEARCHING THE BODIES

Searching the bodies is effectively impossible when they are pixelated. Unless a character is completely pixelated or wearing *pixel glasses*, the bodies are a mosaic of rock, metal, and cold squishy substances with occasional detachable metallic cubes or rectangles.

The bodies can be easily searched while submerged (though doing so brings characters into contact with the Styx sea), or when they have freshly risen from the water. Once exposed to the air, a body repixelates slowly over 4 hours.

The majority of the bodies are human, though occasional duergar, gnomes, dragonborn, and hobgoblins are found among them. All are adults, and represent countless peoples and cultures (including many from remote portions of the multiverse, which the characters won't recognize). Most are naked, while others bear weapons and wear the armor of foot soldiers. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Medicine) check, a character discerns that though the armored bodies show signs of having died in battle, the naked bodies appear to have died from massive blunt trauma such as a high fall. Moreover, the bodies that have died from falling have not been dead as long as the warriors—including many bodies that look fresh.

If the characters want to search the bodies for valuables, let each character attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. On a success, the character finds some object of value, as you determine.

If the characters use *speak with dead* to talk to any of the bodies, what they learn depends on whether they interrogate a naked or armored body. The armored warriors remember being soldiers of Acheron, serving in Cube 1717 under Earl Andromalius, and then being overwhelmed by the pixelating curse and killed by yugoloths. The naked dead have no memories other than appearing in the soul tap in area 6.14 and falling to their deaths.

A FAMILIAR FACE

If the characters search the bodies long enough, have one character notice a disturbingly familiar body: an exact duplicate of an evil enemy the party fought and killed in the past. The dead enemy is recognizable by their facial features, but is wearing new armor and wielding new weapons. Any death wounds the characters remember having dealt to the enemy are gone, with new fatal wounds taking their place.

This fallen warrior is the same enemy the characters killed, reborn in Acheron after death to fight eternal battles for the lords of that plane. Caught in the pixelating curse, the villain then died again in the battle with the yugoloths.

RANDOM SURFACE ENCOUNTERS

Each time the characters arrive on a new face of the cube (including when they first come to the island), each time they finish a short or long rest on the surface of the island, or whenever they spend 1 hour or more exploring the surface, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, use the table below to determine what the characters encounter. All these creatures appear in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.

If the characters are on face 5, ignore all results except 1 or 2. The cadaver collector is strong enough to pass across that face without fear of its residents, and the berbalang has authority over those residents. The other creatures of the cube avoid the beautiful island.

d6	Encounter
1–2	1 cadaver collector
3	1 berbalang
4	1 derro savant and 1 gray render
5	1d3 + 1 white abishai
6	1d4 + 2 bronze scouts

Cadaver Collector. Having survived the fall from Acheron, a **cadaver collector**^M now roams the surface of the cube looking for victims. Unaffected by the Styx sea, this deadly construct emerges from the water to look for prey, then reenters the water after crossing the upper face of the cube. Constantly passing through the water has left the cadaver collector and its load of bodies unpixelated, though it might gather pixelated dead to add to its collection while the characters watch. It attacks any creatures on the cube's surface, but won't pursue prey through the doors.

Berbalang. Bunch the **berbalang**^M (unpixelated; see area 6.13) goes to the surface to scavenge skulls and bones. It ignores the characters unless forced to talk to them, and runs for the nearest door if attacked.

Derro Savant and Gray Render. Avnas the **derro savant**^M and her faithful pixelated **gray render**^M, Moxon, are searching the dead for magic and trinkets she might use in her work. See area 6.17 for more information.

White Abishai. This group is on an expedition from the temple of Tiamat (area 6.38), looking for a way off the island or for potential sacrifices. The **white abishai**^M attempt to capture the characters' ship if they can, or to knock the characters unconscious and drag them back to be sacrificed to their goddess.

Bronze Scouts. The **bronze scouts**^M from face 2 wander over and around the unfortunate dead, attempting to lay them to rest according to their programming, but stymied by their sheer numbers. They approach to within 5 feet of the characters to inspect them, but do not attack unless attacked first. Roll a d6 each time the bronze scouts appear. On 1–3, they are pixelated. On 4–6, they are unpixelated, having just emerged from one of the cube faces presently underwater.

PERMANENT LOSSES

If the berbalang, the derro, the gray render, or any abishai are permanently killed, remove them from their home locations. The cadaver collector has no permanent home, but is also not replaced if destroyed. Only the bronze scouts can reappear indefinitely.

WHEN THE CUBE ROLLS

In addition to the chance for random encounters, whenever the characters finish a short or long rest on the surface of the island or spend 1 hour or more there, have one player roll a d20. On a 10 or less, the cube suddenly begins to move as if roiled by an earthquake. Its current face tilts down into the water along one edge, and a new face rises above the surface, ascending hundreds of feet into the air before plunging down in an enormous spray of water. Roll a d6 to determine which face comes up, ignoring the current face.

Avoiding being dunked into the Styx sea is most easily accomplished by quickly moving to and opening a door into the cube, by flying (though characters doing so will be attacked by the vampiric mists), or by running toward the rising face as the cube turns. Characters who run along the tilting cube discover that each face of the cube has its own gravity. Even when a face is tilted nearly 90 degrees in the moments before it plunges into the water, creatures can move along its surface as if it were level ground. However, the violent motion of the twisting cube can easily toss creatures into the water.

Each creature running across the tilting cube must make three DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks. A creature that succeeds on at least two checks reaches the next face safely, while all creatures that fail two checks are plunged into the water. A creature that ignores difficult terrain or whose speed is greater than 30 feet has advantage on all three checks.

When a new face of the cube is exposed, the formerly submerged side remains temporarily affected by the curse-removing effects of the Styx sea, letting the characters see the surface of the cube in its true form: a vast expanse of waterlogged bodies. The dead repixelate over the next four hours, giving the characters time to easily inspect them if they choose to.

If the characters watch the island for long enough from their vessel, they might also see the cube roll. Ask one player for a d20 roll whenever the characters finish a long or short rest within view of the island, with the cube rolling on a 10 or less. Though the cube's movement sends waves crashing against nearby ships, characters on those ships are in no danger.

EXPLORING THE CUBE UNDERWATER

Even creatures that can breathe underwater have a difficult time exploring the island's submerged areas, because of the mind-wiping effect of the Styx sea. A submerged creature continually feels the dark power of the water, and must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw every minute or suffer its mind-wiping effects.

Underneath the water, the 'landscape' of the cube appears in its true form of iron piled high with the bodies of the dead. A spell such as *Otiluke's resilient sphere* or a magic item such as the *apparatus of Kwalish* can allow the characters to explore the water more easily. However, visibility in the murky Styx sea is limited to 10 feet in any direction.

Even for characters who succeed on their saves or can explore under the water safely, the invisible hydroloths that guard the island are a deadly threat. Those fiends follow, attack, and kill any creatures in the water unless their attention is distracted by something happening elsewhere.

Any creature that swims within 40 feet of one of the cube's underwater faces feels a momentary dizzy sensation as it's pulled 'down' by the submerged face's local gravity. A creature can easily swim away from the cube's surface (the effect is no stronger than normal gravity), though doing so is mildly disorienting.

The cube's doors won't open on any face that is submerged, and most inhabitants of the cube retreat

inside when the face they normally dwell on is underwater. The only exceptions are the corpse flower of face 4, the bronze scouts and other constructs of face 2, and the cadaver collector that roams all the faces of the cube (see “Random Encounters”). These creatures are unaffected by the Styx sea, and can be encountered by characters exploring under the water.

CUBE 1717

Built as a floating iron fortress in the planar war-world of Acheron, the cube is filled with machinery whose complexity rivals the biology of any living creature. Like a parasite, the Archquadrone plugged itself into the center of that machinery, and the entire cube is now infected by the pixelating curse still pumping from the construct’s heart. The cube cannot operate at full capacity until its ‘brain’ has been fully engaged by the Six-Face Throne. But its autonomic functions still control the internal gravity, the opening and shutting of doors, and the cleanup system that has been disgorging bodies onto the outside of the cube.

If damaged, the cube can heal itself as long as its ‘heart’ beats, slowly generating new, pixelated metal to replace that which was destroyed.

EXTERIOR DOORS

At various points on each face of the cube (except for face 1), a number of metal doors lead into the interior. When the cube is submerged or has freshly risen from the water, these doors appear as 20-foot-wide, 6-inch thick circular metal hatches. At four cardinal points just outside the edge of the door, smaller 1-foot-wide circles are covered with symbolic patterns of law and set with the indentation of a handprint.

The circles radiate abjuration to a *detect magic* spell. If a lawful creature presses its hand into any indentation, the door irises open with a whoosh, revealing a 20-foot-wide shaft with four ladders (one beneath each handprint) leading down. Nonlawful creatures can use the hand of a dead lawful creature (including any of the creatures on the surface) to open the door.

When the characters first come to the island—and within 10 minutes of a cube face emerging from the water—the doors are pixelated. Though the circles are still recognizable, the symbols of law and the handprint appear as boxy, illegible mosaics. While a door is in this form, it opens only when the flesh of a lawful creature is pressed into the door in a cubical shape. Any creatures or bodies on the surface have their hands automatically conform to a cubical shape when they are pixelated. Alternatively, the characters can press, flense, or *polymorph* the flesh of a lawful creature so that it fits the shape.

A *remove curse* or *dispel magic* spell cast upon a pixelated circle causes it to become unpixelated for 10 minutes, allowing it to be used with a normal handprint.

Near the top of each of the four ladders, a pixelated handprint lock operates the door from the other side. The interior of each shaft is lit by glowing pixels in the walls at regular intervals. Like the doors, the shafts are

circular, but show pixelated edges made of numerous tiny cubes. The rungs of the ladders are also square.

When any character passes through the doors—or 10 seconds after opening a door if no character does—square pixel lights in the shaft walls near the doors flash red, a hidden alarm blares, and the doors seal shut. If a lawful creature’s body blocks the door, the door stays open and the red lights continue flashing until the creature moves. The doors close around the body of any other creature, which must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to leap out of the way or take 35 (10d6) slashing damage as the door irises closed on them. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by this damage dies as the door cuts it in two. A creature not killed by the door chooses which side of the door it ends up on.

The doors have AC 20; 100 hit points; a damage threshold of 7; immunity to psychic and poison damage; immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. The first 20 damage dealt to a door opens a small hole in it, just wide enough to let a character look through. Anyone dealing bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, or thunder damage to the doors makes noise that echoes deep into the cube, alerting any nearby guards. As long as the Six-Face Throne is active, damaged or destroyed doors slowly regenerate, returning to their original condition in 1 hour.

JUNCTION ROOMS

By default, each face of the cube has its own local gravity, which is controlled from area 6.28 and extends 40 feet above and below each face. When characters descend deeper into the cube, the gravity from face 6 (the dominant face) takes over. This change in gravity is potentially disorienting—and can be deadly in certain areas.

Several doors on the cube’s surface lead to junction rooms that allow travel from one face to another. Some junctions lead to two faces, while others lead to three. A character who flies, climbs, or falls down the 40-foot shaft to the ‘bottom’ of the junction room lands in what seems to be the bottom of a 20-foot-wide well-like space, which features two or three identical 20-foot-wide shafts leading up. Each shaft has ladders on its four sides, like most of the corridors inside the cube.

The special gravity of the cube combines with illusion magic to make the ‘floor’ of each junction room appear to be down. All the shafts leading out seem to lead up, even though the different shafts lead to different cube faces that are perpendicular to one another. This odd effect causes all nonpixelated creatures to have disadvantage on attack rolls while in a junction room.

MOVING THE CUBE

Characters who climb down one shaft into the junction room, then climb up another shaft leading onto a different face find themselves under one of the exterior doors, with four pixelated handprint circles controlling the door from the inside. However, if any of these circles are activated, the opening of the door is delayed by

nearly half a minute while red lights beep and a faint shaking is felt—a sign that the cube is rotating.

Any attempt to open a door currently underwater causes the cube to move in this way, putting the face the characters are trying to exit onto above the surface, and preventing water from pouring in when the door is opened. Many of the seemingly random rotations of the cube are caused by creatures traveling between faces in this way.

If one group of characters goes inside a junction room and travels to a new face while other characters are on the surface, those characters outside need to deal with the cube's movement (see "When the Cube Rolls"). If different groups of characters or NPCs try to operate different underwater doors at the same time, an alarm blares and the cube doesn't move. Likewise, if a face about to go underwater has a door opened on it, the cube temporarily ceases its movement and alarms go off. The skull lord Vargo and other creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne can override such conflicts to open and close any door they choose and orient the cube accordingly—even to the extent of forcing doors to close on lawful creatures.

Characters who step out through a door that has just emerged above the water see that face of the island covered with wet, unpixelated bodies just emerged from the sea (unless they're on face 5 and the balhannoth is alive). If the face of the cube they left most recently was also unpixelated, characters might assume that they've returned to that face, with no visible landmarks except hills of bodies, the drow ship in the distance, and the sea stretching to the horizon.

INTERIOR DOORS AND GRAVITY SWITCHES

Several exterior doors lead deeper into the interior of the cube, as noted in their descriptions. These entrances are notable for having a second door, identical to the exterior door, 40 feet along the shaft. The double doors are an extra level of defense to protect the cube's vital interior. They can be opened like the exterior doors, and regenerate in the same way if damaged or destroyed.

Beyond each interior door, the 20-foot-wide shaft continues on into the depths of Cube 1717. However, beyond the 40-foot point marking the interior door, the local gravity of the nearest face is canceled out by the gravity of face 6. Characters moving down these shafts feel the strange sensation of gravity swiftly changing, so that a character climbing down a ladder on a wall will suddenly be crawling backward along a floor. Once they adjust to the new gravity, characters can stand and walk in the shaft as they explore the interior of the cube.

Characters in the interior under face 6 who move toward many of the doors on other faces have the reverse experience. Over the space of a few steps, it suddenly becomes harder and harder to walk forward, until the characters must crouch down and climb along the ladder as the floor becomes a wall.

These shifts in gravity are disorienting but harmless. However, two places in the cube transform this gravity switch into a potentially deadly trap. All the inhabitants

of the cube know about these areas and how to safely move through them. See area 4.3 and area 5.2 for more information.

FEATURES OF THE CUBE

All the interior spaces of the cube are pixelated except for areas 6.17 and 6.18 (Avnas's rooms), area 6.22 (the surgery), area 6.23 (the laboratory), area 6.29 (the library), area 6.31 (Vargo's chamber), and area 6.38 (the temple of Tiamat). The characters might be able to see unpixelated versions of other rooms, either by using *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix), or by using *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or Styx water to temporarily unpixelate part of the room.

Before it was pixelated, the interior of the cube had an austere, fortress-like look, punctuated by ornate devilish imagery. Pixelation has simplified that look to an even harsher, more barren appearance. Unless otherwise specified, all interior corridors and rooms are dimly lit by white or red pixel panels, set into the walls at 30-foot intervals. The main corridors and shafts running between rooms are 20 feet wide, while some smaller corridors are 10 feet wide. Most corridors are perfectly square or rectangular, while the shafts are circular with pixelated edges. The risk of gravitational shifts means that corridors and rooms feature emergency ladders or rungs set into grooves running along floors, ceilings, and walls.

Noisy Passage. Unless the characters take care to use stealth, any movement through the cube sets footsteps echoing loudly off its iron floors and walls, alerting creatures in adjacent rooms. Likewise, the characters receive advance warning of any nonstealthy creatures approaching.

Damage and Destruction. Many parts of the cube's interior (particularly areas 6.14, 6.32, and 6.39) retain damage from the battle with the yugoloths that sent the cube to the Material Plane. Some rooms have been completely destroyed and are inaccessible, but characters who return to these damaged places over the course of a few hours notice that the metal in those areas is slowly regenerating. If the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) remains active, the cube completely heals itself in time, and the damaged rooms reappear.

FACE 1: EXHAUST PORT

This face is the bottom of the ship in its normal orientation, with face 6 on the top. It is the only face that has no doors leading to junction rooms and other faces. Instead, the only way in or out of the face is its central shaft.

When the characters first survey face 1, they see gray steam rising from a crater in the distance, mixing with the fog as strange chemical compounds evaporate from the pool at area 1.1.

AREA 1.1: CENTRAL SHAFT

Within a rough-walled crater rising at the center of face 1, a 40-foot-wide circular shaft drops 30 feet into a pool of murky, steaming water. An oily substance clings to the pool's surface in glinting squares, like fish scales.

The sides of the shaft resemble blackened iron and are slick, such that climbing up or down without using a rope requires a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. A character who tests or enters the murky black water finds it the temperature of a warm bath, and notes that it smells like cassia (or cinnamon), oil, and tar. The oily substance is pixelated, and crystallizes in pixel-like masses on the skin and clothes of characters in the water. These encrustations are harmless and can be brushed off. (The water was originally from the Styx sea, but the exceptionally powerful pixelating curse within the shaft has dispelled its powers and turned it into normal water.)

Exhaust Port Pool. A character who tries to swim to the bottom of the black pool feels a strange dizzying sensation when they are 10 feet under the surface. If they continue to dive, they pass through a layer of floating debris—most of it pixelated body parts—then find themselves suddenly swimming upward. Characters emerge from the other side of the pool at the bottom of area 6.47—a slimy, air-filled, 200-foot-long shaft dimly lit by red lights high above.

Passing through the pool this way involves a gravity flip into the dominant gravity of face 6, so that the character's former 'up' is now 'down.' The full depth of the pool is 20 feet—10 feet on either side of the debris wall that marks where the gravity switches. A magical pressure barrier beneath face 6 keeps water from entering the cube this way when face 1 is submerged.

This shaft is the exhaust port for Cube 1717. Every hour on the hour, the cube expels garbage and bodies through the shaft, dropping it from area 6.47 and then forcing it out of area 1.1 in an explosive geyser of cubic debris. During the characters' first time on face 1, roll a d6 every 10 minutes. On a 1, the cube shoots up a geyser, spraying the area around area 1.1 with piles of pixelated dead. The same geyser then erupts every hour thereafter.

AREA 1.2: JUVENILE CORPSE FLOWERS

A mat of strange, fleshy green plants with purple buds, each about six inches high, grows here upon the mosaic-like 'rock' of the island. The plants completely cover the surface down to the cube's edge, where they disappear

under the water. The plants are unpixelated, and have a smell like rotten flesh.

