

THE MAN FROM BEFORE

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

A humble village enjoys prosperity beyond all reason, due to the fabulous **fire oil** it extracts from a nearby cave system.

Only the village children perform the **harvesting**, a task that leaves many of them marked forever, for the cave is home to a fugitive **giant** and much dangerous magic.

THE GIANT HAND

Water runs in rivulets down the slick walls; below the stone steps, the **mud** is soft and very deep.

A **giant gray hand** as big as a draft horse rests here, sticking out of the mud. It is the hand of **Nibolcus the Giant**.

The hand doesn't move unless touched, spoken to, or otherwise disturbed, but careful observers will see a pulse. The middle two fingers have **tattooed runes** on them, the alphabet recognizable to any student of written magic. They spell 'suh,' a word common to many incantations.

The hand appears to be attached to a buried arm, but it's actually separate. It can see, smell and hear by magical means, and if it needs to can crawl, spider-like, up the walls and ceilings. Its behavior depends entirely on **Nibolcus's mood**. If he speaks, the voice comes from the **mud pool** room.

MUDDY CAVE ENTRANCE

A trickle of water enters the cave system here, leaving the ground soft and sticky with clay-like **mud**. Child-sized **footprints** are everywhere. A small, lost **sandal** is near the entrance.

LICHEN-COVERED CAVE

The walls and ceiling are coated in a fast-growing white lichen. Bare-rock trails have been munched into it by d12 faintly glowing **apocalypse larvae**. The sound of their chewing is audible.

A long, rickety **ladder** leans on a stone column. Below it is a large, bellows-like **syringe** and four wax-sealed **urns**. Two are full of **fire oil**.

CHAMBER OF THE SPHERE

A barrel-sized sphere rests on a shelf of rock. It rests in a shallow depression it has melted into the rock.

Close up, it appears to have been made from millions of slender metal needles, all facing outwards. Many are missing, some have been crushed, bent or melted off; others rendered porous and brittle with acids. Still, a thousand remain. **Approaching the sphere** is very dangerous.

HAND OF KNOWLEDGE

Nibolcus' handprint is pressed into a huge, fired clay **brick**. Sleeping in the handprint allows Nibolcus to pass on some of his arcane knowledge.

Among the **oil gatherers**, this is a rite of passage. Generations of children have etched their names into it.

GRAVE OF THE PRODIGIES

Ninety human **skulls**, adolescents and young children, are carefully arranged in stacks. Each has been carefully painted with pre-Seree **runes** with the name of the deceased and some fond moniker or nickname:

Asab too Brave / Huth Generous / Wusel Cleverflame / Barasa Stoutmost / Thenn most Gifted / Yurli Knewall / Gen Foremost / etc.

