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INTRODUCTION

An iridescent spire in the distance, impossibly tall, tempting with dreams of black gems and glory. A prison at the top of a mesa, filled with light and demonic monstrosities, awaiting visitors. A lush forest where five witches rule unopposed. A deep cave where the last thunder lizard has retired for its final slumber.



Forbidden Lands is our love letter to the fantasy genre, and the result of many evenings discussing Conan's Hyperborea, the classic pictures of Nils Gulliksson, the anti-heroes of Fritz Leiber, old western movies, and more. We have been inspired throughout by the innumerable creative souls that are active in the so-called OSR-movement (Old School Renaissance). The OSR looks to the classic role-playing games of the seventies for inspiration, but often with a creativity that puts the originals to shame.

In this book, four prominent creators in the OSR-movement present their versions of what an adventure site in the Forbidden Lands could look like. Patrick Stuart (author of the magnificent *Veins of the Earth*) takes us on a dizzying dimension-hopping ride in *The Spire of Quetzal*, where the adventurers encounter the different personalities of a Demon-Queen in a psychological nightmare of an adventure site that would make Michael Moorcock proud.

Chris McDowall (creator of the acclaimed *Into the Odd*) invites us to a strange building at the top of a cliff, where a particularly dysfunctional family of demons is incarcerated. The *Bright Vault* is an infernal drama that could very well have been the illegitimate love child of Ingmar Bergman and Clive Barker. Relationships are the focal point of Ben Milton's (creator of the brilliant *Maze Rats* RPG) adventure site *Hexenrvald* as well, where five strong women stand in the fore, and wandering corpses cause trouble in an otherwise peaceful location. Last, but not least, Karl Stjernberg (creator of the post-apocalyptic *Rad-Hack*) cranks the pulpometer to the max and treats the adventurers to *The Graveyard of Thunder*, complete with rolling thunder, flesh-eating prehistoric lizards, and cruel orc warriors.

Four authors, four visions of what *Forbidden Lands* can be. It is now your turn to discover these places, so step through the Silver Door and journey to another world!





TYPE OF ADVENTURE SITE: Castle

Wind dies. Pale grass grows in spirals. Lichen forms blurred iridescent sigils on cracked stone. Black trees curl their trunks and crook their branches as if bowing. The Spire is driven through the skin of the world like a pin through curling paper.

With every step toward the tower, it writhe and warps like a hallucination. It seems infinitely tall, like something in a dream. There is one silver door, marked with a pavonated eye in iridescent blue and green.

BACKGROUND

The Sorceress Quetzel was born in the crimson shadow of the Blood Mist as it rose. Child of

Elf and Demon, she was cast into the darkness before she could form words.

She wandered for years, talking to voices on the wind, learning the craft of magic from starlight on water and the entrails of peasants, a beautiful and terrifying nightmare to all she encountered.

Eventually, her mortal heart yearning for society and other worlds, she built her Spire. A tower that twisted through realities. At its top, in a world beyond worlds, she ruled from a crystal throne beneath burning nebulae.

She filled it with strange spirits, exiles, demons, and those from other planes or realities. All lost and rootless like herself.

Even common demons feared to go there,



lest they be enslaved by her incalculable magics. A fear that still holds, even today no demon will willingly approach that place.

Eventually, she tried to tear the fear and conscience from her own soul but could not destroy them. They betrayed her and left her dead, yet undead, on her crystal throne.



LEGEND

"That city burnt to brands and scattered ash,

Now home to wolf and ghost, there she did dwell.

*Twas there, by subtle art and brutal lash,
The Demon-Queen made rule, and ruling, fell,
And falling, slept, yet not, for dead tongues tell;
What dying; dreams, when dreaming;
may awake,*

*And sleeping, live, yet dead. So sleeps Quetzal,
And thirsts for taste her dry tongue cannot slake,
For life and breath, a fast she dreams to break."*



GETTING HERE

The adventurers can find the Spire of Quetzal in many ways. You as the GM are free to use the best hook suitable for your campaign. One suggestion is presented below.

THE DREAM OF THE CROW-MASKED MAN

One night when the adventurers strike camp

under starry skies, they experience something strange: they all dream the same dream.

They are all in a familiar and safe place. A man is there. He wears a crow mask and a feathered robe. He seems familiar, like he could be themselves in disguise. Someone powerful and questionable.

"Please forgive me for contacting you in this manner. Secrecy is of some importance to me.

Word has reached me of your capacities. And – forgive me – greed. I have a proposition; The tower of a Sorcerer. A strange being, rumored to be half elf, half demon. Long since dead. Immensely powerful. And wealthy. Her body, and her treasures lie there still.

Her bodiless spirit dreams there. The presence of a truly powerful – again, forgive me, but not you – sorcerer might fully awaken her, a transformation few would wish to witness. Yet, with my information and your skills, it is possible.

This is my offer: First – silver, to be delivered to you the moment you agree. Second – information to assist you in the endeavor. Third – you may keep everything you find, the tower itself and all its treasures except for one, the only item I desire. The heart of the Sorceress; a Black Gem.

Do you agree to my terms?

If the players do, read the final piece of the dream. If they don't, well, let them continue their travels through the Forbidden Lands and find another adventure for now.

Very well! A few hours' journey to the north you will find a red, snail-shaped rock. Dig five feet down – you will find your payment. Second – the Sorceress put her power into her tools. A knife,





a bird, a ring, all silver, seemingly only trinkets. Those who hold these trinkets will have mastery over her spirit, and be able to destroy her.

When it is done, I shall know, and come to you.

GAMEMASTER'S NOTE. Everything about this dream is false. There is no Crow-Masked man. The whole thing is an illusion created by the sleeping mind of Quetzal to get adventurers to visit her tower and touch her heart.



LOCATIONS

The most important locations at the Spire of Quetzal are described below.

I. THE TOWER

A tower. Reaching toward the cloudy sky, almost touching it. The needle-like structure shifts in and out of focus as you stare at its magnificence. A vibrating hum can be felt in the ground before it. Set into the tower's base before you: a silver door, a giant eye etched onto its surface. It stares at you.

With every step toward the tower, it writhes and warps like a hallucination. It seems infinitely tall, like something in a dream. There is one silver door, marked with a pavonated eye in iridescent blue and green. The door is not locked.

When the adventurers approach the tower, they notice a red, snail-shaped rock in the ground before it. This is the stone mentioned in the dream.

RUMORS

D6 RUMOR

- 1 An historical reference by a powerful Sorcerer describing going to "the city in the tower" – assumed to be a mistranslation.
- 2 Someone offers the adventurers payment in silver coins marked with a Pavonated Eye (an eye of iridescent blue and green, like a peacock's tail feather), they offer more than they need to, because many locals will refuse to touch the coins, saying "but you can spend them far away."
- 3 A Raven Priest is convinced the locals are secretly worshipping some unknown birdlike entity in disguise as the Raven God.
- 4 Brave sons of the local lord recently set off to find "a woman they saw in a dream." They have not returned.
- 5 A traveler saved from pursuing demons – they warn the adventurers not to approach a desolate tower they came upon by chance.
- 6 The "Ballad of the Lonely Lady" – a story of a woman who decides to never feel shame or fear again, but those emotions become monsters and hunt her in her own home, then burn it down.