The mat of vegetation is a mass of immature corpse flowers (from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*), growing from the main mass at area 4.5. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature or Arcana) check identifies these plant creatures. Immune to the Styx sea, the corpse flowers are growing rapidly, though this patch is harmless. A character who uproots a portion of the patch sees it is growing from the bodies underneath. The Styx water traveling through the plants' roots unpixelates the bodies on the surface, which blend seamlessly into the cubical, pixelated bodies outside the roots' range.

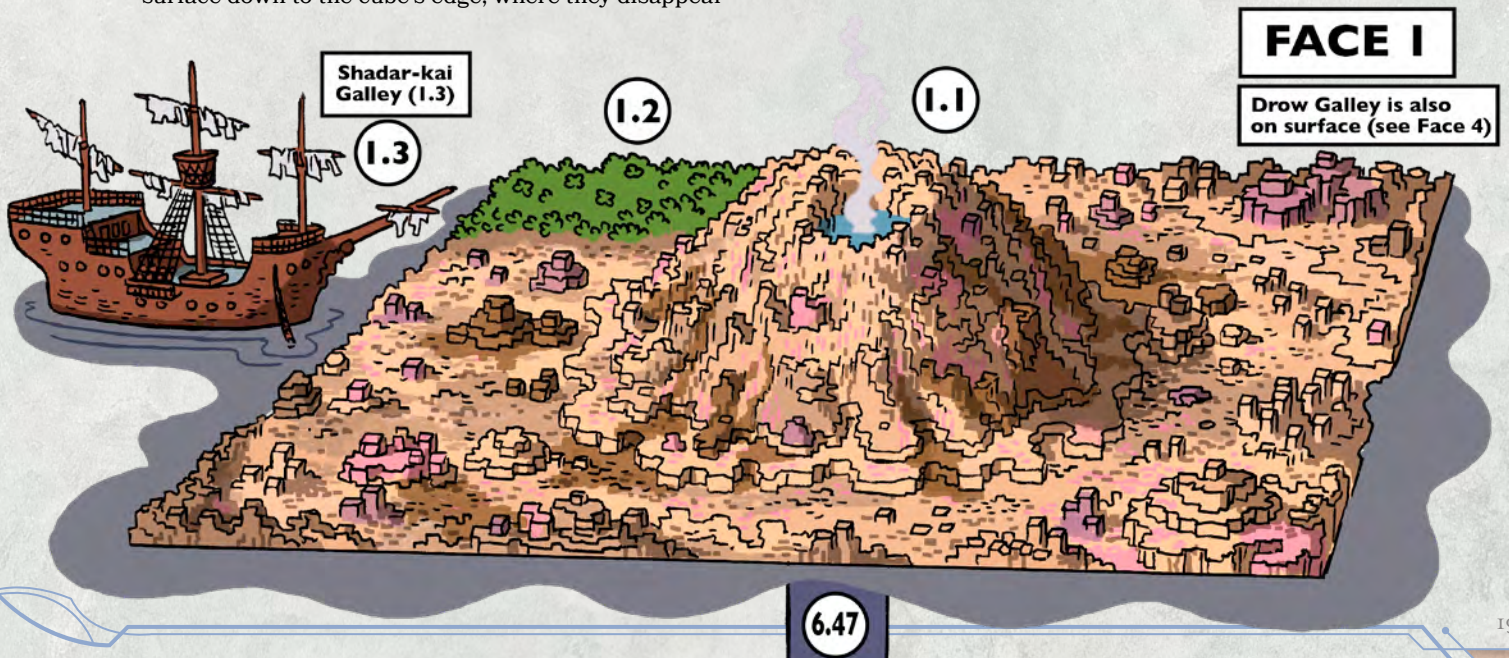
AREA 1.3: SHADAR-KAI CARAVEL

When face 1 is up, a strange ship floats on the waves 50 feet from the edge of the island. This caravel is gray and white, and decorated with white carvings of autumn leaves. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check identifies the style as suggestive of the mysterious shadar-kai. The ship is badly battered, its sails are missing, and it floats low on the waterline. Its anchor is dropped (and stuck in face 2).

The interior of the caravel is thoroughly wet but still relatively intact. Anything of value on board has been ruined, though, and the ship's cargo hold is partly flooded with the water of the Styx sea. Whenever a face of the cube other than 1 or 2 rises to the surface, the shadar-kai caravel is dragged down beneath the water. Though the ship sinks a little more each time, it still maintains partial buoyancy from the air trapped within its cabins.

Sole Survivor. Any characters searching the ship for valuables or survivors find relatively recent footprints along the wet floor. These lead to a locked storage closet in the stern. The locked door can be picked with a successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or smashed open with a successful DC 13 Strength check.

Hiding in the storage closet is Fern, a frightened and wary survivor of the shadar-kai expedition. Fern is a **shadar-kai shadow dancer** with the following changes:





SHADAR-KAI
SHADOW
DANCER

- Her Intelligence is 14.
- She wears a *cap of water breathing*.
- She wields a +1 *spiked chain*.

Fern is able to leave the galley and search the island when face 2 is up and the caravel is beached (see that section for more information). However, she has not figured out how to open the cube's doors. When the characters meet her, she is suffering only 1 physical level of the pixelating curse, since she is cured of it (and loses her memories of having been pixelated before) whenever the cube rolls and the caravel is resubmerged.

The closet contains all the valuable items Fern could scavenge from the ship: two *potions of healing* and a week's worth of soggy food and fresh water.

Fractured Memories. Fern and her crewmates—led by a shadar-kai elder—received a message from the Raven Queen that the walls of life and death had been breached, and that the dead had escaped. They journeyed to the island in an attempt to discover the nature of the breach and try to close it. But their mission turned to disaster when all except Fern were killed by the hydroloths and the vampiric mists. Fern escaped by fleeing back to the ship and hiding. But a few hours later, the cube flipped

to send the caravel under the water with its anchor firmly stuck to the submerged side. Fern's *cap of water breathing* allowed her to survive the immersion, but did nothing to deter the Styx sea's memory-wiping effects.

Exposure to Styx water has created huge gaps in Fern's memory, including everything that has happened since she first sighted the island. She doesn't remember where she came from or what else the Raven Queen told the shadar-kai. She warns the characters that there are dangerous creatures in the water that ate her friends.

Additionally, if the characters befriend her, Fern shares one more memory so powerful that even the Styx sea can't erase it: she volunteered for the shadar-kai mission because she dreamed that her dead friend Astilbe was on the island and could be rescued. (Astilbe was one of the reborn souls doomed to fight on Acheron, but was converted into a pixelated creature and is now one of the skull lord's guards at area 6.31.) Fern will join the characters if they promise to help her search for Astilbe.

FACE 2: ANCHOR POINT

The most notable feature of this face is the shadar-kai caravel (area 2.3) resting on its side, attached by its anchor chain and guarded by an unexpected defender. A number of metallic cubic 'rocks' are also scattered across the face, growing thickest in area 2.5.

AREA 2.1: JUNCTION ROOM

A door at this location leads to a two-way junction room, then beyond to area 4.1.

AREA 2.2: JUNCTION ROOM

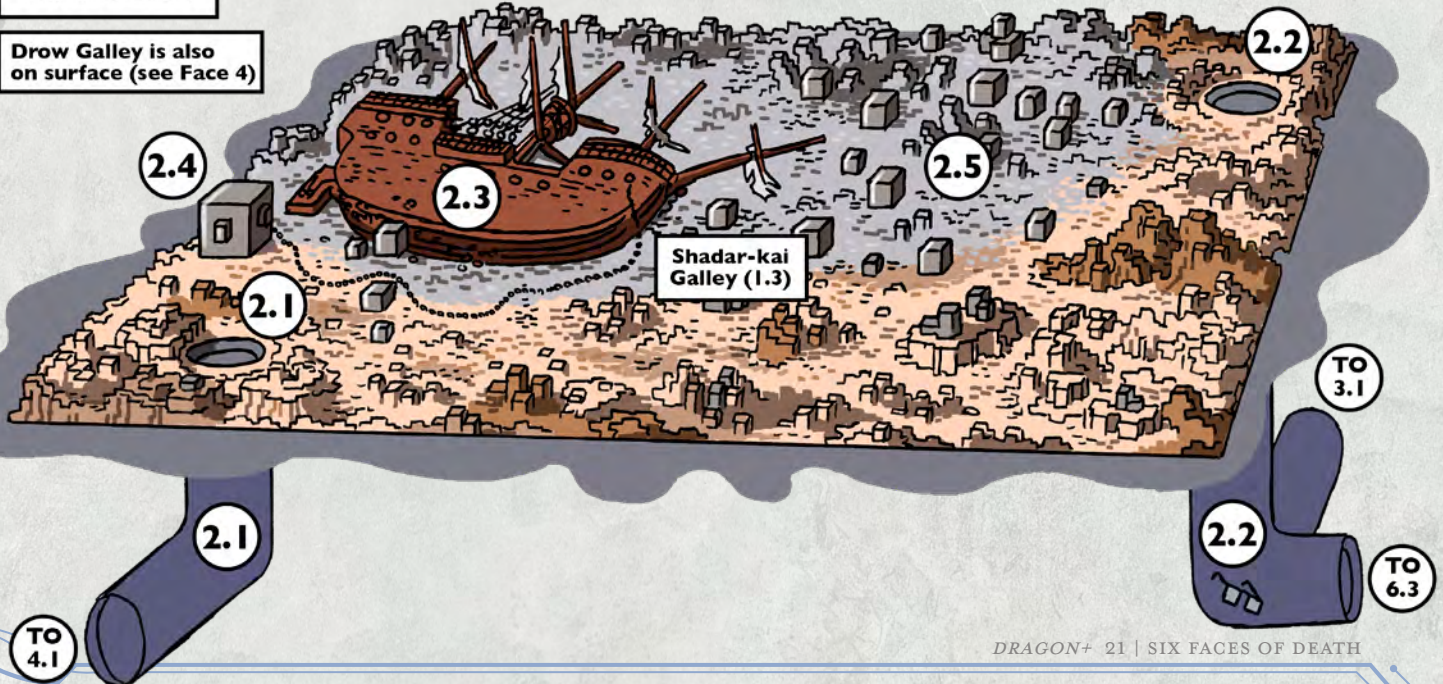
This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 3.1 and area 6.3. A set of *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

AREA 2.3: SHADAR-KAI CARAVEL

The foundering shadar-kai ship is described at area 1.3, but characters who see it on this face will come to

FACE 2

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



understand how the shadar-kai accidentally anchored the ship too well. When the cube rolls and face 2 comes up, the shadar-kai caravel is pulled out of the water to end up lying on its side, as if thrown there by a giant. Its stout iron anchor chain, 100 feet long, leads away from the ship to area 2.4.

Like everything else on the island, the caravel is vulnerable to the pixelating curse. If face 2 is above the water when the characters first come to the island, the wood of the ship has already started to transform into brown cubes. Within four hours, the caravel is entirely pixelated, though it is still recognizable as a ship.

AREA 2.4: ANCHOR

When the shadar-kai caravel dropped its anchor, it was caught by the gravitational pull of face 2 and thoroughly embedded in the face's iron surface. That spot is now guarded by a confused gnomish construct called a **stone defender** (see *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*). Normally called upon as a bodyguard, the stone defender has decided that it guards the anchor, and it attacks anyone who approaches this area.

If face 2 has been out of the water for more than a few hours, the stone defender takes on the form of a human-sized gray cubical rock next to where the pixelated anchor is embedded. If anyone approaches, the construct attacks with surprise, with its False Appearance making its pixelated body blend into the pixelated landscape. If face 2 has just emerged from the water, the stone defender is in its true form of a stout, humanoid robot with stone plates bolted into its metal frame.

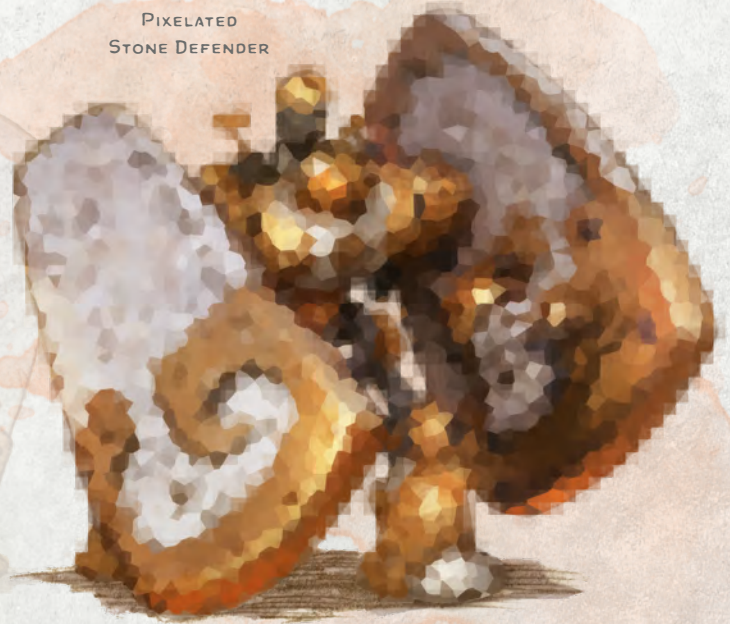
The stone defender normally defends the anchor until destroyed, but it can be tricked into guarding another item instead if the characters present one. Destroying the defender, getting it to guard another item, or cutting the anchor chain frees the shadar-kai caravel, which floats up freely (though it remains damaged and in need of serious repairs) the next time the cube rolls.

AREA 2.5: CLOCKWORK CONGREGATION

This section of the face is covered with metallic objects, all of them the remnants of clockworks created by Avnas. When the cube is pixelated, this area takes the form of an unusually large number of shining gray-and-brown metallic blocks, which continue over the edge to face 3. Some of the blocks make a ticking sound, or crawl and hop around.

When the cube isn't pixelated, the broken constructs can be seen in their real forms as strange bronze and iron devices, scattered among the dead bodies. Though

PIXELATED
STONE DEFENDER



most of them are destroyed, a few still twitch, flip, or crawl in circles like malfunctioning toys.

Amid the harmless mass of barely functional clockwork devices, a number of constructs are potential threats. Each time the characters approach this area, or each 10 minutes they spend here, roll a d6 to determine what they encounter. All these creatures can be found in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. You might wish to use the Clockwork Malfunctions table in that book to give personality to these damaged constructs.

d6 Construct Encounter

1-2	2d4 bronze scouts
3	1 oaken bolter
4	1d2 iron cobras
5	1 stone defender
6	1d4 duergar screamers

Bronze Scouts. When encountered, these bronze scouts are in the process of pushing the dead around the face of the cube. They crawl toward any creatures they can see or hear to assess them, but lose interest in living creatures and depart the following round if they are ignored. If attacked, the bronze scouts fight until destroyed.

Oaken Bolter. This war machine immediately begins firing at any creature that moves within its field of view. Its vision and memory are poor, though, so if any creatures hide or stand perfectly still for 2 rounds, it ignores them and rolls away.

Iron Cobras. Any iron cobras the characters stumble upon are hiding, aided by their impressive Dexterity (Stealth) checks and the advantage they gain on those checks if the face is pixelated. If an iron cobra takes any damage, it flees and hides.

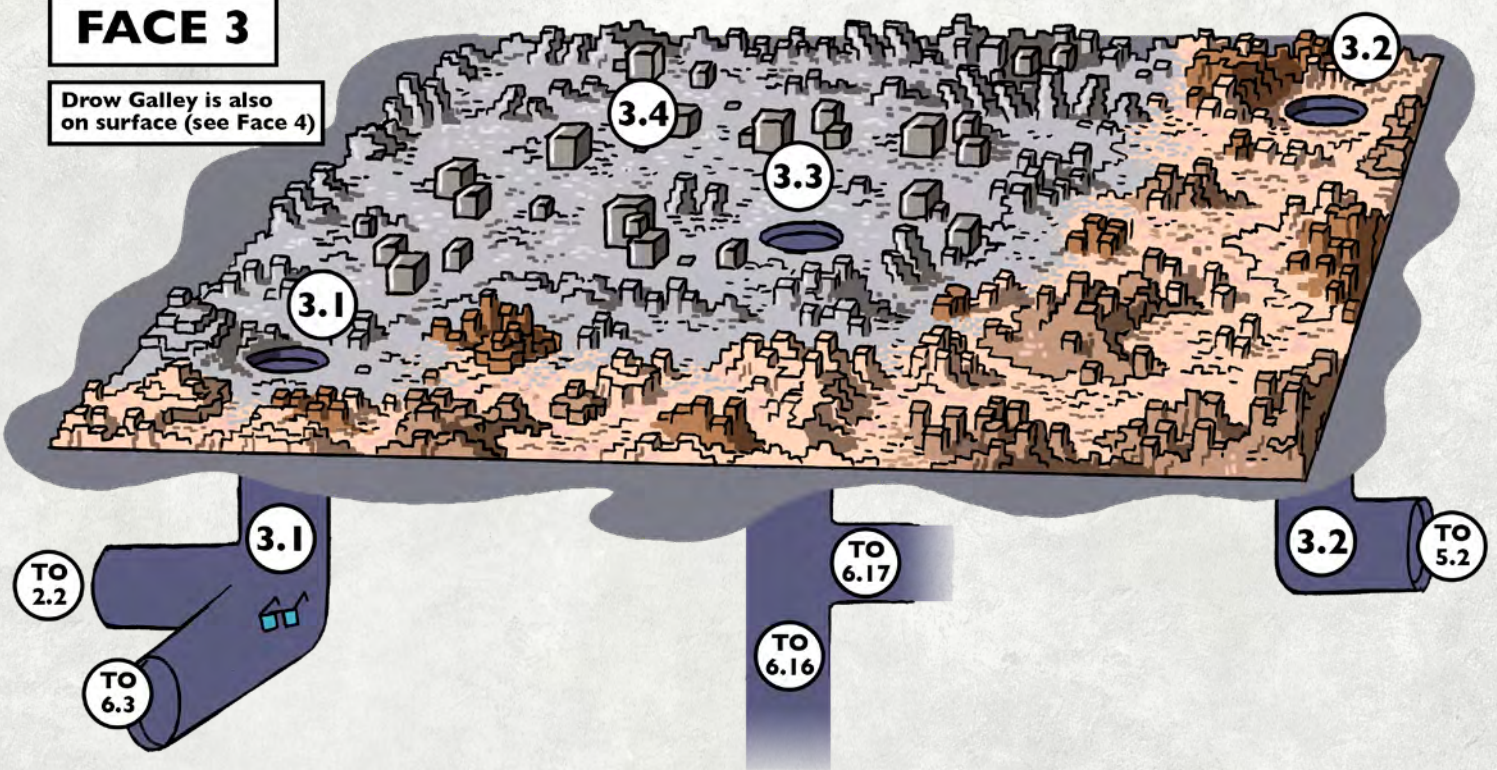
Stone Defender. The stone defender has picked a spot or a random object to guard, gesturing threateningly at any creature that comes close, and attacking if any creature comes within 5 feet. If left alone, the construct forgets about the spot or object it defends, then wanders off and repeats the process.