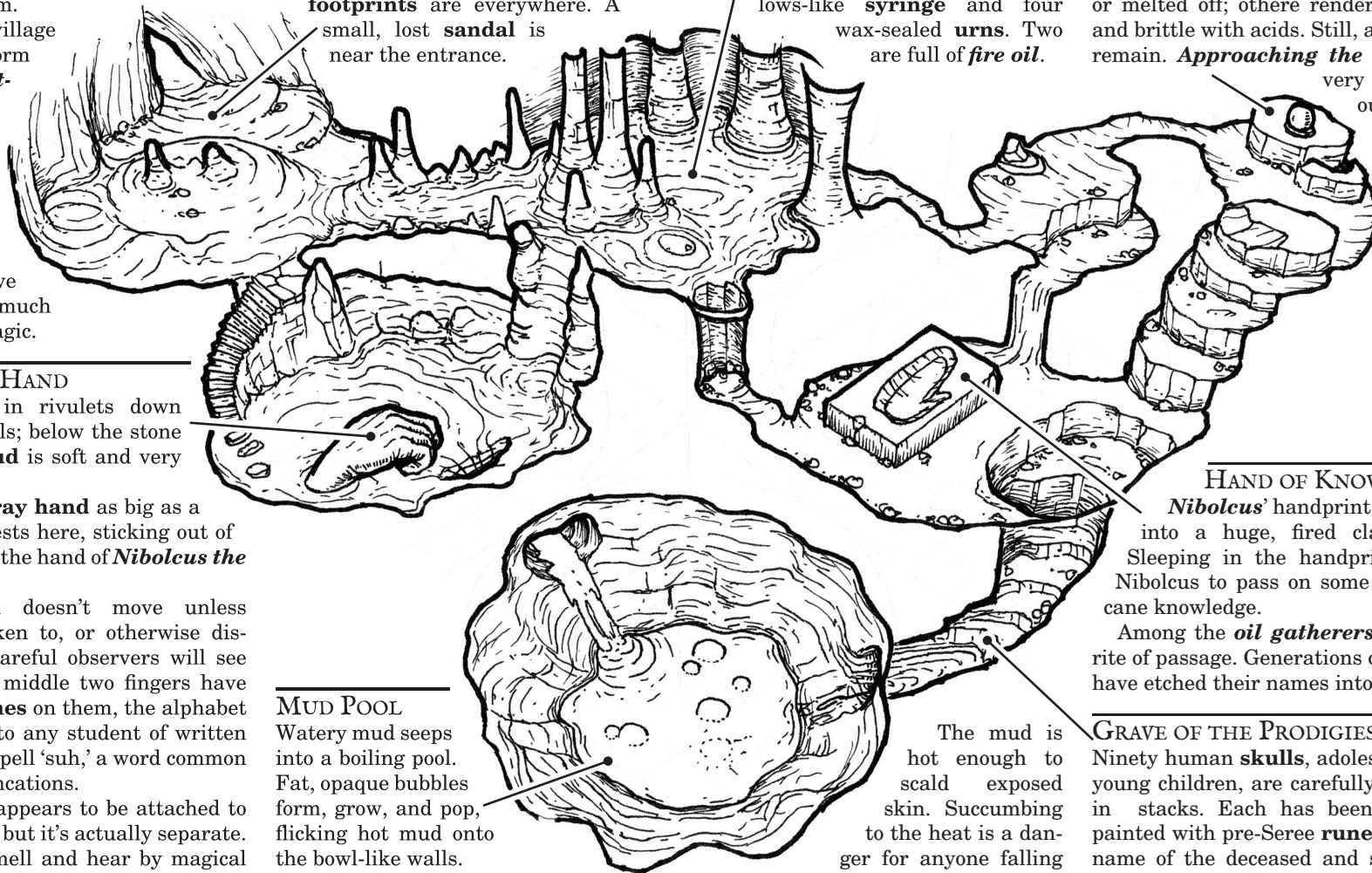
MUD POOL

Watery mud seeps into a boiling pool. Fat, opaque bubbles form, grow, and pop, flicking hot mud onto the bowl-like walls.

The pool is ten paces deep and conceals the separate, animate body parts of **Nibolcus**—his arms, torso, legs, and head. When he speaks, his mouth (and a bit of his nose) surfaces.

The mud is hot enough to scald exposed skin. Succumbing to the heat is a danger for anyone falling in. The mud contains a

mineral that blocks divination and detection magic, which is why **Nibolcus** hides within it. The heat is not natural, and comes from Nibolcus' innate magic.



| d6 | Hourly/Per-Room Encounter |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Oil gatherers (d4) coming or going with heavy urns. 1 in 4 chance a prodigy leads them. |
| 2 | d4 prodigies here to practice |
| 3 | d6 prodigies well rested, armed, and here to fight with the sphere |
| 4 | Injured apocalypse larva , dripping flaming oil and threatening to explode |
| 5 | Nibolcus ' left hand having a quick look around |
| 6 | Grieving parent from the village, come to lament / find a gatherer lost to fire / a prodigy killed by the sphere |

THE OIL GATHERERS

A group of twelve children from the village knows how to **extract fire oil** from the **apocalypse larvae**. They take this duty and the **harvesting** procedures very seriously, as mistakes can be lethal. The presence of adults will alarm them, for they worry that it will activate the **sphere**.

THE PRODIGIES

When gatherers turn thirteen, **Nibolcus** makes them an offer: if they will help him fight against 'cruel Panur', he teaches them magic. Each knows a handful of **war spells**: invisibility, stonegrip, blasting gaze, cyclone shield.

