

THE MOUTH OF SPRING

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

A humble shrine to the powers of spring conceals an elaborate system of underwater caverns. To the *Wives of Spring*, a secret order, it represents a powerful initiatory journey, and a repository of magical resources.

Locally, strong women are said to be “from the mouth of spring”, though only the *Wives* know the origin and true meaning of the phrase.

SHRINE OF SPRING

The out-of-the-way shrine's few visitors have etched a path in the mossy steps. The shrine walls are so mossy that it feels like a humid, green cave. The thunderous **splashing** of water into the brimming pool makes conversation difficult. A steady **trickle** overflows the pool and flows down the shrine steps.

SHRINEKEEPERS

Two elderly, half-deaf **shrinekeepers** stay bundled against the damp, chattering happily about news of the day in sign language. They beg coin ‘for spring’. This, they spend on meat, which they cut up on the stone **altar** and then throw into the pool to be washed down to the **malak**.

If the visitors attempt to enter the caverns, the shrinekeepers will not stop them—they believe the caverns will sort out intruders. Nevertheless, when they can, they send word to the *wives*. d6 will arrive in d8 hours, to observe who emerges from the **mouth**, their motives, and in what state they are in.

THE SUPPLICANT'S GATE

A huge, metal **sleeve** hangs from a counterweighted chain. The outside is etched with a stylized, but detailed **map** of the shrine and caverns. If lowered fully, the sleeve blocks the pool's drain, and the **water levels** begin to drop in the caverns.

VAULT OYSTERS

This round chamber drains in the second half hour, leaving an **island** in a pool of sand-clouded water. The huge **oysters** there will open if their shells are scratched gently. Inside, each has a **glowing pearl** that throws a soft, blue light. Inside them are also:

Crab-climb oil: chitinous legs sprout from the drinker's back

Vexing arrows (4): rotate constantly; will drill to the heart of large targets. Everything within the oysters is covered in fine, pearlescent whorls.

THE WATER LEVELS

Normally, the caverns (shown drained) are full of water. When the gate is lowered into the pool, it blocks the flow down to the caverns. The pool then overflows, and water sluices down the steps of the shrine. The caverns slowly drain, emptying in about eight hours. If the gate is lifted, a **torrent** of water cascades in to refill the cavern. White water rushes over slippery floors, and the vertical shafts become crashing waterfalls. Moving upstream is extremely difficult until the caverns refill fully, which takes about two days.

THE EMPTY DANCERS

Drains in the third half-hour. Various styled **outfits** sway silently, facing away. The **pool of disguise** reflects a succession of unfamiliar faces. Touching one permanently swaps your appearance with its; the appropriate outfit then sways forth to dress you. Any clothes left here dance with the others.

STAIRS OF GEBENN

Tightly packed **giant mussels** cling to these steps, which drain over hour three. The mussels' edges are knife-sharp, making progress tricky. Tiny sightless **starfish** ask endless questions in squeaky voices.

POOL OF WIVES BEFORE

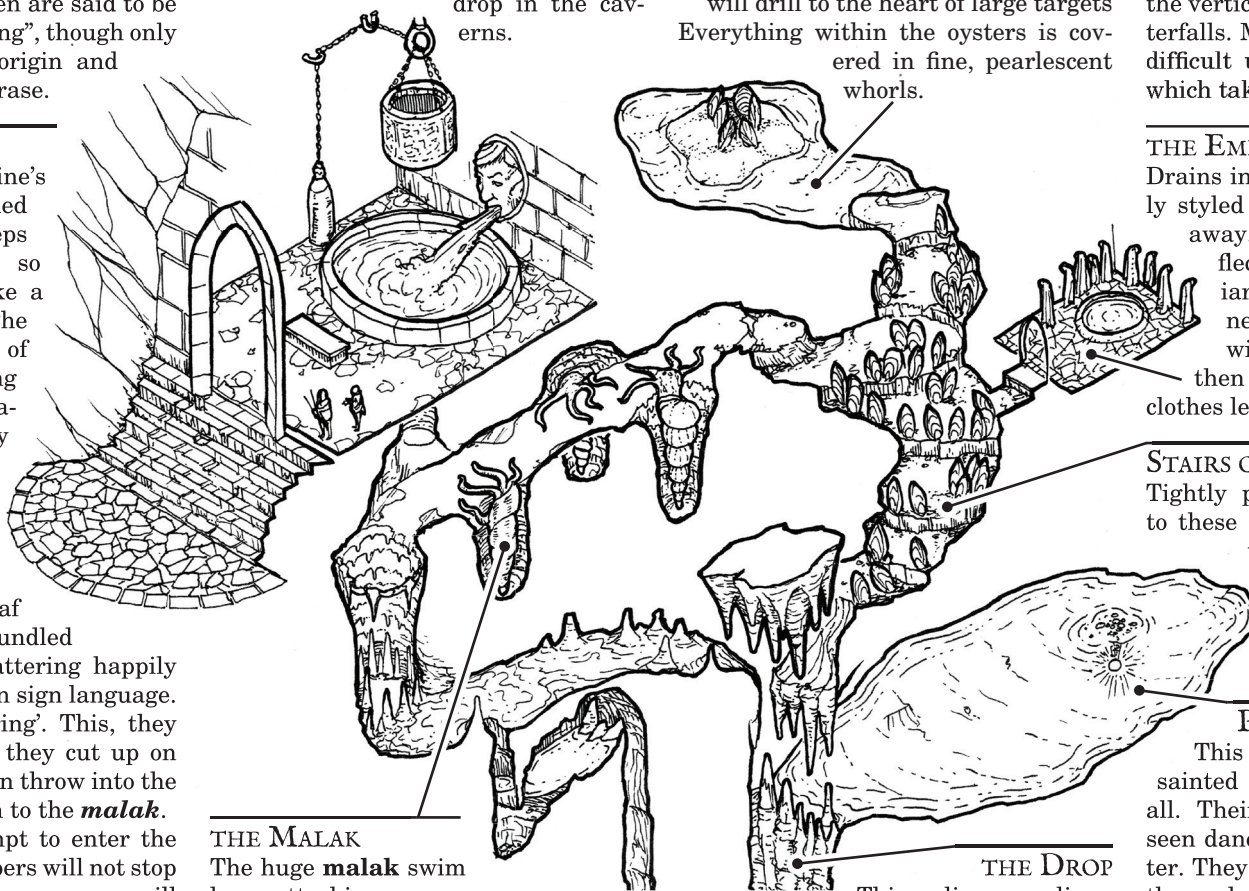
This icy pool holds the **bones** of sainted wives of spring, hundreds in all. Their **wraith**-like forms can be seen dancing on the surface of the water. They will ‘bless’ women who enter the pool: their touch causes a terror so acute it can cause heart attack, permanent or partial paralysis of a limb or the face. Anyone who endures it never suffers fear again, and causes fear in fear-causing beings.

THE DROP

This slippery, lime-stone shaft drains during hour four. When drained, a risky, forty-pace dive down to the **central pool** is possible. (Falling climbers tend to hit the walls and land spinning.)

THE MALAK

The huge **malak** swim here, attacking any motion with their tentacles and sharp beaks. When the hall drains (in a quarter hour), they retreat to their holes, probing the oily puddles for prey. The cautious can avoid them easily.



THE LOCUS OF POWER

The **Pool of Wives Before** is a locus of power strong enough that sensitives can feel it from many leagues away. Neophyte wizards sometimes enter the caverns, hoping to use it for their own means. This serves the wraiths, who see greedy wizards that come here as useful—the grit that begins a pearl.

MAKESHIFT SANCTUM

The upper cavern has been converted into a crude, underwater sanctum. It drains in hour five.

A **glowing sigil** etched on the floor provides a pale light. It is a catalyst for liminal insights, and anyone within its pattern hears fragments of magic rituals, whispered by the wraiths.

Ulthis has etched **six stone tablets** with the rituals they have pieced together here. The rest are fragmentary.

Goldsong: nearby gold produces a high-pitched whine

Blade of Insight: cast upon a knife, when it injures a victim, the wielder receives guidance toward their goal