PIXELATED BRONZE SCOUT



FACE 3

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



Duergar Screamer. With their shrill, terrifying voices, these constructs are heard before they are seen. They hunt and fight all non-duergar humanoid until destroyed.

FACE 3: JUNKYARD

Face 3 appears as a wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on its pixelated state. It has few notable features except the large number of metallic blocks and cubes that spread across its surface.

AREA 3.1: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 2.2 and area 6.3. A pair of *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

AREA 3.2: JUNCTION ROOM

A door at this location leads to a two-way junction room, then beyond to area 5.2.

AREA 3.3: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between areas 6.16 and 6.17.

AREA 3.4: CLOCKWORK CONGREGATION

This area of metallic cubes is identical to area 2.5, and has the same random construct encounters.

FACE 4: GARDEN OF THE DEAD

Face 4 is a wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on its pixelated state. Its dominant feature is the enormous green mass of juvenile corpse flowers that spreads across area 4.5.

AREA 4.1: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a two-way junction room and area 2.1 beyond. Anyone who emerges from or approaches this door draws the attention of the corpse flower at area 4.5.

AREA 4.2: SPECIAL JUNCTION ROOM

An interior door opens up 40 feet beyond the exterior door. Halfway between the exterior and interior doors, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6. Beyond the interior door is area 6.33A.

AREA 4.3: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between area 6.1 and area 6.8.

Any creature moving toward this area through level 6 simply climbs along a ladder, passing the ‘horizontal’ ladder shaft to area 4.3 as they do. However, creatures descending from area 4.3 must carefully navigate a change in the cube’s internal gravity.

Deadly Gravity. From the perspective of those coming from area 4.3, the shaft abruptly opens up in what appears to be the ceiling of a two-way corridor. Two of the four ladders leading down curve and run along the ceiling of this corridor, while the other two go halfway down the wall of the corridor before turning 90 degrees to the left and right. Looking down into the corridor, the characters see that the T corridor ends in another circular metal door (area 6.1) in one direction. In the other direction, the corridor continues 60 feet before widening out into a strange room filled with blocky furniture (area 6.8). With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices that the furniture in area 6.8 appears to be on the wall, while the floor is bare except for a few glowing lights.

A character who climbs down the ladder from area 4.3 to the corridor feels their legs suddenly falling out from under them, as their lower body is pulled toward area 6.8 while their upper body remains in the gravitation of face 4. The character must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw to hold onto the ladder rungs. On a failed save, the character falls and instantly whooshes down the corridor—whose gravity suddenly makes it an open shaft. The character takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the 60-foot fall into area 6.8, lands prone, and is quickly surrounded by pixelated **merregon**[™] and pixelated **veteran** guards. See area 6.8 for more details.

If a character expects it, the gravity shift is easy to overcome by carefully climbing down one of the curved ladders onto the apparent ceiling of the corridor. This leaves the character clinging to the ladder going down, as the ceiling turns out to be one of the walls of the shaft.

AREA 4.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction whose shafts lead on to area 5.4 and area 6.4.

AREA 4.5: CORPSE FLOWER GARDEN

A **corpse flower** (detailed in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) grows here with nine bodies stuck in its tendrils. Spreading out around the flourishing flower is a carpet of juvenile plants: a thick mat of fleshy green leaves and tiny purple blossoms that reek of rotten flesh. This mat of greenery spills over the edge of the cube to area 1.2 on face 1.

The corpse flower attacks any living creatures that get close to it or attack it, and it moves slowly toward such creatures when it sees them. It routinely dispenses with its nine corpses to heal itself or send zombies against the characters, knowing that it has a near-unlimited supply of the dead beneath its roots. The corpse flower and the dead beneath it are always unpixelated, as the



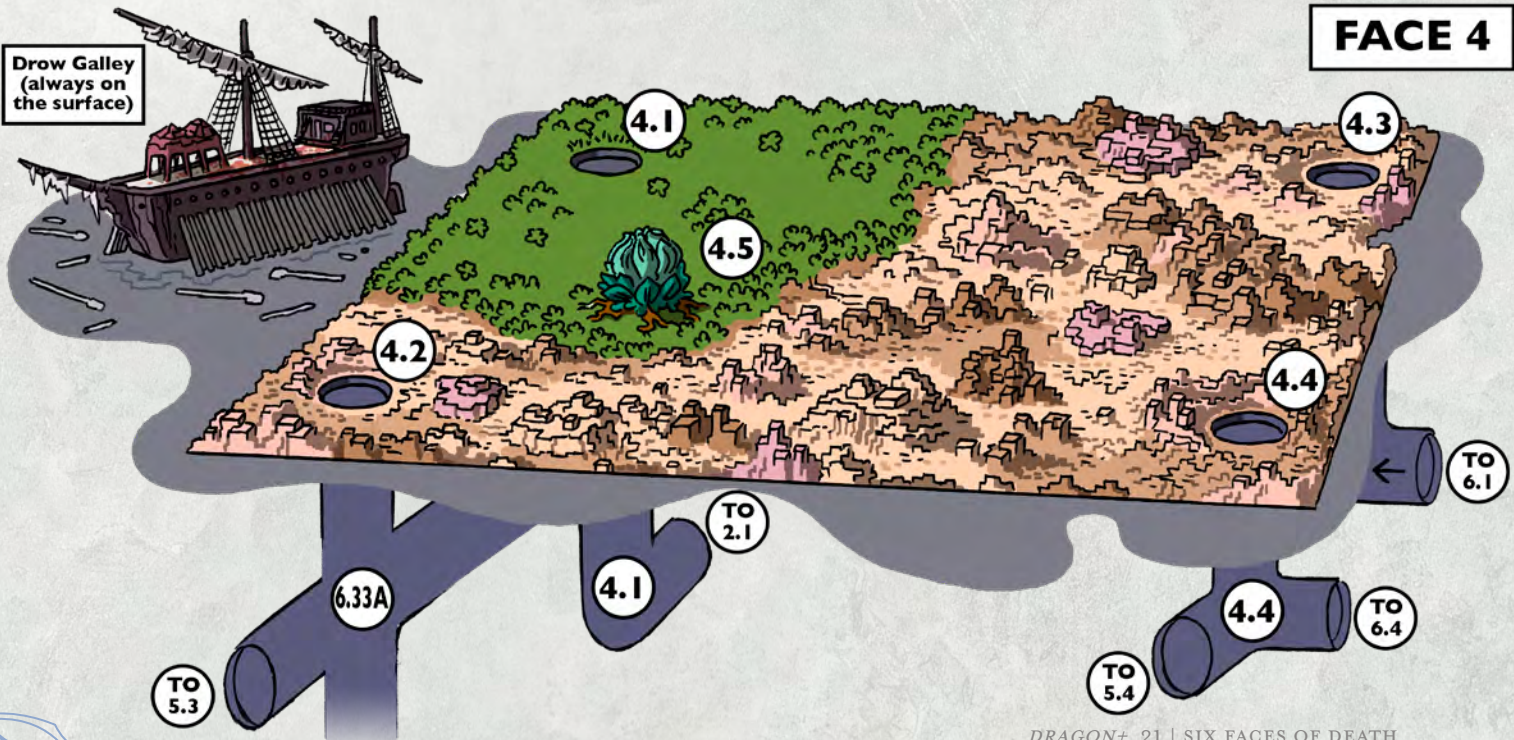
CORPSE FLOWER

Styx water the plant draws up through its roots washes through the bodies.

If the adventurers kill the corpse flower, they can dig beneath its roots, finding 1,200 gp, 400 sp, and a gold and jade death mask worth 900 gp.

FACE 5: BEAUTIFUL ISLAND

This face appears as a verdant tropical island. Sandy beaches open up to island grass and shrubs, beyond which spreads a jungle of banana plants, coconut palms,





and other trees. Gentle breezes blow here, and the gray fog that covers the island seems less oppressive than it does on other faces.

This vista seems entirely real. The sand and plants can be picked up, touched, and smelled, and even appear immune to the pixelating curse. But with closer investigation, characters might begin to spot cracks in this facade. No birds or animals can be heard or seen on the island. The breadfruit, bananas, and other seemingly edible plants are tasteless and provide no nutrition. The wood of the trees quickly begins to rot if cut, and the grass and shrubs will not burn.

Another giveaway as to the true nature of face 5 can be noted by characters who have visited the drow galley: the smell of the balhannoth. Any character who inspects the cargo hold of the drow ship and then comes to face 5 recognizes the same foul smell with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, and notes that smell growing stronger toward area 5.5. For the characters who don't recognize it, the smell is faintly bothersome but easy to ignore.

WARPED REALITY

The appearance of face 5 has been warped and reshaped by the balhannoth lairing under area 5.5. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more

information about the balhannoth). The balhannoth can sense the presence of any creatures on face 5, and has been using its telepathy to sense the desires of all creatures within one mile of the island since it escaped its confinement on the drow ship. The appearance of the pleasant island has been created in response to the thoughts of the many sailors that have come to investigate the cube.

The balhannoth's hunting partner is the adult oblex that dwells at area 5.1, and which can take the form of living creatures that the balhannoth can't create. Unified by the conforming power of the pixelating curse, the two normally solitary creatures have formed a symbiotic relationship where they communicate telepathically and hunt prey together. When face 5 is submerged, they retreat beneath the doors until it surfaces again.

If the balhannoth dies, face 5 is slowly transformed back into its true form over 10 minutes—another wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on the state of its pixelation.

AREA 5.1: OBLEX DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a shaft leads on to area 6.42. This shaft is filled with white and pink deposits of pixelated slime—the remains of the oblex's meals.

An **adult oblex**—a psychic ooze that can generate simulacra in the form of other creatures—uses this door to come and go. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for full details on the oblex.) The oblex can generate 1d4 + 1 simulacra resembling living creatures whose memories it has stolen. The number of creatures it managed to kill during the chaotic attacks that brought the cube to the Material Plane has given it a host of fiendish and humanoid forms it can take on.

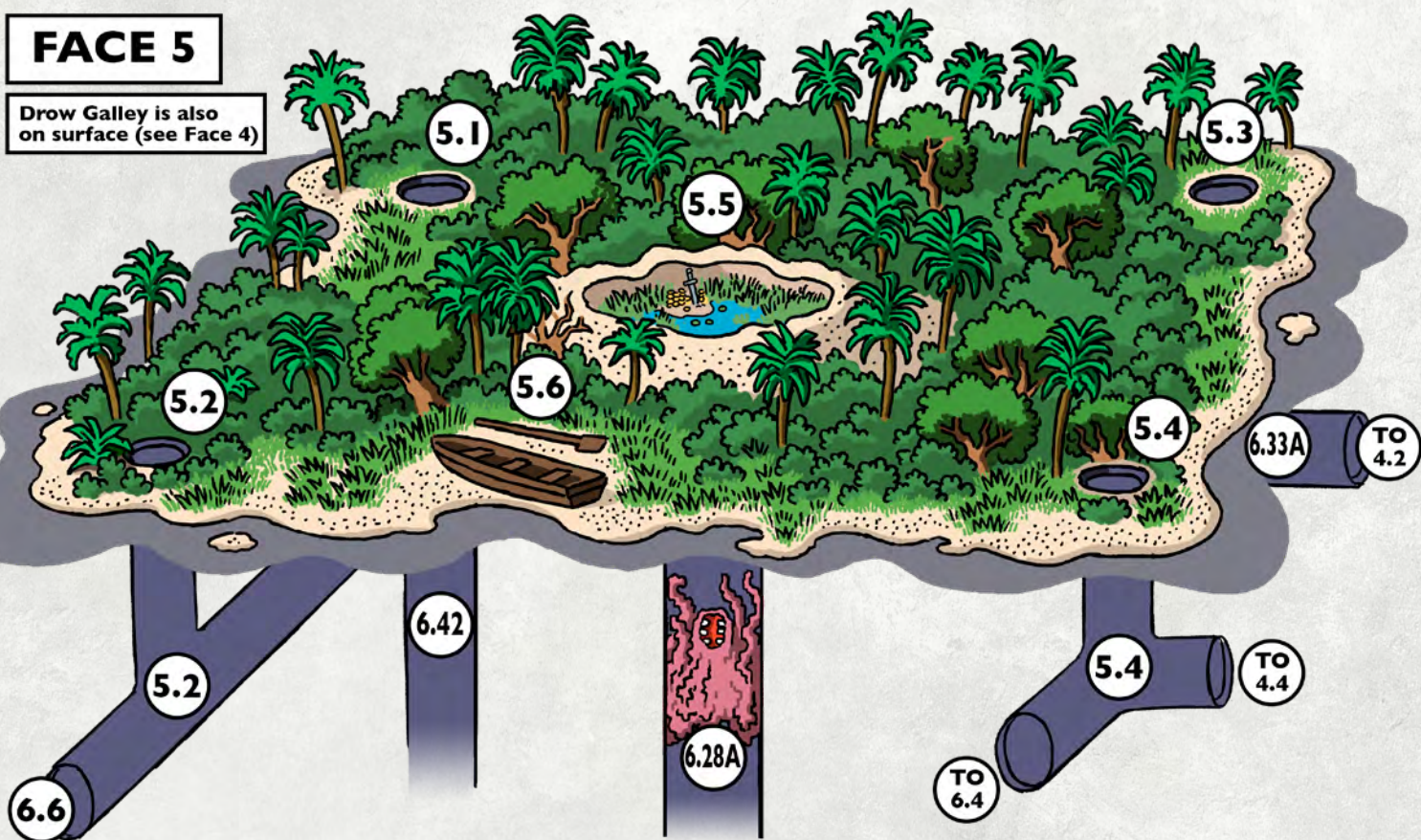
Creating simulacra of people needing aid or weak fiends just asking to be destroyed, the oblex sends those simulacra out of the jungle near area 5.1, while it stays concealed within the trees. (The oblex's true form is pixelated, resembling a large mass of pink and red jelly-like cubes. But it can create nonpixelated bodies to lure prey.) If only one or two characters are present, the oblex attacks through one of its simulacra at once. If more are present, it tries to get the group to split up, sending some to the pool at area 5.5 and encouraging others to descend through the door and head for areas 6.42 and 6.43, where its oblex spawn lie in wait.

A character who interacts with a simulacrum notices that it carries a faint scent of sulfur. A character might also notice the pixelated pink tether connecting the simulacrum to the oblex with a successful Wisdom (Perception) check opposed by the Oblex's Charisma (Deception) check.

Because the oblex is lawful, the door won't close on its tether if it and any of its simulacra are on opposite sides of it. If the door is held open in this way for more than a few minutes, the oblex either retreats down the shaft or slithers up onto the surface.

FACE 5

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



AREA 5.2: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between area 6.6 and area 6.42.

Any creature moving toward this area through level 6 simply climbs along a ladder, passing the 'horizontal' ladder shaft to area 5.2 as they do. However, creatures descending from area 5.2 must carefully navigate a change in the cube's internal gravity.

Deadly Gravity. From the perspective of those coming from area 5.2, the shaft abruptly opens up in what appears to be the ceiling of a two-way corridor. Two of the four ladders leading down curve and run along the ceiling of this corridor, while the other two go halfway down the wall of the corridor before turning 90 degrees to the left and right. Looking down into the corridor, the characters see that the T corridor ends in another circular metal door (area 6.6) in one direction. In the other direction, the corridor continues a long distance into darkness.

Where the shaft from area 5.2 meets the shaft below, a shapeless red cubic mosaic stands out on the otherwise featureless black iron wall. If touched, some of it rubs off. If any character has *true seeing* or views the mosaic with *pixel glasses*, they see the pixelated mosaic in its true form as a message written in blood by a previous visitor. The message reads in Common: 'THE FLOOR BECOMES THE WALL! LOOK OUT!'

A character who climbs down the ladder from area 5.2 to the corridor feels their legs suddenly falling out from

under them, as their lower body is pulled toward area 6.42 while their upper body remains in the gravitation of face 5. The character must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw to hold onto the ladder rungs. On a failed save, the character falls and instantly whooshes down the corridor—whose gravity suddenly makes it an open shaft. The character falls nearly 600 feet to area 6.42, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

If a character expects it, the gravity shift is easy to overcome by carefully climbing down one of the curved ladders onto the apparent ceiling of the corridor. This leaves the character clinging to the ladder going down, as the ceiling turns out to be one of the walls of the shaft.

AREA 5.3: SPECIAL JUNCTION ROOM

An interior door opens up 40 feet beyond the exterior door. Halfway between the exterior and interior doors, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6. Beyond the interior door is area 6.33A.

AREA 5.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This three-way junction room leads to the doors at area 4.4 and area 6.4.

AREA 5.5: POOL

At the center of the false jungle, the ground plunges down beneath tall trees to form a crater containing a shallow pool of clear water 30 feet below its upper edge. It takes a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb down the crater without a rope. The pool is 3 feet deep, with lily pads on its surface and horsetails and grasses growing along the shore. A tempting pile of treasure is spread along the edge of the pool—873 gp,

10 opals (100 gp each), a gold bracelet (250 gp), a suit of drow-made +2 *leather armor*, and a brass incense burner covered with fiendish symbols—a *censer of blood*. (See the “New Magic Item” appendix for more information on the *censer of blood*. Originally carried by the oinoloth now a prisoner in area 6.11A, the censer was lost here in the frenzied fight when the yugoloths were attacked by the balhannoth. That creature has no idea of the censer’s power.)

When not transformed by the balhannoth, the inside of the crater is a metal shaft with a spiral ramp carved along its sides, and which ends in a 20-foot-wide door identical to any of the other doors on or within the cube. But between this door and the interior door below waits the hungry **balhannoth** that has created face 5’s false island paradise.

Unseen Threats. The balhannoth is fully pixelated, appearing as a monstrous blob of cubes with four long, semicubic tentacles and a blind mouth of gnashing rectangular teeth. Its pixelated nature has bound its unnatural power to the cube, so that its blindsight and its lair actions extend beyond their normal range and across the full breadth of face 5. This makes the balhannoth aware of the movements of any creatures on the beautiful island. Though it is capable of hunting on the surface, it prefers to lure creatures down to the pool, whereupon it teleports to the top of the crater to leave prey trapped between it and the door.

The balhannoth can also simply teleport creatures under the door of this area, using its lair action. A deadly ambush predator, it lives to hunt and uses this method only rarely. But if the characters bring any NPCs onto face 5 with them, the balhannoth can pick them off this way, creating the impression of comrades simply vanishing into the jungle with no warning.

Being fully pixelated has made the balhannoth a servant of the skull lord. If the characters enter the cube without killing the balhannoth, the skull lord can telepathically summon the creature into the cube to help trap the characters in a specialized prison. See area 6.25 for more information.

Cannon Shaft. The exterior door at the bottom of the pool opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. The area between the two doors smells of rotten flesh and is littered with pixelated bones and rags from the balhannoth’s victims. Unlike most of the other shafts in the tube, there are no ladders in this shaft, and the walls are warm and streaked with strange colors. This is Cube 1717’s cannon shaft, which continues some 250 feet down into the heart of the cube (see area 6.28A).

AREA 5.6: FERRY

A few feet from the water along the edge of the beach lies a simple wooden boat that fits up to six people. A long wooden boating pole lies nearby. The boat is in fine condition and seaworthy, though it smells strongly of the Styx sea. Any character who inspects it closely can see that what first appeared to be natural lines in the wood are actually countless names carved into the boat’s plank surface. The boat radiates abjuration to a *detect magic* spell, and it is immune to fire, acid, cold, poison, and lightning damage. The pole radiates

conjunction to a *detect magic* spell, and is a magic item—the *merrenoloth’s oar*, described in the “New Magic Items” appendix.

This place is where the oinoloth and its guards made landfall on the island for the yugoloths’ ill-fated assault. The boat and the *merrenoloth’s oar* are both immune to the pixelating curse. With a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, a character inspecting the boat recalls the legends of the ferryboats of the River Styx, and can guess that the names scribed into the boat are, in fact, the names of the dead.

FACE 6: FACE OF EVIL

The surface of face 6 appears as a wasteland of rock or bodies with no notable features except its six doors. Though the characters have no way to note this from outside, this is the “master face” with which the cube’s internal gravity is aligned.

Many of the locations within this face are given both pixelated and unpixelated descriptions. The characters can see the latter if they use the *pixel glasses* or temporarily unpixelate part of the room with *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or Styx water.

See “Running the Adventure,” earlier in this document, for guidelines on how to handle encounters with the defenders of the cube.

AREA 6.1: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, a side passage lined with ladders leads off to area 4.3, while the main shaft continues down 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.8.

If characters coming down from area 6.1 try to walk into area 4.3, they find it unexpectedly difficult as gravity shifts, making area 4.3 appear to be above them. However, the effect is only disorienting—not potentially deadly as it is for characters coming from area 4.3 (see that area’s description for details).

AREA 6.2: INTERIOR DOOR

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, the shaft continues down another 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.9.

AREA 6.3: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 2.2 and area 3.1. A set of *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

AREA 6.4: JUNCTION ROOM

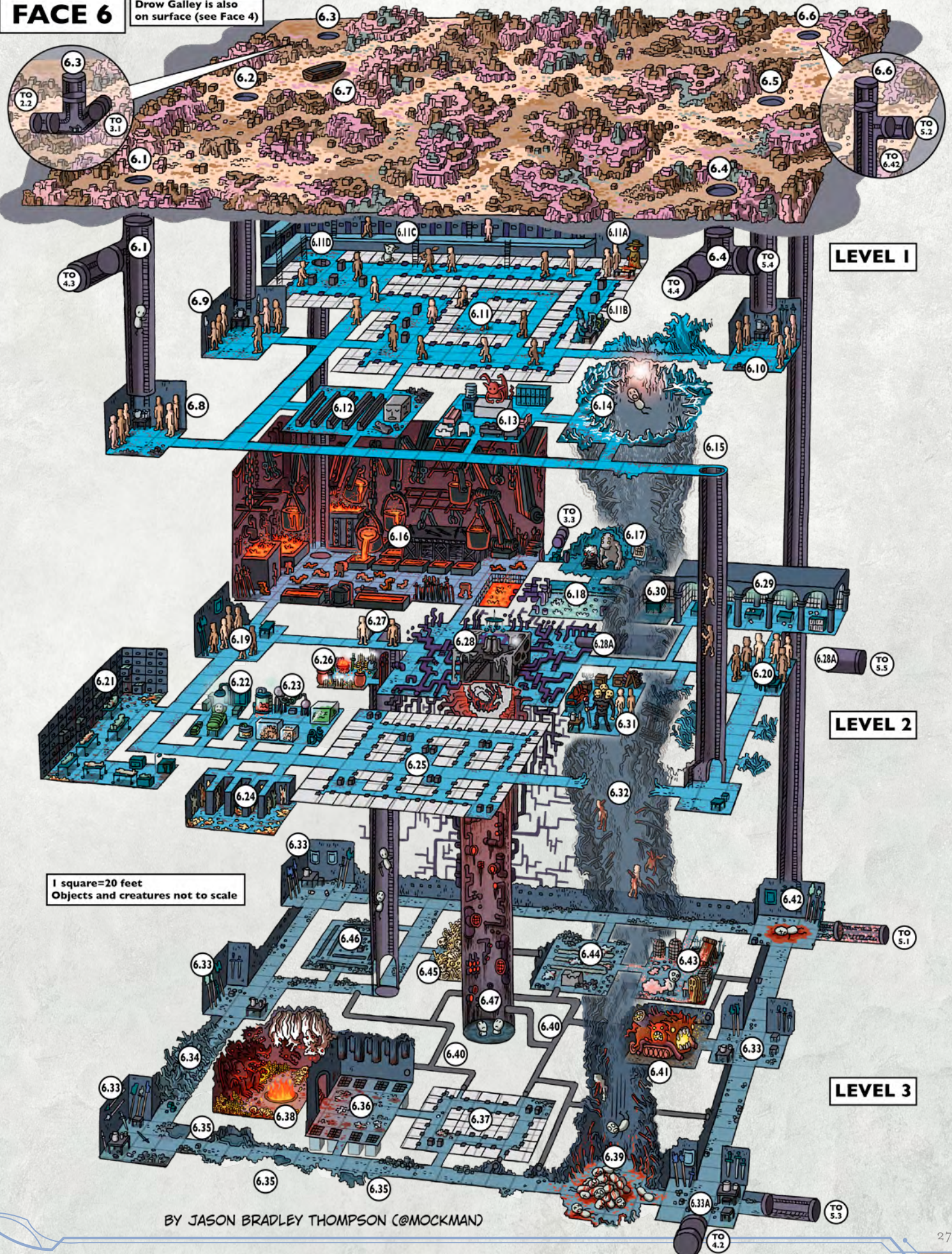
This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 4.4 and area 5.4.

AREA 6.5: INTERIOR DOOR

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, the shaft continues down another 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.10.

FACE 6

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



LEVEL 1

LEVEL 2

LEVEL 3

1 square=20 feet
Objects and creatures not to scale

BY JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON (@MOCKMAN)

AREA 6.6: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, a side passage lined with ladders leads off to area 5.2, while the main shaft continues down into darkness, eventually reaching area 6.42 nearly 600 feet below.

If characters coming down from area 6.6 try to walk into area 5.2, they find it unexpectedly difficult as gravity shifts, making area 5.2 appear to be above them. However, the effect is only disorienting—not potentially deadly as it is for characters coming from area 5.2 (see that area’s description for details).

AREA 6.7: WATERLOGGED BOAT

An ordinary wooden rowboat, similar to any the characters would have seen in the port they started out from, lies here among the cubic landscape, filled nearly to the brim with the murky black water of the Styx sea. The rowboat belonged to a large merchant vessel that recently landed on the island. The hydroloths sunk the ship and killed the crew, but the sunken rowboat was caught in the gravitational pull of face 6. Because it remains full of Styx water, the boat hasn’t pixelated yet.

AREA 6.8: GUARDROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Four iron ladders lead down into a square chamber, lit by panels in the blocky walls that glow with a soft white light. Gray tables, chairs, and benches are made of rectangles and blocks. Vaguely weapon-like items also made of blocks hang on rungs set into the walls. Six faceless, blocky humanoid figures stand against the walls.

Unpixelated. In addition to normal tables, chairs, and benches, this room features walls lined with rivets and pipes, round glass panels that glow with light, and a number of weapons on weapons racks. A water jug, six mugs, some hunks of unidentifiable meat, rulers, calipers, crossbows, bolts, and valueless personal items are scattered about.

Pixelated Guards. The six figures here are three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**—fanatical defenders of the cube who see all nonpixelated beings as grotesque mutants. If the characters don’t seem immediately threatening, the pixelated guards offer to escort them to the reception room (area 6.13). They won’t let anyone roam the cube without escorts. If the characters broke through the interior door or otherwise displayed violent tendencies, five of the guards attack while the sixth goes to alert the skull lord at area 6.31.

AREA 6.9: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.10: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.11: UPPER LEVEL BARRACKS

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This high-ceilinged room resembles a warehouse or a prison cell block, with ladders leading up to several levels of walkways. Along each level are numerous black metal doors fitted with small, square-barred windows. Most windows reveal identical cell-like rooms beyond, each containing only shelves in the walls and a number of large blocks or cubes. One cell along each section of wall is instead empty, and tiled in white. The cell doors have no locks. Blocky machines stand in the central corridor between the rows of cells, and the whole area is lit by white glowing bricks in the walls.

Unpixelated. The individual rooms contain bunk beds, tables, crates, simple toilets, sinks, and other plain furniture. A few hold personal items such as dishes, weapons, and cloth rags.

Warriors’ Quarters. These rooms were previously inhabited by the Acheronian army that inhabited the cube. The many empty rooms contain only valueless personal items. Characters who thoroughly explore the barracks also find occasional cells that contain incomprehensible machinery or pipes leaking magical fluids.

Slime Showers. Each of the white-tiled chambers features a large pixelated drain at the center of its floor, and a large pixelated faucet on the wall. If the faucet is turned, a bubbling sound emerges from the drain, followed by an eruption of white pixelated slime that moves across the floor as if alive. The white slime is a hazard that eats only dead organic material, and is used by the soldiers to clean themselves. If any characters allow the slime to crawl up their bodies, it presses against them to cleanse them of sweat, dead skin, and dirt—along with any nonmagical clothing and gear with an organic origin (including most cloth, leather, and wood). The slime flows back into the drain when its cleaning is done, or if attacked.

Food and Water Dispensers. The blocky machines are fountain-like devices operated by buttons, tubes, and cranks. One dispenses small waxed-paper boxes holding water, which can be pierced open and drunk. The other machine dispenses soft cubes of macerated meat-like pulp made from the flesh of lemures—creatures unworthy of being soldiers and condemned to be eaten by their betters. Unpixelated food takes the form of a sloppy paste instead of a cube. It is harmless to eat, though extremely unappetizing.

Off-Duty Threats. The pixelated guards come here in shifts to eat, drink, and rest. When the characters first arrive, nine pixelated **merregons**^M and nine pixelated **veterans** are resting in rooms or wandering the central corridors. The maximum number of guards here will easily overwhelm even a 13th-level party, so a stealthy approach is warranted—and characters might need to flee if a serious fight breaks out. Additionally, unless the characters are stealthy, creatures in areas 6.11A, 6.11B, or 6.11C hear them when they enter 6.11.

Every 4 hours, six of the guards here switch out with guards in areas 6.8, 6.9, 6.10, 6.19, or 6.20.

AREA 6.11A. OINOLOTH'S ROOM

Malika Tahoun ("Queen Plague") dwells in this area. The **oinoloth**^M appears as an unpixelated humanoid figure that is completely covered so that none of its flesh is visible. It wears leather robes, a stained apron, leather boots and gloves, and a bird-faced leather mask and helmet with a long beak and two smoked-glass goggles over the eyes. Two pixelated **merregons**^M with halberds stand within 5 feet of it at all times, watching it and preventing it from leaving the cube.

This cell is distinguished from the others by two pixelated bodies on the table inside (playthings of the oinoloth) and a partially pixelated ivory chess set worth 100 gp (a gift from the skull lord). Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher smells the blood from the room just passing by through area 6.11. The oinoloth has no treasure. Any mortal foolish enough to wear its leather robes or mask is infected by horrible diseases of your devising.

Fiendish Bargains. Malika surrendered to the skull lord when the rest of the yugoloth away team were killed. The magic suit it wears protects it from the pixelating curse. Respecting it as a potential ally—and unable to claim its plague-ridden head—the skull lord is waiting to see if it becomes necessary to have the oinoloth become part of the Six-Face Throne. The oinoloth is happy to wait—and is hopeful that other yugoloths or Bane's forces mount a more successful assault on the cube.

Using its telepathy, the oinoloth can communicate with the characters without being overheard by its guards. In the interest of gaining their aid, it uses its Corrupted Healing to heal wounded characters or cure the pixelating curse. This triggers a fight with the attending merregons at once.

The oinoloth knows almost everything the skull lord knows, and can also tell the characters about the *censer of blood* that it lost somewhere on face 5. But if the characters agree to aid it, the selfish and evil oinoloth doesn't risk its hide in a face-to-face fight with the skull lord or its servants. It instead leaves the cube as soon as possible, taking the censer with it if it can—preferably by killing one or more characters for it.

AREA 6.11B. SLADEK'S ROOM

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the wizard is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter area 6.11. Otherwise, he is in area 6.23.

Sladek is completely pixelated, but he can be easily identified from among the other pixel guards by his blue coloring (from his genasi skin and blue robes) and his tall, conically cubic wizard's hat. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Insight) check makes the connection that this is the mage they're looking for.

Sladek now willingly serves the skull lord as a trusted advisor, and he happily betrays the party to Vargo even if the characters are former friends or allies. Sladek is a pixelated **mage**, giving him the following changes:

- His alignment is lawful neutral.
- He has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.

Being attuned to the Six-Face Throne, he can also communicate telepathically with the skull lord at any distance.

- He is immune to the frightened condition.
- He has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

If Sladek casts any spells that produce a visual effect, that effect is pixelated.

Wizard's Work. A pixelated *driftglobe* lights the room, which is filled with pixelated wizards' equipment. Sladek's spellbook (identifiable as a large violet book but illegible unless unpixelated) sits on his chair. Tables in the room have been set up with alchemical equipment, with which Sladek studies the interactions of different types of pixelated matter. The equipment is visible as pixelated glass tubes in which pixelated liquids stir and pixelated green, red, and blue flames flicker. The equipment can be used or sold as alchemist's supplies.

In one corner of the room, a small chest is inscribed with a *glyph of warding* that is impossible to see when the chest is pixelated. When unpixelated, it can be found with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Opening the chest triggers the *glyph's cloudkill* spell. Within the chest are a *potion of healing*, two *potions of climbing*, and a *spell scroll of control water*.

AREA 6.11C: SIMAK'S ROOM

The drow captain Simak is found lurking in her cell when the characters pass through this area. She is here whenever she is not playing court jester to Vargo. After seeing her forces annihilated by the skull lord and its servants, she escaped the same fate only by pretending to have been rendered an entertaining idiot by the effects of the Styx sea. Amused, Vargo lets her wander the cube freely, but the pixelated guards have orders to not let her reach the surface.

Simak knows the skull lord's plans and the oinoloth's powers. She looks constantly for any opportunity to escape the cube, and might reveal her subterfuge to the characters if she thinks they might help her. Naturally, she betrays them immediately if doing so helps her escape.

Simak is a **drow house captain** (see *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) with the following changes:

- Her Intelligence is 14 and she has Deception +5.
- She has a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls with her magic weapons (see below).
- She also carries a mundane poisoned dagger hidden in her boot: +8 to hit; 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.

Simak has become aware that her *amulet of the Styx* is the reason she has not pixelated like other creatures. (See the "New Magic Items" appendix for details on the amulet.) She also wears a white spider-silk cape (300 gp), a chrysoberyl ring (150 gp), and an alexandrite ring (600 gp), and she carries a pouch holding *oil of slipperiness*, three doses of assassin's blood poison, and five doses of drow poison. See chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for information on poisons.

Simak's *+1 hand crossbow*, *+1 scimitar*, and *+1 whip*, all clearly of drow make, are hidden under some pixelated rags beneath the lower bunk.

AREA 6.11D: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the upper and middle levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

AREA 6.12: TEMPLE OF THE CUBE

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This blocky chamber has an arched cathedral-like roof, lit by partially hidden glowing white wall panels high in the nave. Long black rectangular benches face a huge gray block with the crude outline of a noseless face engraved on all its visible sides. Lying on its side in the back of the chamber is a smaller blocky statue of black metal, apparently depicting an armored humanoid.

Unpixelated. The room is a temple, with an elaborate cathedral roof and black pews facing the central object of worship. This place was once a temple to Bane, the god of tyranny, whom the fallen statue depicts as a tall man in dark knightly armor. The statue has been desecrated and replaced with a recently forged statue of the Archquadrone. However, hymns to Bane in Infernal are still scribed on the walls.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the new steel statue as resembling the body of a quadrone without its arms, legs, and wings. Its face has a lordly expression, as if about to speak a command.

Once per day on a regular schedule, all the pixelated guards come here to pray. Each time the characters enter this area, roll a d6. On a 1, three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans** are here, rapt in worship and easy to surprise.

AREA 6.13: RECEPTION ROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This room is lit by glowing white squares in the ceiling and floor. Several angular chairs and divans face a crude, blocky metal desk on a square dais, behind which sits a high-backed blocky chair. A red-skinned, naked humanoid sits in the high-backed chair, possessed of a grotesque, hairless head and long bat wings.

Behind the desk are numerous cabinets and chests of drawers, and a strange, blocky machine. Crudely angular gray statues stand about the room, with a vague resemblance to humanoids in armor.

Unpixelated. This place has the appearance of a mundane waiting room—except for the features appropriate to the Lower Planes. The statues depict Bane, Loviatar, and other mighty lawful evil beings. The cabinets and chests are filled with writing instruments, paperwork, and scrolls in Infernal listing the names of countless dead souls who ended up in Acheron due to their service (conscious

or otherwise) of Bane, Loviatar, and Tiamat—the lords of tyranny, cruelty, and greed. The machine is a water dispenser (see area 6.11). Despite their angular appearance, the chairs and divans are quite comfortable.

Welcoming Committee. The bat-winged humanoid is Bunch, a **berbalang**^M ally of the skull lord. Bunch is resistant to the pixelating curse because of the creature's extraplanar nature. Though it has the appearance of a devil, the berbalang is not a fiend at all. Rather, it came to the cube for the vast wealth of bodies upon it, which it plunders for the chance to speak with the dead. It gladly agreed to assist the skull lord and its pixelated servants in exchange for access to these riches, which it gathers in area 6.45.

When the characters arrive here, the berbalang is working where the bureaucrats of the cube once sorted new arrivals to Acheron, welcoming them to an afterlife of eternal servitude and war. It welcomes the adventurers as if mistaking them for dead souls, asking them what they did when they were alive, what they would like to do in their new existence in the afterlife, and so on.

The berbalang's seemingly misguided questions have an evil design. It was been charged by Vargo with noting and delivering any intelligent visitors that have come to the cube, so that the skull lord can steal their skulls to activate more faces of the Six-Face Throne (see area 6.28). The berbalang takes special note of wizard characters, and might also ask other characters to take



“intelligence tests.” (These tests can be summarized quickly, represented by a few clever riddles, or turned into a long comedy sequence, as you desire.)

When the *berbalang* has learned all it can from the characters, it suggests they might like to rest and offers them a room in area 6.11 or area 6.25. If they ask to talk to someone in charge, it offers to introduce them to Vargo, the lord of the cube. If the characters seem like they might cause trouble, the *berbalang* tells them that Vargo can teleport them back to their homes—and sets up a masterful plan of deceit. See area 6.25 for more information.

If the characters attack the *berbalang*, it fights back but flees as quickly as it can to alert Vargo. If Bunch ever faces the characters again, it uses its Spectral Duplicate feature to hide in a safe place while the duplicate fights.

AREA 6.14: SOUL TAP

As the characters approach this room, they hear a sudden scream that quickly fades away. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Some great disaster has torn this chamber apart. Everything that remains has a crudely blocky appearance, as if shaped of thousands of black metal cubes. Huge rends in the metal walls expose massive steel girders and pipes whose blocky lengths are bent and twisted. Red steam spills out of the pipes, and red glowing bricks in the walls blink and flash erratically. The floor, once covered in square white tiles, is split open to an enormous hole opening up to darkness far below, and edged with blocky, twisted girders and pipes. Multicolored squares of tile cover the ceiling.

Unpixelated. The room looks much the same, though the twisted girders and pipes are revealed to be viciously jagged. The remnants of great machines stand along the edges of the room, likewise smashed beyond recognition. The tiles in the ceiling are a mosaic incorporating symbols of order, reincarnation, and rebirth. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, a character recognizes ceremonial designs showing the Great Wheel that represents the position of the planes. Characters who can read Infernal or Primordial note sigils praising cosmic law and justice, and talking of how order must be obeyed even when it seems cruel or arbitrary.

Long Way Down. When the characters first enter this area, a pulse of light appears in the center of the room, directly below the Great Wheel image in the ceiling. Within the light, a naked humanoid appears in midair, then immediately screams as they plummet down the hole in the floor and vanish into darkness. A character near the edge who listens with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check hears the scream abruptly stop and a crunching sound from below.

Every six seconds, this spectacle repeats itself, with another figure appearing in the air and falling to their death. All are naked adults but vary in gender, race, and culture, including humans, gnomes, dwarves, the occasional goblinoid, and pale dwarves the characters

might recognize as *duergar*. All are doomed to die as they fall some 400 feet to area 6.39.

Interrupted Fall. The characters might attempt to rescue one or more of the falling individuals, using spells such as *feather fall* or *telekinesis*. Creatures saved from their fate are confused and have no idea where they are. All are lawful evil (or occasionally lawful neutral) individuals who died and have been reborn in new bodies resembling the ones they used to have. They know nothing about Acheron except what they might have heard in legends, and might be surprised to be told they’ve ended up there. Each creature has **veteran** statistics, adjusted for the lack of weapons and armor.

If the characters figure out a way to rescue large numbers of reborn souls (for example, by creating a solid structure to bridge the open center of the room), they discover to their peril that these humanoids all transform to pixelated **veterans** within 1 hour of wandering around the cube. If you don’t want to deal with the complication of hundreds of new guards joining the ranks of the skull lord’s servants, you might decide that the soul tap’s corrupted magic causes some or all of them to drop dead or vanish a few minutes after they appear.

Souls on Tap. A *detect magic* spell identifies powerful divine magic and transmutation in this area, centered in the pulsing light where the bodies appear. This room was the second most important site in Cube 1717 after the engine room: the place where the souls of lawful evil dead were reborn to be assigned new duties in area 6.13. When the *yugoloths* invaded the cube, they destroyed this area to shut off the flow of souls. But when the Six-Face Throne was activated, so was the soul tap. Only destroying the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) or a *wish* spell can turn it off now.

Characters who observe the damaged floor and walls see that they are slowly rebuilding themselves. If the characters are unable to destroy the Heart Engine before the floor of the room grows back in one week, it will once again provide the skull lord with an endless stream of new recruits.

Climbing the Girders. Descending the mangled girders and pipes is difficult and dangerous. Climbing the 200 feet between this area and area 6.32 requires four successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks (one for every 50 feet climbed). On a failed check, a character slips and falls, plummeting up to 400 feet to area 6.39 and taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage. A character who sees the area as pixelated has disadvantage on the check.

With each successful check, a character still takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage from the jagged metal along the descent path.

AREA 6.15: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the upper and middle levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

AREA 6.16: ACHERON'S ARMORY

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This cavernous room is hotter than the corridors outside. Cubic steel terraces are stacked with blocky caricatures of weapons, while gleaming shields and armor are set on racks across the floor, all appearing as though forged of jagged cubes. The heat in the chamber comes from large furnaces venting pixelated smoke and flame. Blue and white glowing bricks in the walls and ceiling illuminate the room. Several small pixelated creatures wander near the furnaces.

Unpixelated. These chambers contain weapons and armor of all descriptions—enough to outfit an army, and all forged by duergar smiths or shaped by gnome crafters. Anvils, tongs, hammers, and other tools lie scattered about.

Fiery Exits. Numerous pipes extend from the furnaces to disappear into the walls where they lead to other areas. These pipes range from 2 feet to 5 feet across, with the largest pipes connecting to the Heart Engine at area 6.28. At your discretion, creatures with immunity to fire damage might be able to creep through the pipes into other areas.

Arms and Armor. The characters can claim any kind of nonmagical medium or heavy armor they want from this area (including hide armor made from the skin of Acheronian beasts), as well as nonmagical weapons of any type. Characters who spend some time searching the farthest corners of the chamber also find multiple examples of siege equipment (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*; size Huge or smaller only).

Clockworks. The gnomish clockworks that infest face 2 were made here by the mad derro architect Avnas and her pupils. Several of those constructs still crawl and rattle along near the forges: three **oaken bolters**^M, ten **bronze scouts**^M, and four **iron cobras**^M, all pixelated.

The iron cobras and oaken bolters attack nonpixelated creatures on sight unless commanded not to by an intelligent pixelated creature. Unless they are attacked, the bronze scouts crawl within 5 feet of intruders, harmlessly sniff them, then wander off.

If the characters destroy all the clockworks here and return to the room later, another 1d6 + 1 pixelated **bronze scouts**^M will have crawled out from hiding to behave as noted above.

Any noise of battle in this room is audible to creatures in area 6.19 or area 6.28.

AREA 6.17: AVNAS'S LAIR

If they have not been encountered and killed already, there is a 50 percent chance that Avnas and her gray

render pet are in this area when the characters come here. They are otherwise wandering elsewhere in the cube, including on the surface (see "Random Surface Encounters").

The door to this area from area 6.16 is blocked by a heap of black, blue, and gray metallic cubes that make it appear as though the walls have collapsed. However, any character who inspects these cubes sees that they are not made of metal as they appear to be, but are simply heavy paper covered with metallic paint.

Moving the cubes reveals a 5-foot-wide circular iron hatch that resembles a smaller, handmade version of the huge doors on the cube's exterior. The door is unpixelated and has an unpixelated handprint lock at its center. Both the hatch and the lock are painted with wild arabesque designs and symbols of chaos.

Unlike the regular doors that open to the handprint of a lawful creature, this hatch opens only if the handprint of a chaotic creature (living or dead) is pressed into the lock. Alternatively, characters can batter their way through the hatch, which has AC 17, 30 hit points, and immunity to psychic and poison damage. However, doing so alerts Avnas and the gray render if they are here.

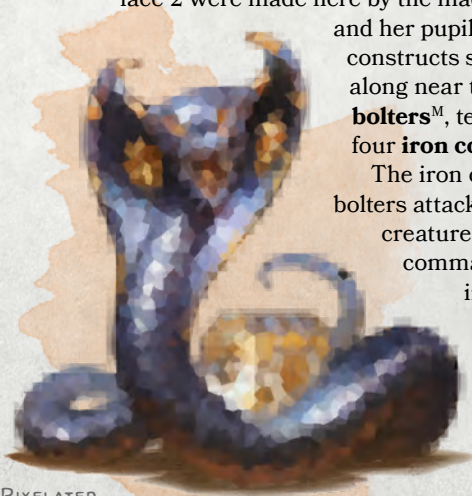
Beyond the door stands a comfortable, cluttered lair and workspace. Unlike the geometric corridors outside, the surfaces of this room are twisted into fabulous curves, ripples, and whorls. This area remains unpixelated as a result of the chaotic energy focused in Avnas's work. It is set with a four-poster bed whose soft mattress is stuffed with plump bat wings, a drafting table, numerous torture devices, comfortable armchairs and divans, a mirror, and a kitchen area where Avnas prepares and cooks homemade sausage. A pile of human, gnome, and duergar bones are the remains of the gray render's food. Several blobby cubical objects set around the place are the pixelated heads of dead enemies, which Avnas talks to as if they were alive.

Avnas and Moxon. This area is home to Avnas, the **derro savant**^M who designed Cube 1717. She has the appearance of a scrawny, deformed dwarf of indeterminate age, with huge white eyes and a tangle of gray hair. On a chain around her neck, she wears the pixelated severed hand of a lawful hobgoblin, used to open the cube's doors. Avnas also carries a *+1 quarterstaff*, as well as numerous bags and pouches containing tinker's tools, jeweler's tools, mason's tools, smith's tools, polyhedral dice, and 850 gp worth of small gems. The derro is infected with the pixelating curse, picked up on one of her many trips outside this area. But she is just beginning to pixelate, with cubic growths visible on her hands and chin.

Avnas is accompanied everywhere by her huge, vicious pet Moxon—a **gray render**^M that serves her



PIXELATED OAKEN BOLTER



PIXELATED
IRON COBRA

faithfully and attacks anyone who threatens her. Moxon is fully pixelated.

Works of Madness. Formerly one of the few chaotic creatures in Acheron, Avnas's mechanical engineering skills quickly made her a prized servant of Earl Andromalius, who coveted her clockworks and machines. Earl Andromalius gifted the derro with a dread magic item called the *book of patterns* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix). The evil dreams bestowed upon the derro by that tome inspired the experiments that turned the quadrone into the Archquadrone and started the pixelating curse.

With the progression of the curse slowed in Avnas because of her chaotic nature, she survived the cataclysm that followed. By the time she emerged from her hiding place, Vargo had created the Six-Face Throne and taken control of the cube. Pledging allegiance at sword point to the skull lord, Avnas is nominally an ally of the "new earl." But she mostly wanders the cube in a state of awe, fascinated by the pixelating curse and the bodies, arms, and armor she has to experiment with.

Avnas is dangerously insane and constantly switches personality traits. Every time the characters meet her, roll a d6 and consult the following table to see how she acts.

d6 Avnas's Personality

- 1 The derro is completely obsessed with some piece of weapon, armor, or machinery. She ignores the characters, muttering to herself. If the characters persistently bother her, Moxon attacks them.
- 2 Avnas is homicidal and paranoid. Seeing the characters as her prey, she stalks and attacks them.
- 3 Convinced that the characters are undead slaves of the skull lord, Avnas rudely commands them to help her dig through bodies or perform some other menial task.
- 4 Avnas is mostly lucid, seeing the characters as threats but curious about how things have changed on the Material Plane since she came to Acheron. She asks about obscure figures of derro culture from thousands of years before. If the characters change the topic, she tries to misdirect them into the clutches of nearby pixelated guards, the balhannoth, or another enemy.
- 5 The derro scratches at the cubes on her face and hands, desperate as she asks the characters for help getting them off. If the characters cure her of the pixelating curse, roll a d6 again to determine her reaction. Thereafter, reroll this result if Avnas is free of the curse.
- 6 Avnas is unfailingly polite and enthusiastic. She answers any questions about Cube 1717 while eagerly engaging the characters in conversation about the wonders of the pixelating curse. (This personality results from the pixelating curse beginning to affect her brain. Reroll this result if Avnas is free of the curse.)

Along with the skull lord, Avnas is one of the only creatures in Cube 1717 who knows the whole story of what brought the cube to the material plane. However,

even she doesn't understand exactly how the dreams sent to her by the *book of patterns* transformed the quadrone and created the pixelating curse. She sees everything as an exciting new experiment, from torture to death to becoming a pixelated creature. Her sociopathic narcissism and self-destructive tendencies make it impossible for the derro to become a true ally of the characters, no matter what they might offer her.

Drafting Table. This metal table and the shelves around it are covered with rulers, styluses, and drafting equipment. A **stone defender**^M stands near the table, inscribed with notes and sketches in Abyssal. Avnas uses the construct as a bulletin board, and it is programmed to attack anyone who goes near the drafting table. If Avnas is in the room, she can command the stone defender to attack intruders.

Canvas scrolls spread across the table show Avnas's architectural plans for the fortresses and barracks she was commissioned to make, as well as her dream projects—insane buildings combining the shapes of flowers, intestines, and seashells.

With a search of this area and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a character recognizes Avnas's plans for a huge cubic fortress as depicting the very fortress they are in. The plans show the overall layout of the fortress's faces (including the doors on each face, but not the threats currently found there). It shows all the rooms beneath each face, although not the names or contents of those rooms.

Avnas's Dice Collection. A set of shelves and a table in one corner of the room contain Avnas's treasures—shining, glowing polyhedral objects of all colors, shapes, and sizes, each with its faces marked by numeric symbols. Some are made of stone, others of metal or jewels. Some are sculpted of layered lizard skin. Some are ochre jellies magically kept at a low temperature to keep them solid. On the table stand dice towers, scales, and spiraling glass tubes used to test dice. The floor around the table is scrawled with invocations praising Demogorgon, Juiblex, and the other demon lords.

Avnas's collection of dice weighs 200 pounds in total. Most are merely curiosities, but any character who spends 30 minutes to sort through the collection identifies 50 pounds of valuable dice worth a total of 12,000 gp. The largest of these is a d12 carved from a petrified roc's egg.

Additionally, five unique dice are hidden among the rest:

Eye Die: When this translucent d4 is rolled as an action, the creature rolling it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution save or have their face transform as their number of eyes changes to the number rolled on the die. A *remove curse* spell restores the creature's normal number of eyes, or they can reroll until they get the desired number. Additional eyes grant a creature no benefit.

Skull Die: This d6 is carved of demon bone and has a skull in place of the 1. When it is rolled as an action, a number of creatures within 60 feet (as determined by the roll) must each succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 35 (10d6) necrotic damage.

Creatures are affected in order from those with the lowest hit points to the highest.

Dice Quasits: An oversized dice cup on the table is covered by a stack of books. Inside the cup are three dice quasits (see the sidebar). When they hear the characters, they call out in wheedling, whiny voices to be released, promising to serve anyone who frees them.

AREA 6.18: AVNAS'S FORGE

Like area 6.17, this area remains unpixelated because of the chaotic clockwork energy it channels. This hot, poorly ventilated chamber contains a makeshift forge connected by pipes to the larger forge at area 6.16. The fire burns blue here due to the chemicals Avnas uses in her work. A creature with fire immunity might be able to creep through the pipes that connect the two forges.

A number of nonworking clockwork creations are scattered around the room, including constructs shaped of sword blades, corkscrews, and jagged drill bits; booby-trapped armor that lops off its wearer's head or explodes when a belt-buckle is pushed; and fragmented metal limbs that crawl around. If the characters search the room thoroughly, they awaken three **iron cobras**^M that attack.

AREA 6.19: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.20: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.21: MORGUE

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. The room is cold, and the white glowing bricks in the wall glow dimly. Numerous long tables fill the area, and the walls are lined with large drawers, some open. Most of the tables are covered with blocky humanoid figures whose flesh is gray or yellow, and which is marked by irregular ridges, gaps, and holes. Similar figures lie in the drawers. In one corner of the room is a white tub 10 feet across. The tub is streaked with square scales of brown-gray slime, has a large grated drain, and features a crown of square gray pipes hanging from the ceiling above it. A faint smell of decay

DICE QUASIT

A rare variant among its demonic kind, a dice **quasit** can use its shapechanging ability to transform into what appears to be a large gaming die shaped of metal or stone. In this form, the dice quasit can see its surroundings, can speak, and can move by hopping or scuttling.

When rolled in its dice form, a dice quasit has a certain amount of control over the result of the roll. It is thus a perfect companion for a cheating gambler—especially as it does not radiate magic as enchanted dice would. A character using the dice quasit in a game has advantage on any ability checks made as part of the game. A dice quasit is always eager to serve a master—but it always attempts to corrupt that master, goading them into ever-greater acts of risk-taking, chaos, and evil.

STYX MIST

Vargo has deemed it advantageous for certain areas of the cube to not become pixelated. To accomplish this, the skull lord had Avnas set up a number of jury-rigged systems of pipes and pumps that constantly mist Styx water into the air.

In areas that are Styx misted, the pipes and pumps are noticeable where they run along the ceiling and walls, terminating in a large bucket of Styx water periodically refilled by pixelated guards. The Styx-water mist makes everything in an area damp and dripping. Pixelated creatures find the mist unpleasant but not harmful. Exposure to the mist is of no benefit to creatures under the effect of the pixelating curse, though the bucket of Styx water can be used to end the curse as normal.

fills the room except near the tub, which carries the scent of lye.

Unpixelated. The metal slabs and wall drawers of this morgue are mostly filled with human, hobgoblin, and duergar dead. Stripped of valuables and partially dissected, they number a hundred or more.

Every body in the room is an undead creature, culled from the endless supply of bodies at area 6.39 and raised by the skull lord using necromantic rituals. In total, forty-three pixelated **skeletons** and seventy-four pixelated **zombies** are here. Each has the following changes to its normal statistics:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The zombies and skeletons normally lie immobile until commanded to action by the skull lord. However, if the characters destroy more than six bodies, the rest of the undead all rise on the next round and attack. If Vargo is not present, the undead do not pursue characters out of the room.

Acid Bath. The tub is an automated body disposal device. Whenever an object is placed in the tub (or a creature steps into it), a deluge of acid pours down from the pipes above. This deals 21 (6d6) acid damage to the creature at the start of each of its turns. A dead body in the tub is dissolved and drained away to nothing in 2d4 rounds.

AREA 6.22: SURGERY

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the pixelated **mage** is 50 percent likely to be found here, doing his own alchemical experiments or assisting with the skull lord's. See area 6.11B for more information on the mage.

This room of blue and green tile is kept damp and unpixelated by a Styx-water spraying device (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar).

Bright light fills this area from two *driftglobes* that hover in the center of the room, as well as glowing panels on the wall. Half the room is dominated by a surgical table. Around it, cabinets hold knives, scalpels, and other medical equipment. Sinks along one wall

produce a flow or shower of normal water. A closet contains surgical smocks, while another closet is filled with severed heads—victims of the skull lord’s surgeries. A third closet contains twenty vials of special acid that dissolves flesh but does not harm bone or brain tissue.

In one cabinet near the surgical area are Vargo’s notes, written in Infernal in two styles of handwriting (for two of its heads). Short and unembellished, the notes describe experiments designed to allow the skull lord to add new heads to its body—as well as speculation on the most effective means of determining a creature’s intelligence.

AREA 6.23: LABORATORY

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the pixelated **mage** is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter. See area 6.11B for more information on the mage.

This room is kept damp and unpixelated by a Styx-water spraying device (see the “Styx Mist” sidebar). The huge chamber is dominated by alchemical equipment: beakers, flasks and alembics, bubbling liquids, and strange slow-moving flames of various colors. Additionally, several glass-and-steel tanks hold living experiments—the horrible remnants of the fiendish work once carried out here. Breaking any of the tanks requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Green Slime. If the glass is broken, all creatures within 5 feet of the tank must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be covered by a mass of green slime. More slime erupts out to cover an area 5 feet on a side at the center of the room. On initiative count 10 starting the following round, the slime spreads 5 feet horizontally and vertically until it covers an area 15 feet on a side. See “Dungeon Hazards” in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for information on green slime.

Ochre Jelly. If the glass of its tank is shattered, this **ochre jelly** attacks.

Oblex Spawn. This tank is filled with red slime that constantly heaves and changes shape, sending forth limbs that melt back into the mass. If any character examines the slime for more than a few moments, it presses up against the glass as it forms a mushy caricature of that character’s face. If the glass is shattered, the slime is released as an **oblex spawn**^M.

Spiked Creature. This tank contains a water dispenser and food dispenser similar to those in area 6.11. In the opposite corner is what appears to be an earthen lump of light brown pyramidal spikes, about the size of a small barrel.

If the characters approach the tank, the mass rises to its feet and presses itself against the glass nearest to them. It has a vaguely humanoid form with arms and legs, but no facial features or visible eyes—only perfectly triangular spikes. The unknown creature then scratches on the glass as it watches the characters walk around the room.

A *true seeing* spell reveals that the spike creature is a human infected by a disease developed in this laboratory—something similar to the pixelating curse. The creature desires humanoid contact though it cannot speak. A *dispel magic* or *cure disease* spell

returns it to normal, but the human is quite mad from being kept in this state for many years. If subject to a *greater restoration* spell, the character is cured and can communicate. Full immersion in the Styx sea also cures both the disease and the madness. If this unfortunate test subject is cured, who they are and how they came to be here is left for you to determine.

Hand Creature. This tank contains a water dispenser and food dispenser similar to those in area 6.11. Pacing back and forth in the tank is a pink creature with two arms and two legs whose body is covered with hands. The creature’s face, feet, elbows, shoulders, and thighs are festooned with hands, with no facial features visible.

As with the spiked creature, a *true seeing* spell reveals that this is a human subject of terrible experiments. The creature is completely lost in its own world, and it paces in circles even if its glass tank is broken. It can be cured of its affliction in the same manner as the spiked creature (see above). If cured, the unfortunate character’s origin and identity are left to you to determine.

AREA 6.24: MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

This room was used as a prison for creatures that had offended Earl Andromalius in some way. When the pixelating curse overtook Cube 1717, the pixelated soldiers released the prisoners here—including the skull lord, Vargo.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Numerous deep oubliettes are set into the floor throughout this room, whose unpleasant, glaring white light comes from glowing white bricks in the walls. The mouths of the oubliettes are blocked by cubic gray metal bars, most of which appear to be bent and damaged. Some of the bars are covered with a decorative mosaic pattern. A gray box connected to blocky pipes is attached to the wall between the doors.

Unpixelated. The gray metal box contains numerous wires, switches, and buttons that once opened and closed the barred doors of the oubliettes. The mosaic markings on the bars are Infernal inscriptions, noting the crimes for which prisoners were incarcerated. If the characters read all the writing on the bars, they discover Vargo the skull lord’s cell, whose bars read: “*CRIMES: Sedition, sedition, sedition • PUNISHMENTS: Decapitated and heads fused into one body; raised; 1 million life sentences.*”

Empty Prison. Characters looking inside the oubliettes see that they are 30 feet deep and note their foul scent. Pixelated chains hang from the walls 10 feet below the top of each pit, from which prisoners were once hung by their extremities.

In some cells, the bodies of prisoners still hang from the chains. In others, those bodies have rotted and fallen apart. Though the dead are pixelated, it’s clear that all were the unfortunate subjects of cruel magic experiments at the hands of Earl Andromalius.

AREA 6.25: MIDDLE-LEVEL BARRACKS

This area is identical to area 6.11, set up as an open space lined with multiple layers of cell-like rooms once

inhabited by the cube's Acheronian soldiers. Some of the cells contain minor personal items that once belonged to the dead, but nothing else of interest. (Vargo doesn't yet have enough soldiers to need this level of the barracks).

Welcome Home. If the skull lord becomes aware of the characters' presence in the cube but the situation doesn't immediately turn into a fight, it uses this area as a prison to hold the intruders (see "The Skull Lord's Plan")—but with a dark twist. Using the authority over all pixelated creatures that comes from being attuned to the Six-Face Throne, the skull lord commands the balhannoth and the adult oblex (see face 5 and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on those creatures). Using its telepathic and reality-warping powers, the balhannoth turns this area into an exact duplicate of a real place one of the characters most wants to be: their hometown, their favorite tavern, the port town they were in before they came to the island, or even some place of respite the character has only ever dreamed of visiting.

To carry out this plan, the skull lord or one of its allies (most likely Bunch the berbalang or Sladek the pixelated mage) engages the characters in negotiations or distracting small talk for the 10 minutes

it takes for the balhannoth to transform the area. The characters are then told that a dimensional portal in the cube can take them home, whereupon they are led to area 6.25. As soon as they pass through the doorway into this area, that doorway disappears behind them.

Everything in the new environment appears to be real. Moreover, the characters are also greeted by up to 1d4 + 1 people or creatures that seem to belong at the new location—all of them manifested by the oblex. If the area would normally have a larger group of people, they are unexpectedly absent or show up later, but no more than two to five other creatures are ever seen at the same time.

In reality, the characters remain in the barracks as transformed by the balhannoth. The skull lord simply wants them to waste time figuring out how to get out of this false environment while the pixelating curse overcomes them.

Among the many things likely to give away the false nature of this homecoming, any object created by the balhannoth is clearly a fake. Books turn out to be filled with blank paper, mechanical devices are crude, nonfunctioning duplicates, gold and jewels turn out to be made of paste or tin, and so forth. Characters who move to the edge of the area also quickly discover that it has fixed boundaries, as the balhannoth has reshaped the barracks' existing walls to hem them in.

The faint sulfur smell of the oblex can also be noted around any of its simulacra with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Because the oblex has no knowledge of NPCs known to the characters, the absence of such NPCs at the false location is also a giveaway.

If the characters attack the simulacra or discover the balhannoth where it hides within some feature of the false location, both the balhannoth and the oblex attack at once and summon nearby pixelated guards to aid them.

If one or more characters reach mental level 3 of the pixelating curse while in this area, the balhannoth telepathically fills them in on the plan. Players of those characters can be encouraged to secretly roleplay this development, joining in on deceiving the other characters and keeping them in the false location while the pixelating curse runs its course.

AREA 6.26: TREASURY

The 20-foot-tall door to this room is inscribed with a carving of the five heads of Tiamat, still recognizable despite their pixelation. The door is locked, and features a large keyhole covered with pixelated dragon designs. A *glyph of warding* inscribed upon the door by the skull lord can be noted only with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. It triggers a *finger of death* spell (save DC 18) upon any creature except the skull lord that touches the door.

The door opens only to a key the skull lord wears around its neck, but it can be picked with a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. It can also be attacked (it has the same statistics as the exterior doors of the cube).



Beyond the door, the features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This chamber is filled with heaps of yellow and silver blocks, as well as scale-like flat squares that shine in the light of glowing white sticks. Barrel-shaped white objects hold more blocks, transparent and shining in blue, green, and violet. Blocky caricatures of weapons, shields, armor, and helmets hang against the walls or are stacked in heaps. A pixelated haze hangs in the air, emanating from glowing cubes in a blocky red brazier.

Unpixelated. The room is filled with piles of coins, urns holding colorful gleaming gems, strange armor, and weapons. Smoke pours from red coals in a squat brazier in the form of a devil's head, which appears to be carved from a single red gem. Numerous white candles fill the room with light.

Poor Welcome. Any unfortunate thieves exploring the treasury must immediately contend with the fact that the entire room is filled with poison gas from the incense in the devilish brazier. Any creature that starts its turn in the room must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) poison damage and become poisoned until it leaves the room. A creature that holds its breath gets no benefit against the poison. If the door to area 6.28 is left open, the poison gas dissipates after 10 minutes.

Once the property of a great lord of Acheron, the treasury contains ancient riches from dozens of forgotten empires. The heaps of coins total 35,000 gp, 120,000 sp, and 42,000 cp. Several marble urns are completely filled with gems—mostly star sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and blue spinels—totaling 170 pounds and 108,000 gp in value. (A character who spends an action to scoop up a handful from any urn gathers gems worth $1d4 \times 1,000$ gp.) The devil brazier is carved from a single gigantic piece of rose quartz. It weighs 500 pounds and is worth 15,000 gp.

The finely decorated arms and armor include *+1 chain mail*, *chain mail of resistance (necrotic)*, *scale mail mariner's armor*, *+1 plate mail*, a *sentinel shield*, a *vicious longsword*, a *+2 longsword*, a *+2 spear*, a *greatsword of vengeance*, a *horn of Valhalla (bronze)*, and a *helm of teleportation*. These magic items are scattered among many nonmagical items of the same kind, and are easily spotted when the mundane items are seen in their pixelated state.

Each of the ten white candles in the room has a *continual flame* spell cast upon it.

AREA 6.27: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the middle and lower levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

Two pixelated **veterans** stand beside the ladders, guarding this shaft from potential intruders. If they see any nonpixelated creatures climbing up from below

or in area 6.28, they telepathically alert the guards in area 6.19.

AREA 6.28: CONTROL ROOM

The beating of the Archquadrone's heart can be heard in the corridors leading up to this chamber, and is loud within.

The pixelating curse is stronger here than in the rest of the cube. While in area 6.28, creatures must make all checks and saving throws related to the curse every 10 minutes, rather than at the end of each short rest. The appearance of this chamber also cannot be unpixelated, even with Styx water, *pixel glasses*, or other magic.

This vast square chamber lies at the exact center of the cube. Pipes, valves, and gears cover the riveted iron walls here, occasionally moving, pumping, or hissing as they release strange-smelling steam. Red lights glow from red bricks on the wall. The room is totally pixelated and has no curved surfaces.

The skeletal remains of the Archquadrone fill the center of the room. They resemble little more than a 60-foot-wide dilapidated square framework of what looks like rotting sheet metal, and which shows only hints of the Archquadrone's face and empty eye sockets. Clearly visible through the vast rents in the Archquadrone's remains is the 10-foot-wide Heart Engine, which pumps at the center of the floor. The engine is perched over a wide pit that is bridged by pipes thick enough to walk upon. The pipes go everywhere, disappearing into the walls and floor.

A short flight of metal steps leads 10 feet above the Heart Engine to a metal platform. Two pieces of bulbous machinery squat there, with a large glowing cube floating between them. On the other side of the platform is a large panel of buttons, switches, and levers. A strange piece of furniture at the center of the platform resembles six chairs in a circle sitting back to back, with a crown of piping above them. This is the Six-Face Throne.

The Archquadrone's Remains. Little is left of the Archquadrone except for its heart and the shell of its skull. A character who saw the statue in area 6.12 recognizes it as the same creature. The remains can be confirmed as belonging to an enormously large and limbless quadrone with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The Archquadrone's body can be damaged by any attack, but it's already dead. The Heart Engine must be attacked directly. However, a creature that touches any part of the remains and uses *detect thoughts*, *speak with dead*, telepathy, or a similar effect receives fragmentary images of the life of the Archquadrone and its desire to reshape the universe in its own image.

Heart Engine. This huge, crystalline cluster of square valves and pixelated pipes continually pulses and moves, and radiates palpable heat and a red glow. Black metal pipes ranging in size from 2 feet to 5 feet across emerge from the Heart Engine to enter the Six-Face Throne and the walls all around it. The engine is encircled by what appears to be a ring of shining gray-black metal, which also pulses in time with the beating of the heart.



PIXELATED STEEL PREDATOR

The Heart Engine is the nexus of the pixelating curse. Any creature that touches it with its bare flesh suffers the pixelating curse at an accelerated rate thereafter. That creature rolls to avoid infection, goes up another physical level, and rolls to avoid increasing their mental level of the curse every minute.

If the Heart Engine is destroyed, the pixelating curse is immediately dispelled and all the other parts of the cube become nonfunctional. The Heart Engine has AC 18; 180 hit points; immunity to poison damage; immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. When damaged, it spills black pixelated blood, and all pixelated creatures and creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne that are on or in the cube understand that the Heart Engine is in danger.

Predatory Defender. The ring of shining gray-black metal is actually the foremost defender of the Heart Engine: a pixelated **steel predator**^M with these changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.

- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The pixelated steel predator's mission is to guard area 6.28. If any creature threatens or attacks the Heart Engine, the Six-Face Throne, or any of the other controls in this area, it uncurls its panther-like body from around the heart and attacks until it or its foes are destroyed. It will even attack the skull lord and other creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne if they attempt to damage it or the Heart Engine for some reason. The steel predator does not leave area 6.28 under any circumstances.

Going Down. Below and around the heart is a pit partially filled with the pipe-like 'guts' of the Archquadrone, and which slopes down into the slippery shape beneath it. A creature that enters this tight, red-lit space can crawl down into area 6.47, the exhaust shaft of the cube. However, this route is slippery with oil, and a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to hold on as they climb. On a failed check, the creature slides out of control down toward area 6.47, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to grab onto the edge of the pit with their hands. On a failed save, the creature falls 300 feet down to the foul waters of area 1.1, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

The Six-Face Throne. Resembling six throne-like chairs in a hexagonal shape stacked back to back, these six linked seats sit at the center of what used to be the Archquadrone's skull. Sitting just above the chairs is a crown-like nest of pixelated pipes and wires. If any creature climbs the steps to the Six-Face Throne unaccompanied by the skull lord, the pixelated steel predator uncoils itself from the Heart Engine and attacks.

The Six-Face Throne has AC 18; 90 hit points; immunity to poison damage; bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. Even if the throne is destroyed, creatures attuned to it remain so attuned as long as the Heart Engine survives, and can continue to control the cube. However, no new creatures can attune to the throne and gain control over the cube until the throne is rebuilt by the skull lord over a week's time.

Created by Vargo, the Six-Face Throne allows up to six creatures to take control of the cube systems once controlled by the dead Archquadrone. A number of pixelated suction cups hang down from the tangle above on heavy wires, each just the right size to be attached to a humanoid head.

If a creature presses the suction cup against its head, what happens next depends on its Intelligence. A creature with an Intelligence of 14 or higher automatically becomes attuned to the Six-Face Throne (see below), after which the suction cup detaches. A creature with an Intelligence of 10 to 13 is unable to interface with the throne, and instead takes 7 (2d6) psychic damage. A creature with an Intelligence of

9 or less literally hurts the throne with its stupidity, triggering an explosion that deals 21 (6d6) psychic damage and 21 (6d6) thunder damage to that creature and each other creature within a 30-foot radius. Any creature aside from the triggering creature can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, reducing the damage by half on a success. Any pixelated creature that takes damage from this explosion are stunned for 1d3 rounds.

Attuning to the Six-Face Throne. A creature that becomes attuned to the Six-Face Throne gains access to various powers, which it understands instinctively:

- It can communicate by telepathy with other attuned creatures at any range.
- It can use the gravity controls (see below) while in area 6.28.
- It can use the scrying mosaics (see below) if it is anywhere within the cube.
- It can use the cannon controls (see below) while in area 6.28 if five or more faces of the cube have been activated.
- All pixelated creatures obey its commands, unless those orders contradict with the creatures' desire to protect the Six-Face Throne and the Heart Engine. If different attuned creatures give conflicting orders to a pixelated creature, that creature obeys whichever order is in the majority. If there is no majority, the pixelated creature takes no action, unable to decide.

It's impossible to become attuned more than once to the throne. If an attuned creature tries to do so again, it takes 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

Between the skull lord's two intelligent heads and Sladek the pixelated mage, there are three creatures attuned to the cube when the characters begin the adventure. If one or more characters attune themselves to the Six-Face Throne while Sladek and the skull lord are alive, the Heart Engine starts to beat stronger and faster, and the cube's powers increase. See the "Awakening the Cube" sidebar.

Gravity Controls. The glowing cube that levitates on the platform near the Six-Face Throne is covered with symbols. Pixelated lightning shoots back and forth between the bulbous machines, surrounding the floating cube with a halo of crackling red energy.

The gravity control cube can be touched and manipulated easily by any creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne. Any other creature that tries to touch it must make a DC 18 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 28 (8d6) lightning damage and is unable to touch the cube that round. On a success, the creature takes 14 (4d6) lightning damage but can touch the cube.

Each face of the control cube is numbered from 1 to 6, corresponding to one of the six faces of Cube 1717. The face of the cube that is up corresponds to the face that is up and above the water on the Material Plane. As an action, a creature can gently turn the control cube in midair so that a different face is up. This causes a great rumbling and hissing of steam in this area that lasts for 1 minute while the cube 'rolls' outside, but that movement goes unnoticed inside.