Prodigies are loyal to **Nibolcus**, but all are scarred, physically and mentally, from their fights with the **sphere**.

When they reach adulthood, Nibolcus banishes them from the cave (for their own safety). Few sleep soundly.

APOCALYPSE LARVAE

These fat, white grubs are native to the deep places. As they mature, they bloat with **fire oil**, their translucent, sac-like

bodies sloshing with it. They are slow and passive, but if poked they burst, splashing their lifetime's collection of **fire oil** on everyone nearby.



FIRE OIL

This extremely flammable oil must be kept in stoppered containers. If exposed to the air, it evaporates rapidly, forming an invisible **cloud**. After d3 minutes, the invisible cloud self-ignites as a **blue fireball**, splashing any remaining liquid oil everywhere.

Fire oil is prized by miners for its potency, excellent light, and the fact that it is self-lighting. A lamp filled with fire oil lights itself with a pop as soon as the wick is exposed, and will yield light for a full day. Metal lamps are preferred!

HARVESTING FIRE OIL

Nibolcus has taught the oil gatherers how to extract oil from the larva using a sharpened bellows syringe. Basting the tip in numbwort paste prevents the larva from exploding, and the wounds are small enough not to leak afterwards. The extracted oil is then injected into urns sealed with wax, and taken away.

NIBOLCUS THE GIANT

The Seree had powerful allies in their war against the gods. Among them were gray giants, first people of the earth, skilled in magic and crafty science.

Like the Seree, nothing remains of them but ash—as far as he knows, Nibolcus, Archmage of Firevault, is the last of his kind. He hides here, unable to use his magic or re-assemble his body for fear of awakening the **sphere**.

He has memorized a library's worth of lost natural philosophy, and knows dozens of incantations and rituals. Within his chest he holds the souls of four friends recovered from the battlefield, awaiting reincarnation.

Sorgite **sigils** cover his arms and neck, but scoffs at demon worship, considering Sorg the Devourer (and indeed, all Powers) a mere 'natural force'.

APPROACHING THE SPHERE

The sphere of needles is an autonomous weapon, a remnant of the war between the Seree sorcerers and the Powers of heaven and earth. It came here in pursuit of Nibolcus, and waits for any sign of him.

It was fashioned by the demigod Panur in his war aspect, and it **weaponizes its victims' memories** against them. When it spies a target, it fires one or more of its **needles** with unerring accuracy. If they strike, they extract a victim's memory and materialize it as a violently aggressive **memory horror**.

MEMORY HORRORS

Memory horrors take the form of childhood rivals, enemies or bullies; the last truly dangerous opponent faced; an ally or loved one turned to a murderous rage; a parent; a deceased relative or beloved pet crawling from the ground.

The sphere is damaged and half blind; its response is now only proportional to age and magical ability. The

| d4 | Nibolcus's Mood |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Rageful—angry that intruders might disturb the sphere or harm the children |
| 2 | Haughty—will insist on gifts to honor an "unrivaled sorcerer" |
| 3 | Needy—desperately lonely for worldly conversation, he offers anything he has to win friends |
| 4 | Guilty—inconsolably distraught over the harm he has brought to the children over the years. |

older and more magical its target, the more needles it fires. It ignores children, except for **prodigies**, whom it shoots with one or two needles. Their horrors have the strength of angry drunks. Against **adults**, it fires d6 needles. The resulting horrors are as strong as gorillas. **Warriors** face d12 needles and horrors with fire-breathing, shadow form or regeneration. **Sorcerers** get d20. Their horrors are rhino strong, telekinetic, and hurl lightning.

NEEDLE BY NEEDLE

Trapped here, Nibolcus is using the prodigies to deplete the sphere. Each month, he sends one to trigger it. Three others lie in wait to ambush and destroy the resulting horror. He has trained them well, and they nearly always win.

After a hundred years of this, Nibolcus can taste freedom.

If, however, the sphere somehow locates him, it fires all of its needles. This unleashes a four-headed **Sorgite dragon** made of Nibolcus' long-dead family, whose merest gaze causes internal bleeding. The dragon will kill Nibolcus, and then everything else.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES