

Clean Slate Sanctum

A Quickpix One Page Adventure

Introduction

On my travels I came across a group of pilgrims. They were on their way to the Temple of Spiritual Cleansing to "rid themselves of all otherworldly influences on their soul". I had never heard of the temple nor this ritual, so I decided to join them on a whim.

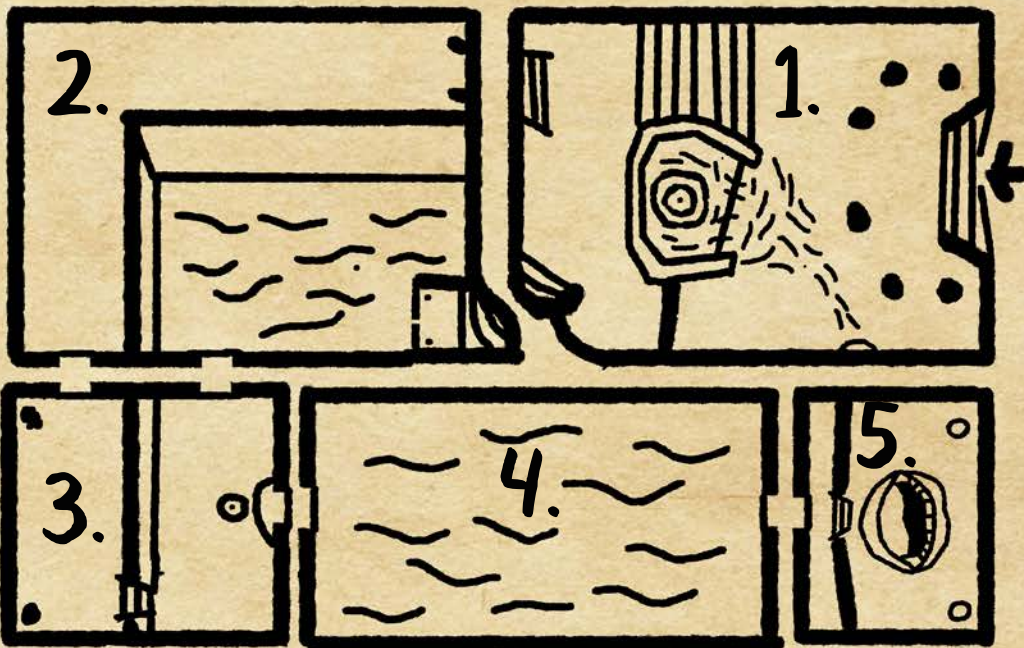
The Entrance

No wonder I had never heard of this temple before. To enter it, the leader of the pilgrims had to cast a long ritual spell in the middle of a forest. The spell created a small stream of glowing water, which we then proceeded to follow for about half a day. Finally, the glowing stream ended at a crack in the ground, which led us to a giant stone portal. Here the group proceeded to undress and leave all their equipment behind. They warned me, that any item that "could hold influence over my soul" could be destroyed by the ritual we were about to attempt. I imagined they were mostly talking about magic items - which is why I left my cloak of billowing behind. However, I foolishly did not relinquish my staff of power. A decision I would come to regret.



Spiritual Cleansing

The entrance hall was a sight to behold. High marble arches framed a delicate fountain in the middle of the hall. Glowing white water flowed from it and spilled over its rim. The soft light paired with the gentle sounds of flowing water immediately put me into high alert - it was way too relaxing to be safe. At the end of the hall I spotted two doors, one in a pale white, one in inky black. My companions started praying and the leader of the group sent their oldest to bathe in the fountain. As soon as he entered the water, tiny black shadows could be seen streaming from his body. They were immediately washed away in the stream of glowing water. The oldest emerged unharmed - his palms glowing in the same pale white as one of the doors. The leader next directed me to the pool. To my dismay, I could see hundreds of black shades emerge from all my small amulets and trinkets. Finally, one giant shadow left my staff of power and I could immediately tell, that its magic had been sealed. I left the pool with the same glowing palms. Apparently, I could now exit through the white door. A third and a fourth pilgrim underwent the same ritual - but after half the group was standing aside with glowing palms, the fountain suddenly stopped flowing. The basin's floor, previously invisible under the glowing water was now revealed to be soot-stained and black. The rest of them darkened their hands with the soot. They directed us to go through the white door while they took the inky black door.



2. Penitance

I and my fellow white-palmed individuals emerged onto a balcony overlooking an inky basin about 30ft. below us. The other half of the group just stepped into this basin, looking confused. However, before we could ponder the purpose of this separation, bodies began to emerge from the inky water. Each of them a looking like a demonic copy of our dark-palmed comrades below. These dark figures immediately started to single-mindedly attack only their real counterparts. In a panic, both the people on the balcony and those below began to attack the creatures in retaliation - but to no avail. Attacks connected, but the dark doppelgangers just kept on going. One of my companions from the balcony even jumped down into the basin below, only to be confronted by a shadow of his own. At the rate the battle was going, everyone below was about to perish. Then I noticed something. The leader of the group below swung his staff in a wide arc and accidentally hit one of his friends. To my surprise, both the real person and its inky counterpart reacted to the hit. Apparently the temple wanted us on the balcony to dish out violent judgement onto those below. I carefully targeted my spells at the real people. Each of my blows should threefold on the dark doppelgangers. The others on the balcony soon caught on and started to pelt their friends with rocks and spells. It did not feel good, but after the sadistic ritual, the shades dispersed and the door on the balcony and below opened and allowed us to move on to the next trial.

4. Collective Shame

Bled dry, exhausted and tired we emerged into a bright chamber that resembled a public bath. The same glowing water we originally saw flow from the fountain in the first chamber was gently lapping against our ankles. Again inky black shadows began to stream from everyone that did not bathe in the fountain. In the back of the room they joined a swirl of massive shadows that had been coalescing there since we entered. Apparently, all of the "otherworldly influences of our soul" from all of our group were brought here. I entered a battle stance, as I feared for the worst. Soon enough, several grotesque monstrosities emerged from the swirling shadows. The old man that had entered the fountain first gasped loudly "my patron" as he saw a demonic figure form from the shadows. I soon joined his gasping, as a vaguely humanoid chimera of all the magical creatures whose fur, teeth, blood and magic I had used in my enchantments and trinkets over the years stepped out of the pool. In its hands it carried an orb of magical power, whose glow felt distinctly like my staff's magic. The temple's purpose then became clear to me: we were either strong enough to literally fight off all the influences over our soul, or we would perish right here. With a desperate battlecry we attacked the horde of demons before us.

The battle was tough. Spells I had used so often against foes were thrown against me. The effect of magic items or trinkets I happened to carry with me were used as effectively by the dark creature as if they had learned under me. One of my companions was battling a depiction of his deity - another his dead martial arts instructor. The temple did not care whether we might regard those influences over our souls as positive or not. It threw all of them against us. After I managed to defeat my dark chimera I was able to help the others and together we drove back the horde of nightmares. The fight ended with a silent clicking sound, as one final door opened in the room's back.

5. Self-Sacrifice

My feeling of triumph was shortlived. The final room was empty - apart from a giant stone mouth carved into the floor. Its gullet leading down into a bottomless black void. A final poem was carved into the wall of the chamber:

"In the end, death holds sway over all; our souls at its beck and call. One last fear, it is near, to let it go, everyone must fall"

At first, even my considerable mind was overwhelmed with panic. Was the entire temple just a death-trap for religious nuts? Luckily, the rational part of my mind soon reinserted itself with one thought: Who would spread the word of this temple, if everyone entering it was doomed to die? I held on to that thought, as I positioned myself over the mouth and took a leap into the darkness.

Rebirth

I must have passed out while falling. The last thing I remembered was a feeling of a massive magical power watching over me. It showed me all of the influences I had sacrificed to the temple: my magic items, my trinkets, some of my spells. I got the feeling, it wanted me to make a choice. Which of these influences would I voluntarily choose to have power over me? I remember grasping for my staff of power - a gift from my mentor. It vanished from my grasp. The next thing I knew, I was lying alone and naked on the cold forest floor. Nearby I found all the things I did not take with me into the temple. Yet, my comrades were nowhere to be found. I spend two days searching for either the temple or its pilgrims before I gave up. Despite feeling anxious over the fate of my companions, I recognized that my mind was more focused than before. The third night after the ordeal, my thoughts idly drifted to my beloved staff and I could feel its power within my grasp. I could use its power, as if it were my own. Apparently, the ritual did more than just rid me of influences - it implanted it directly into my very being. Slightly perturbed but nevertheless excited about this new power, I wandered onwards.

3. Personal Sacrifice

The next room thankfully reunited both groups and allowed us to tend to the numerous wounds we and the dark doppelgangers inflicted. Unfortunately, we soon noticed, that we were stuck. The only door out of the room was blocked by a mystical force. In front of it stood a stone basin. A short poem was carved into it:

"Unburdened are those that choose to share not as tribute, but a gift of care body's strength, spirit's flame one to yield, one cut in twain through the gate, their souls light as air"

The temple was not done with us. I explained to the group, that a collective sacrifice was required. Each of us had to either pour enough blood into the basin to leave us half dead or pump enough magic spells into it to leave our minds half empty. We proceeded to do so - the blood soaking unnaturally fast into the stone, all higher level spells being absorbed as if into another plain. However, it worked. After each of us had given a substantial sacrifice, the door mercifully opened.