AWAKENING THE CUBE

Vargo's ultimate goal is to awaken the full functionality of Cube 1717. The cube's powers are dependent on the number of active faces of the Six-Face Throne. Each effect is cumulative if one or more faces are active.

No Faces Active. All the interior lights in the cube go out. The only places with light are the forges in areas 6.16 and 6.18, and wherever fitful fires burst forth from broken pipes from time to time. The cube stops producing its own internal gravity and the local gravity of each of the faces, so that all areas conform to the prevailing gravity of the world outside. The pixelating curse stops spreading, although all currently pixelated creatures and areas remain pixelated as long as the Heart Engine survives. The damaged soul tap (area 6.14) stops producing its endless flow of bodies. The cube sinks to the bottom of the Sea of Swords, and the forge fires eventually go out.

One Face. Lighting and local gravity functions in the cube. The soul tap produces bodies as noted in the adventure.

Two Faces. The cube gains partial vertical propulsive power, allowing it to rise to the surface of the water for up to 4 hours each day.

Three Faces. As at the start of the adventure, the cube has increased vertical propulsive power, allowing it to stay at the surface of the water. It can also sink underwater if the controllers of the Six-Face Throne want it to.

Four Faces. The cube gains the ability to move vertically up or down at a rate of 60 feet per round. If Vargo is in control of the cube, the skull lord causes it to rise out of the water, allowing the *handkerchief of darkness* to be grabbed and ending the fog. Freed from the Styx sea, all the faces of the cube rapidly pixelate.

Five Faces. The cube's main cannon (extending from area 6.28A to area 5.5) powers up. A creature that is attuned to and sitting in the Six-Face Throne can use the controls to fire the cannon as an action. Doing so has the effect of a *meteor swarm* spell that can be aimed at any points within 1 mile of the exterior of the cube. Additionally, all creatures and objects caught in the area of the cannon's four fiery orbs automatically contract the pixelating curse. Each time the cannon is fired, all creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne suffer one level of exhaustion.

Six Faces. The cube gains horizontal as well as vertical movement ability, flying at a rate of 60 feet per round. At this point, it is free to go anywhere in Faerûn.

The gravity control cube has AC 17; 30 hit points; and immunity to cold, fire, poison, lightning, and necrotic damage. If the control cube is destroyed, Cube 1717 stops producing its own internal gravity and the local gravity of each of the faces, so that all areas conform to the prevailing gravity of the world outside. The cube also stops moving and rolling, forcing creatures to exit it through the face that is currently above the water. A new control cube self-generates in one day.

Scrying Mosaics. Along each of the walls of this chamber at a height of 10 feet, as well as on the ceiling directly above the Six-Face Throne, a 20-foot-wide rectangular mosaic appears to show flat, square stones of gray, white, and black. Occasionally, the color of the stones changes, with white becoming black and vice versa in random patterns.

The five mosaics are magical, and serve as scrying mirrors. When a creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne is in this room, they can use a bonus action to cause the mosaics to display a pixelated image of the world outside the cube. The five mosaics show a color panoramic view of the exterior of the cube as seen from faces 2 to 5. Creatures and objects upon those faces appear as if they were semi-transparent, allowing an attuned creature to see creatures walking on the cube while also seeing through them to the landscape beyond. The only direction that cannot be seen is the bottom of the cube (face 1).

The scrying has no visible effect on the exterior of the cube, and creatures on faces 2 to 5 have no idea they are being scried on. The scrying effect ends when the creature that activated it leaves area 6.28. The scrying doesn't show any of the interior rooms or tunnels of the cube.

When a creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne is not in this area, it can use a bonus action to send its consciousness into the mosaic and see into the control room. The creature's head appears in color in one of the five mosaics, and it can see from that mosaic's perspective while not losing any awareness of its own surroundings. The creature can also hear whatever is happening in the room, and can speak to creatures in the room in a supernaturally loud, booming voice. If multiple creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne attempt this at the same time, their heads appear in separate mosaics.

Cannon Controls. This elaborate apparatus of buttons, switches and levers can be reached from one of the six chairs of the Six-Face Throne. Pipes run into the wall from the apparatus, pushing past other pipes and pistons before reaching area 6.28A. Metal tubes from the Heart Engine also converge on the opening. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check identifies the cannon controls as belonging to some kind of magical siege engine.

The entrance leading to area 6.28A initially appears to be jammed shut with pixelated pipes and cables. A Small creature can sneak through to area 6.28A with a successful DC 25 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

The cannon is nonfunctional until five faces of the Six-Face Throne are activated (see the "Awakening the Cube" sidebar).

AREA 6.28A. CANNON SHAFT

This round, pixelated metal shaft leads some 250 feet toward face 5, gradually widening from 2 feet in diameter to 20 feet at area 5.5. The walls of the shaft are warm and hum with energy. Tiny maintenance shafts, grates, and pipes along the way vent heat and occasional harmless electrical discharges.

As it reaches area 5.5, the shaft ends at an interior door (see that area's description). Anyone approaching the door from area 6.28 becomes aware of an increasing stench of decay and rotten meat.

If the cannon is fired, the interior and exterior doors at area 5.5 open and a violet light begins to build in intensity at the bottom of the shaft. Any creatures in area 6.28A or area 5.5 are killed the next round as

the cannon shaft is flooded with enough energy to destroy a castle.

AREA 6.29: LIBRARY

This room of black onyx pillars and arches is not pixelated, thanks to a constant spray of Styx water (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar).

The library is lined with stone shelves, making it one of the few rooms in the cube not entirely made of metal. Glowing wall panels provide dim light, and three *driftglobes* provide additional illumination as they float through the stacks. Several stone tables and chairs provide places to sit and read.

The shelves are covered with books and scrolls—many suffering damage from the dripping mist. The majority of the scrolls are in Infernal, with others in Common, Dwarvish, or rare and forgotten languages of the Material Plane. Most of the books are of six types:

- Histories of the great military battles of forgotten empires
- Descriptions of armor and weapons
- Lists of names of the dead
- Tedious legal texts describing the many laws of Acheron and the gruesome punishments for breaking them
- Transcribed court proceedings from legal cases in Acheron, including the gruesome punishments decreed by infernal judges
- Hymns to Bane, god of tyrants

Several stacks of books have been pulled from the shelves by the skull lord, and now rest in puddles on the tables. Among them are four reference books on multiple-headed creatures, from the hydra to the chimera to the ettin. There are also eight tomes on mechanical and electrical engineering, two books discussing the River Styx and its effects, five books on brain surgery, and four books on the history of Faerûn's Sword Coast. These last titles were written centuries ago and are completely outdated.

One cabinet between the main doors contains ink, quill pens, blank paper, and writing implements, and has two shelves stacked with games. A character who searches the game shelf finds dice, several damp decks of cards (including Three Dragon Ante), a fine chess set (120 gp), a fine backgammon set (180 gp), a checkers-like game played with small opals (worth 1,000 gp), and several more-obscure games. The skull lord might use games to test the intelligence of the characters (see "The Skull Lord's Plan").

Any character who can read Infernal and who spends 1 hour searching the library for interesting books discovers four *spell scrolls* tucked away in the stacks—*creation*, *detect thoughts*, *fly*, and *Otiluke's resilient sphere*.

If a character specifically searches the library for secret doors, a successful DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers a sliding bookshelf that leads to area 6.30.

AREA 6.30: SECRET LIBRARY

This dimly lit room contains the library's most precious books. All have been pixelated, as even the skull lord

isn't aware of this place. (Avnas is now the only person who knows about it.)

While the characters initially explore this room, they begin to hear strange whispers coming from all around them. If they do not leave immediately, 1d4 + 1 **allips** emerge from the walls and attack, formed out of the evil lore of this vile place. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the allip.)

If the books in this area are viewed unpixelated, most are revealed as bizarre poetry, secret plans for military battles in Acheron, or fiendish spellbooks. (You can determine the contents of these books if any wizard characters are interested in them.) An especially large stack of books offers up all the gory details of the tortures inflicted on prisoners of war and disobedient soldiers in the laboratory at area 6.23 and the torture chamber at area 6.43.

Two particularly old and heavy books are set on two pedestals at the center of the room. One is a *tome of clear thought*. The other is the *book of patterns* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix).

AREA 6.31: VARGO'S CHAMBER

If it has not been encountered already, Vargo the **skull lord**^M is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter. Vargo is always accompanied by its bodyguards—a pixelated **merregon**^M and a pixelated **shadar-kai shadow dancer**^M—that defend their lord to the death. But the skull lord's shadar-kai servant is someone the characters might be looking for (see "The Missing Shadar-kai," below).

The steel door to this room is unpixelated, and is inscribed with a carving of three skulls. The door opens only to a key the skull lord wears around its neck, but it can be picked with a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or it can be broken down. The door has AC 18, 30 hit points, a damage threshold of 5, immunity to psychic and poison damage, and resistance to cold and fire damage.

Beyond the door is a sumptuous room which is not pixelated, thanks to a constant spray of Styx water (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar). This area is noticeably colder than the corridor outside. The room is lit by a combination of ghostly glowing worms that crawl out of the furniture, a dusty candelabra with candles made of eyeballs glued together, and red glowing panels in the walls.

The walls here are lined with black curtains. In the center of the room is a large black steel sarcophagus lined with red velvet. The rest of the room is divided into three parts, each featuring the same furniture: plush high-backed chairs, kingly tables, and fine cabinets and wardrobes. However, all these fine furnishings have been so damaged by the damp as to be worthless.

The three tables are each set with three silver cups (a total of nine cups, 75 gp each). Each of the three sections of the room also has a wine rack loaded with twenty bottles of rich wine (sixty bottles, 90 gp each). In a wineskin hidden among one of the sets of bottles is six doses of torpor poison (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). It can be found with a successful DC

15 Wisdom (Perception) check, or by any character who takes all the bottles.

At the bottom of the sarcophagus, visible to any character who searches the steel coffin, is a musty *spell scroll of dimension door*.

One of the three sections of the room contains a glass case with the partially pixelated rotting head of a hideous devilish creature—the dead Earl Andromalius.

Best Two out of Three. When the characters first enter Cube 1717, only two of Vargo's three heads are fully active and aware. The third head babbles and chatters idiotically, when not sucking from a straw attached to a flask tied around its neck. Each of the skull lords' other two heads has a key tied around its neck—to the treasury (area 6.26) and this area. The flask the third head drinks from is filled with Styx water, keeping the skull lord safe from the pixelating curse.

Vargo was once three evil adventurers who teamed up to defeat the devil Earl Andromalius. When they were defeated, Andromalius subjected them to a horrific curse, combining the three of them into a single undead being. At first, the three heads hated being bound together, but over hundreds of years in Andromalius's prison, they gradually developed something like a group mind. When the cube was overtaken by the pixelating curse, Vargo managed to remain uninfected and gain its freedom.

Vargo's unique ability to deal with the curse stems from the skull lord's unique makeup. The Styx water absorbed by Vargo's undead body is strong enough to protect the skull lord from pixelating, but only the head that actually drinks the water is subject to its mental effects. With two heads still functioning, Vargo has survived the chaos with its wits intact, and was able to develop the Six-Face Throne as a way to control creatures pixelated by the curse. Vargo's two conscious heads became the Throne's two initial controllers. Sladek the pixelated mage became the third.

Fighting the Skull Lord. With only two heads active, Vargo is slightly weaker than normal. It has the statistics of a **skull lord**^M with these changes:

- It cannot cast 7th-level spells.
- It has only two legendary actions.

Vargo has also claimed the *Ioun stones* once owned by the wizard Sladek, which grant it additional features:

- It cannot be surprised.
- Its Intelligence is 18.
- Its Wisdom is 17.
- Its proficiency bonus is increased by 1.
- It has a +1 bonus to AC.
- It can cast *fear* once without expending a spell slot.

See "Ioun Stones" earlier in the adventure and chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information on Vargo's *Ioun stones*.

Vargo is a cunning, charismatic opponent who commands the absolute obedience of all the pixelated creatures on the cube. If the characters attack the skull lord, it musters all available pixelated creatures to its defense. But if possible, it tries to parley with the characters in the hope of them letting down their

guard. The skull lord tries to gauge the intelligence of each of the characters, and keeps a special eye out for wizards. See “The Skull Lord’s Plan” earlier in the adventure for more information about Vargo’s tactics and endgame.

The Missing Shadar-kai. Though Astilbe in her pixelated form looks very much like any of the other humanoid pixelated guards, characters can note her shadowy coloration and the spiked chain she wields in combat. If Fern is present, she recognizes her friend at once, calling out and pleading with her to surrender. This takes Astilbe out of the fight. If Astilbe is unpixelated at any point, she regains her original alignment and statistics, and both she and Fern fight alongside the characters.

As a pixelated **shadar-kai shadow dancer**^M, Astilbe has the following changes:

- Her alignment is lawful neutral.
- She has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- She is immune to the frightened condition.
- She has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

AREA 6.32: BROKEN AREA

As the characters approach this area, they hear a scream that rises and quickly falls. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds. When the characters can see into this area, they observe that every six seconds, a naked humanoid appears from above them and plummets down into the darkness below. See area 6.14 for more information.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. The walls, ceiling and floor are smashed open here, forming a great tear through which pixelated pipes and gigantic steel girders are visible.

Unpixelated. The shattered girders, pipes, and floor reveal the deadly sharpness of their edges.

Climbing the Girders. Navigating the mangled girders and pipes is difficult and dangerous. Climbing the 200 feet between this area and area 6.14 or area 6.39 requires four successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks (one for each 50 feet climbed). On a failed check, a character slips and falls, plummeting to area 6.39 and taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage for each 10 feet fallen (maximum 20d6). A character who sees the area as pixelated has disadvantage on the check.

NEARING THE END

The lowest level beneath face 6 is darker and dingier than the two levels above. The rumbling of the cube’s engines is loud in all areas here, and the pixelated walls are marred by rust-colored stains.

The temples and side rooms on this level are filthy with cubic debris—ash, broken metal, mud and dirt—and the decomposing pixelated bodies of soldiers. Only the wide main hallway that runs around the outside of the lower level is relatively clear of bodies and rubble, as it is swept clean by the hellfire engine (see area 6.41).

With each successful check, a character still takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage from the jagged metal along the descent path.

AREA 6.33: EMPTY GUARDROOMS

These rooms are identical to area 6.8, but no guards are present here unless you wish to increase the ranks of the skull lord’s followers.

AREA 6.33A. GRAVITY JUNCTION/ GUARDROOM

This room is identical to area 6.8, except it features no guards and has two passages that lead to interior doors, then to area 4.2 and area 5.3 beyond.

AREA 6.34: DAMAGED CORRIDOR

A great explosion has collapsed this corridor, melting and breaking its steel walls and the girders behind them. The walls are blackened and discolored. Everything is pixelated, and great heaps of metal cubes fill the collapsed area.

Like a living body, the cube is slowly regenerating this area. If the characters rest here or try to remove the rubble, they see that the rubble is gradually clearing itself, oozing back into the walls in great cubical clots. It takes three days from when the characters first enter the cube for a corridor to completely repair itself.

In places, the pixelated pipes and tubes behind the walls are exposed and smashed to reveal a black pixelated liquid dripping out—something uncomfortably similar to both oil and blood. Any character who presses their ear to the wall can hear the engines in the cube pulsing in a steady rhythm—matching the beating of the Archquadrone’s heart.

AREA 6.35: STYX PUDDLES

The rigid right angles and cubic forms of this level are interrupted in areas where the metal walls are bent and broken. In the center of each of these twisted areas is a pool of murky black Styx water, 1 to 3 feet deep. When the cube first fell to the Material Plane, numerous sections were still flooded with Styx water. As the cube regenerated, most of that water was pumped out through area 6.47, but these last few pools remain.

Pixelated creatures do not pursue characters into the pools. A character who wades through the Styx water feels a chill as their memories begin to fade, but is at no risk of suffering the water’s mental effects. A creature immersed in the water must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or lose their memories (see “The Styx Sea”). Creatures suffering the pixelating curse aren’t cured by exposure to the water unless they fully immerse themselves.

AREA 6.36: ANTECHAMBER OF THE GREAT TEMPLE OF TIAMAT.

This area is dark, except for a red flickering light shining from area 6.38. The features of the area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This tall-ceilinged room is decorated with huge pixelated relief carvings in red and black stone, showing creatures with wings. Eight oubliettes around

the room consist of 10-foot-deep pits covered with square steel grates, and are heavy with the scent of rot. Two tall, pixelated archways lead out of the room.

Unpixelated. The reliefs can be identified as black and red dragons, carved in red marble and basalt. The bases of all the statues are engraved in Draconic with hymns to Tiamat.

Place of Sacrifice. When the cube was a functional fortress, the eight oubliettes were used to store sacrifices and food for the abishai priests of Tiamat who controlled this temple. The sacrifice pits contain sand and bits of humanoid remains.

When the pixelating curse overcame the fortress, the temple of Tiamat remained untainted through the power of the dragon queen. This antechamber was too far from the center of that power to have been affected, but midway along the corridor to area 6.38, the walls and floor unpixelate, gradually changing from a blocky mosaic to natural black granite.

AREA 6.37: PRIESTS' BARRACKS

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. A central corridor opens up between numerous black metal doors set with small, square-barred windows. Most windows reveal small rooms beyond that contain a number of indistinct, blocky objects, but a few rooms are empty and finished in white tile. Several blocky machines stand in the main area, which is lit by white glowing bricks in the walls. A number of crudely humanoid, cubic bodies of black and gray are spread across the floor with mosaic-like black stains spilling out around them. The area smells of rot.

Unpixelated. These were meditation chambers and personal quarters for priests of Bane and Loviatar. Each individual room contains a low table, a simple toilet and sink, and personal items such as priestly robes, maces, and holy symbols. The white-tiled chamber is a slime shower and the machines are food devices, all similar to those seen in area 6.11. The doors to individual rooms have no locks.

The rotting remains of the dead priests, killed in the assault on the cube, lie on the floor in pools of dried blood.

AREA 6.38: GREAT TEMPLE OF TIAMAT

This chamber was the temple of Tiamat, one of the gods worshiped by the soldiers and lords of the cube. Thanks to the power of the holy idol here, the temple was able to resist the pixelating curse that has swallowed all other areas of the cube.

Entering this area reveals a vault-like chamber walled in black granite, whose ceiling rises out of sight 100 feet overhead. Human skulls glowing with the light of *continual flame* spells are set on pedestals across the room and hang from the walls to fill the area with bright light.

In the center of the room stands a great brass pool filled with burning oil. At the far end of the chamber is a large bloodstained obsidian statue of Tiamat—a



BLACK ABISHAI

monstrous dragon with five heads whose eyes are glittering gems. A number of items are set at the base of the statue, along with piles of glittering coins. A smell of burned meat and incense fills the air.

Abishai Assault. The temple's most powerful priests survived the assault on the cube: seven **white abishai**^M and one **black abishai**^M. Not allied in any way with the skull lord, these infernal dragons have been seeking a way to escape the cube since the assault, along with sacrifices to Tiamat for protecting them from the pixelating curse. When not scouting the cube for these things, they rest here.

If the characters entered area 6.36 with any light or noise, the abishai flew up to cling to the ceiling. When they party enters this area, they attack with surprise.

Relics and Retribution. In their explorations of the cube, the abishai have gathered treasure and left it as offerings at the foot of the idol: 2,250 gp, 752 sp, and a *tentacle rod* left behind by a fallen drow.

The idol of Tiamat radiates powerful magic and evil. If the abishai kill a creature, they drain its blood onto the idol while singing hymns to Tiamat, then consume the sacrifice. The idol's gem eyes are worth 2,000 gp each (for a total of 20,000 gp). However, any attempt to remove the eyes or otherwise damage the statue causes an **eidolon** (in the form of a howling, ghostly abishai) to rise from the fiery pool. The eidolon enters the **sacred statue** of Tiamat, which animates to attack all non-devils in the temple. See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the eidolon and the sacred statue.

If the sacred statue is destroyed, the fire in the brass pool goes out and the room's protective aura is

dispelled. This causes the pixelating curse to reshape the temple in 1 hour.

A Refreshing Dip. While it burns, the fiery pool of oil radiates transmutation magic and evil, but it channels the same power that prevents the pixelating curse from transforming the temple. The abishai regularly bathe in the oil, which cures them of the pixelating curse if they contracted it elsewhere on the cube. Any creature can submerge itself in the burning oil, which drains 1 physical level and 1 mental level of the pixelating curse at the end of each of the creature's turns. The curse is removed when the creature reaches physical level 0. However, any non-abishai that enters the pool takes 14 (4d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

AREA 6.39: BOTTOM OF THE RIFT

As the characters approach this room, they hear a scream that gets suddenly louder, then ends in a bone-crushing thump. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds. See area 6.14 for more information.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Some massive force has torn open the roof of this chamber, revealing huge pixelated steel girders and pipes, and creating a great hole that opens up to darkness overhead. In the center of this area, below the hole, a pile of unpixelated bodies rises twenty feet high.

Unpixelated. The shattered girders and pipes reveal the deadly sharpness of their edges.

Death From Above. Adults of every race and gender are represented among the dead. Most are human, but gnomes, dwarves, and other creatures can also be seen. All are naked, and appear to have died from the fall. Every six seconds, a screaming humanoid falls from the darkness and smashes into the top of the pile of bodies, where it dies of massive trauma. Characters who attempt to climb to the top of the pile are at risk of being struck by a falling body, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw each round or take 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage.

Bodies that fall here become infected by the pixelating curse, and characters who inspect the pile see that the bodies at the bottom (those that have been here the longest) are beginning to turn cubic. However, the bodies are regularly cleaned up by the hellfire engine that patrols this area (see area 6.41). If the hellfire engine is destroyed, the bodies rapidly begin to pile up, pixelate, and spread out at a rate of six hundred bodies per hour. Within four hours, this area becomes impassable. Over a longer period, the entire lower level—and eventually the entire cube—will be filled.

Interrupted Fall. The characters might attempt to rescue one or more of the falling individuals, using spells such as *feather fall* or *telekinesis*. If they are successful, see area 6.14 for more information.

AREA 6.40: WIRING SHAFTS

Much smaller than normal corridors, these narrow spaces are filled with wires and pipes that occasionally emit heat and steam. A Small creature can squeeze into a wiring shaft with a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, which must be made at each new area or junction. With a failed check, the character can peek into the area beyond but not enter it.

These access spaces for the cube's machinery were once used by duergar and gnome technicians. A creative character might attempt to damage the cube by unleashing powerful spells or attacks here. Anything less than a 9th-level spell is unlikely to seriously harm the cube, but might cause a distraction that the pixelated guards will investigate.

AREA 6.41: PUMP ROOM

Pixelated or unpixelated, the appearance of this room is much the same: a great factory-like space filled with pumps, valves, and pipes. Most of the pipes lead into area 6.47, where they force water and debris into the exhaust shaft to be expelled.

Cleaning Crew. This room is dominated by a massive, boxy metal device with terrifying bestial mouths carved into it—a pixelated **hellfire engine**^M modified by Avnas for cleaning duty. This gigantic construct regularly clears out the lower levels, rolling down the



PIXELATED
HELLFIRE ENGINE

main corridor to suck up bodies, debris, and small amounts of Styx water before returning here to shoot them through pipes into area 6.47. It has the statistics of a hellfire engine (including all of its attacks) with the following changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures. Being unintelligent, it can communicate only emotions and vague feelings.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The hellfire engine recognizes devils and servants of the skull lord, and attacks all other creatures on sight. Because of its size, the hellfire engine cannot leave the wide main corridor that runs around the lower level. However, it can attack creatures in nearby areas using its ranged weapons, liquefying foes with its Bonemelt Sprayer and sucking up any remains that flow into the main hall. If the construct sees an enemy go into a room it can't reach, it waits for them to come out as long as it can see them. If a creature goes out of its range and out of vision, the hellfire engine waits for 10 minutes, then goes back to its rounds.

AREA 6.42: DEATH TRAP

This area is an empty guardroom, similar to area 6.8 and the area 6.33 rooms on this level. It has an interior door leading to area 5.1, and a faint mosaic stain of small pink, white, and red cubes the spread across the walls and floor. The stain appears to have been scrubbed or wiped away in the center of the room, but nonetheless marks a distinct path between area 5.1 and area 6.43. A smell of rotten meat can also be sensed in the direction of area 6.43.

Creatures that slip and fall as a result of the gravity switch in area 5.2 drop nearly 600 feet and land here, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage. The pixelated adult oblex of area 5.1 spends some of its time here eating fallen bodies, but the hellfire engine (area 6.41) cleans up most of the mess. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, a character confirms that the trail has been left by a slimy creature moving back and forth through this area.

AREA 6.43: TORTURE CHAMBER/OBLEX ROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Strange objects made of thick gray, black, and brown blocks fill this room. Some resemble tables, but their surfaces are irregular. Others look like upright cases or trunks big enough to walk into, while still others resemble siege equipment or oversized birdcages. Strange square mosaics mark the walls, and the floor is covered with irregular encrustations of black cubes, like a crystalline growth marked by occasional dark-green stains.

Unpixelated. The unknown objects within the room are all torture equipment—cruel devices beyond mortal imagination. The markings on the walls are symbols of Loviatar, goddess of pain.

The dark encrustation is a squishy slime excreted by the oblex spawn that feed in this area. Indigestible fragments are scattered within it, including bits of armor and chunks of yellow bone. The darker masses among the slime are eight pixelated **oblex spawn**^M, which wait for prey to enter the room before swarming from all directions.

If injured, the **adult oblex**^M at area 5.1 retreats to this room, where its spawn reinforce it.

AREA 6.44: TEMPLE OF LOVIATAR

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. The floor of this high-ceilinged chamber is lined with rows of what appear to be flat, square scales of glittering glass. At one end of the chamber stands a blocky pedestal, from which a black and white pixelated humanoid statue has fallen. Several faceless, blocky bodies lie on the floor, and the stench of rot hangs in the air.

Unpixelated. The statue depicts a woman with a beautiful and cruel face holding a whip—Loviatar, goddess of pain and consort of Bane. The scales on the floor are trenches filled with broken glass, which is deadly sharp and merely appears flat due to the pixelating curse. A creature that steps on the broken glass in bare feet or soft shoes takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage per 5 feet traveled.

The temple has been desecrated by the worshipers of the Archquadrone. The bodies of Loviatar's priests lie on the floor. All carry whips, daggers, and holy symbols, but nothing of value.

AREA 6.45: BERBALANG'S ROOM

This area is identical to the priests' barracks at area 6.37, except that one room here is used as a lair by Bunch, the skull lord's **berbalang**^M ally. If the characters have not already met and destroyed Bunch, the **berbalang** is here counting its bones.

The **berbalang**'s lair is filled with pixelated yellowish-gray skulls and bones to a depth of 4 feet, with duergar, gnome, and human remains the most common. Bunch obsessively sorts through its collection for hours on end, using *Speak with Dead* to mine the memories the skulls contain, then scribing those tales on the other bones. Bunch is protective of these treasures, and the **berbalang** runs to alert the skull lord if the characters mess with its collection.

Any character who searches the bones and succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check finds a *ring of free action* within the pile.

AREA 6.46: TEMPLE OF LADUGUER

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This wide chamber features a ceiling that is lower than the corridor outside. The floor is covered with rows of trenches, which surround a central heap of gray and black metallic cubes. Here and there, the trenches are darkly stained, and all around the room lie short, blocky figures from which the stench of rot rises.

Unpixelated. Duergar dead are scattered throughout what was once a temple to the duergar deity Laduguer,

Master of Crafts. The central heap is Laduguer's iron idol, which has been completely smashed. Only a close inspection identifies a few limbs and the crushed remains of the statue's beard.

AREA 6.47: EXHAUST SHAFT

This roughly pixelated circular shaft rises nearly 200 feet from the oily pool at area 1.1 to the Heart Engine at area 6.28 far above. The temperature is warm here, and gets hotter as the shaft rises toward area 6.28. The shaft is dimly lit by red lights seen high above.

Characters who enter the cube from area 1.1 can climb or fly to the Heart Engine (although thick pipes block the engine from view until they reach it). The walls are slick with warm slime pouring down from a multitude of exhaust pipes and grates, making climbing difficult, but the cubic surfaces of the pixelated walls counteract this somewhat.

Going Up. Climbing the 300 feet between this area and area 6.28 requires six successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) checks. On a failed check, a creature falls and takes damage as normal.

A character who enters the bottom of the shaft and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a number of dry pipes that are just barely large enough for a Small creature to crawl into. With a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, a Small character can enter the wiring shafts (area 6.40).

The exhaust shaft periodically rumbles as black cubical slime and pixelated bodies pour out of its side pipes, then explode out through the pool at area 1.1 in a geyser of pressure and heat. If any character rolls a 1 on the Strength check to climb, the exhaust shaft begins to rumble and shake as the pressure builds. Two rounds later, the pressure wave hits, dealing 21 (6d6) fire damage and 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage to every creature in the shaft or in area 6.47. Each of those creatures must then succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be flung out of the shaft onto face 1.

The proximity to the Heart Engine makes the pixelating curse stronger within the shaft than outside it. While in the shaft, creatures must make all checks and saving throws related to the curse every 10 minutes, rather than at the end of each short rest. A creature that reaches physical level 2 while climbing the shaft has disadvantage on Strength checks as a result of the sudden transformation of its hands into rough, cubical mittens.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Depending on their interactions with Vargo and their ultimate choice about what to do about the threat represented by Cube 1717, the characters might bring the adventure to a number of different conclusions.

VARGO AWAKENS THE CUBE

If Vargo manages to attune to all six parts of the Six-Face Throne, the skull lord reveals its new goal: the conquest of the Sword Coast. The cube is flown to the nearest city, where Vargo demands that the inhabitants surrender to its will—then blasts them with the cube cannon until they submit.

Any injured survivors of the cube cannon quickly pixelate, becoming additional soldiers under Vargo's control. Gradually, the skull lord's pixelated army grows, and the very landscape of the realm is transformed. Some lands resist Vargo, while others send offerings of gold, jewels, and magic items to be spared from the skull lord's destructive wrath and the pixel plague. The Sword Coast descends into darkness and terror.

PIXELS TRIUMPHANT


If Vargo is killed but another pixelated creature (including Sladek) remains alive and attuned to the Six-Face Throne, all the pixelated creatures of the cube telepathically confer among themselves. In truth, they never fully trusted Vargo because of the skull lord's unpixelated state. So with that undead master gone, its former followers can carry out their own plan: peacefully turning the entire world into pixels and spreading the glorious gift of the Archquadrone.

All pixelated creatures on the cube immediately converge on the Six-Face Throne, ready to attune to it or die trying. If enough of them are successful, the cube awakens and they send it flying away from the Styx sea. The cube lands in different spots on Faerûn, dropping off small groups of pixelated creatures to infect the land, the local vegetation, and all nearby creatures.

DESTRUCTION OF THE HEART ENGINE

The only way to truly stop the pixelating curse is to destroy the Heart Engine. When the Heart Engine reaches 0 hit points (or if it is completely immersed in the Styx sea), it explodes. A wave of energy sweeps out from it, unpixelating everything in and on the cube. Any surviving pixelated creatures come back to their senses.

With the Heart Engine gone, the Six-Face Throne stops functioning as well. The entire interior of the cube goes dark as its power fails and it sinks into the depths of the sea, never to rise again. If the characters are in the cube when this happens, you can decide how fast the cube sinks—and how perilous a time they have getting out before it's completely submerged and flooded.

After the characters return to port, word of their exploits will quickly spread, and the dark tale will be told of what the pixelating curse might have done had it been allowed to run unchecked. If the adventurers don't already have a reputation as legendary heroes, they soon will, as all the folk of the Sword Coast learn of how the characters saved the world from a terrible fate. 

Design and Cartography: Jason Bradley Thompson
Editing, Development, and Layout for *Dragon+*:
Scott Fitzgerald Gray

A full-size map of Face 6 is [available for download](#).

APPENDIX: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

The following new magic items appear in this adventure.

AMULET OF THE STYX

Wondrous item, rare

This amulet of smoked glass on a platinum chain contains a small amount of Styx water, making it resemble a round black gem unless closely inspected. While wearing the amulet, you are immune to the pixelating curse.

In addition, when you sleep or trance, you dream the lost memories of a random creature that has died, giving you some of that creature's skills and insights. At the end of a long rest taken while you wear the *amulet of the Styx*, you gain proficiency in one skill or with one tool of your choice. You cannot already have proficiency with the skill or tool kit. You lose this temporary proficiency at the end of your next long rest.

BOOK OF PATTERNS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This ancient book appears to be a fine spellbook bound in the skin of some extradimensional creature. But the book contains no text, instead being filled with strange patterns. Some are curves; some are cubes; others are spiraling designs, or stars, or leaves and plant life; or patterns like hair and veins and flesh. Many of the patterns contain optical illusions, and seem to move disturbingly when seen from the corner of a viewer's eye.

A creature that merely looks at this book for the first time must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the book. While charmed in this way, the creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. Unless it takes damage or is shaken out of its torpor by another creature as an action, the charmed creature remains staring at the book indefinitely, suffering one level of exhaustion every 4 hours until dead. A creature that succeeds on the save or has the charm broken can read the book safely.

Studying the book requires 48 hours of effort over a period of 7 or fewer days. At the end of this study, you must make a DC 17 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, you gain a form of indefinite madness (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) but can attempt to study the book again. With a successful save, you gain the ability to use charges from the book to cast spells as long as the book is in your possession.

The book has 8 charges. As an action, you can expend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from it (save DC 17): *creation* (5 charges), *hypnotic pattern* (3 charges), *illusory script* (1 charge), *phantasmal force* (2 charges), or *phantasmal killer* (4 charges). The book regains 1d4 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn.

As long as you possess the book, your sleep is filled with dreams of its strange patterns. This might grant

you knowledge of unique rituals or magical effects, as determined by the DM.

CENSER OF BLOOD

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This brass incense burner hangs on a brass chain, and is covered with fiendish symbols and the names of ancient vampires. While the censer is on your person, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track by scent and Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect smells. In addition, you are aware of the exact location of any creature within 60 feet of you that is below its hit point maximum.

As an action, you can spill one drop or more of your own blood into the censer, causing it to steam. You suffer one level of exhaustion, and the censer issues forth 1d6 vampiric mists that appear within 10 feet of you. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the vampiric mist.) You can repeat this process to create multiple mists, taking yourself to a maximum of five levels of exhaustion. The vampiric mists don't appear if you are in sunlight.

The summoned vampiric mists understand your language and obey your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, they attack all nearby humanoids except yourself, only sparing those that you specifically command them to.

You reduce levels of exhaustion imposed by the *censer of blood* in the normal fashion. Each mist lasts until it is destroyed, until you die, or until you dismiss it as a bonus action.

HANDKERCHIEF OF DARKNESS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This black velvet handkerchief is inscribed with a repeating pattern of closed eyes. The handkerchief normally appears to be the size of a napkin, but it can be unfolded to the size of a tablecloth.

When the handkerchief is folded to the size of a napkin, you can drop or throw it as an action, creating an area of magical darkness around the handkerchief identical to that created by a *darkness* spell. The darkness endures until the handkerchief is picked up by a creature.

When the handkerchief is unfolded to the size of a tablecloth, you can throw it as an action to have it magically fly high in the air. The handkerchief hovers 50 feet above you and a shadowy fog billows out of it, filling a cylinder 100 feet high and 1,000 feet across, with the handkerchief at its center. The area of the fog is lightly obscured, and creatures that suffer negative effects while in sunlight ignore those effects while within the fog. The fog lasts until the handkerchief is picked up by a creature (typically one that can fly).

MERRENOLOTH'S OAR

Weapon, very rare (requires attunement)

Made of special wood that grows only in the Lower Planes, this long oar is carved with ancient symbols of death from countless cultures.

While you hold the oar, you have advantage on Dexterity checks to maintain your balance while on

a watercraft. In addition, as a bonus action while you hold the oar, you can learn the depth of any water or liquid within sight, and the distance and direction to the closest land while you are on open water.

The *merrenoloth's oar* can be used as a weapon. It is treated as a *+1 lance* when so wielded, and it can be used one-handed while you are on board any watercraft.

PIXEL GLASSES

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

These unique magic items were created by the derro architect Avnas for use aboard the pixelated Cube 1717. However, their potential benefit to the characters is balanced by a dangerous curse.

The square lenses of the *pixel glasses* are cut of thick, dark glass. While wearing the glasses, you see pixelated objects and creatures as if they were normal, the same way that pixelated creatures do. However, normal creatures and objects look hideously distorted.

Curse. These glasses are cursed, and becoming attuned to them extends the curse to you. While you wear them, you have disadvantage on all saving throws to resist the pixelating curse. If you become cursed while wearing the glasses, the physical symptoms spread from the inside out, though your eyes transform immediately into solid cubes. Creatures at mental level 3 of the curse attempt to hide this from other creatures as long as possible.