Stonecloak: causes fabric to look like natural stone

Icepenny: a tossed coin freezes a barrel's quantity of water

Voidmark: touch a spot; it forever appears as a tiny star when eyes are closed

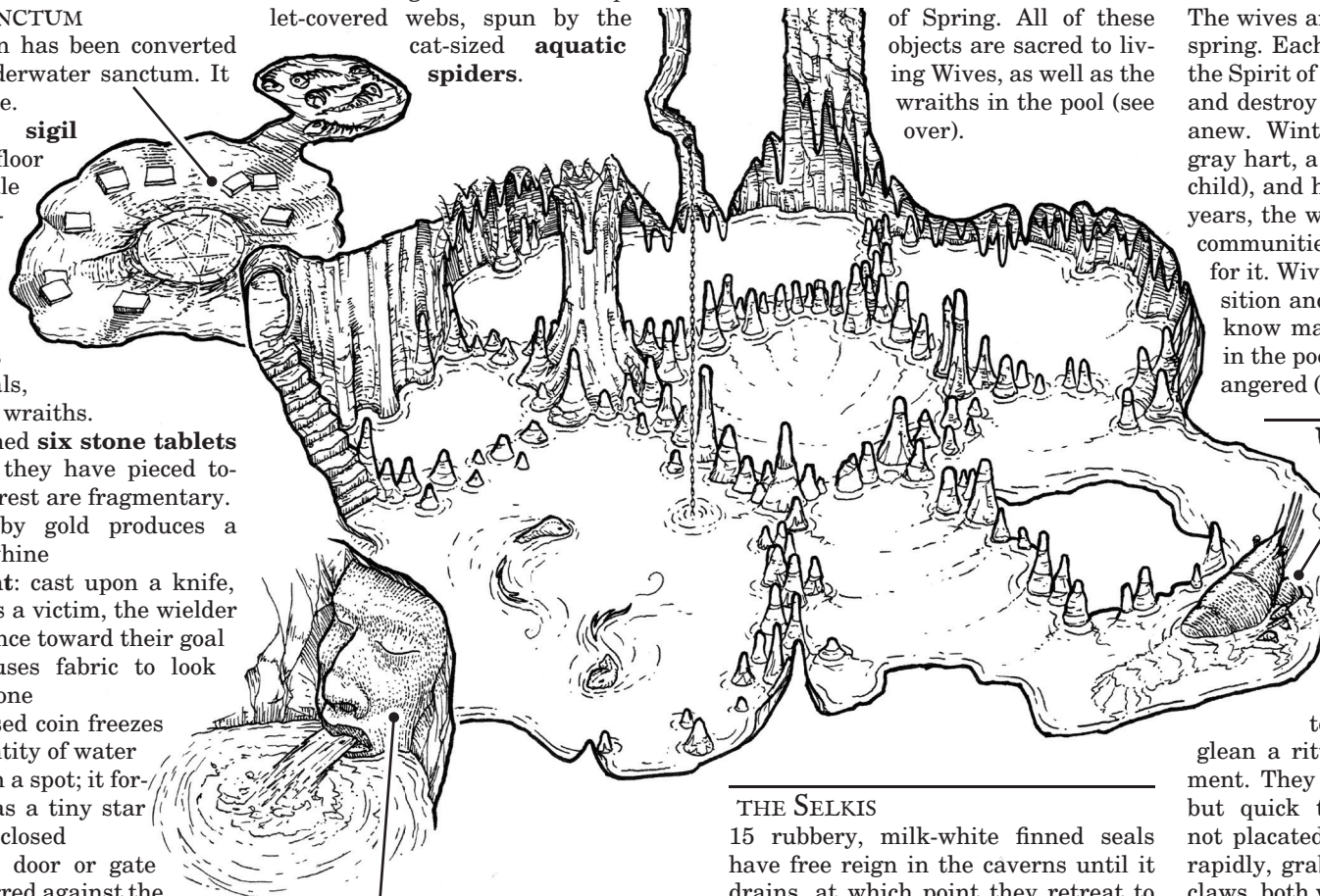
Siege of Dis: a door or gate specifically barred against the caster bursts into flame

Somewhere on each tablet is a **burning eyes rune**, added by **Ulthis**. Anyone reading it squirts flaming oil from their eyes. This tends to splash around and cause great harm.

GREAT CAVERN

The great cavern is dark, save for glimmers of light from the sanctum. In hour five, it is an expanding labyrinth between ceiling stalactites whose floor is ink-black water. In hours six and seven it is a huge, dark pond; in hour eight, stalagmites poke like glistening teeth through **the shallows**.

The ceiling is a mass of drop-let-covered webs, spun by the cat-sized **aquatic spiders**.



THE MOUTH OF SPRING

Water exits the cavern in an unceasing, vigorous flow, splashing into a series of cliff-side sea caves (not shown) and then out to the sea. If any **wives** have arrived, they will be here in boats.

THE SHALLOWS

When the great cavern drains, the five stalactite-rimmed pools around the edge are only waist deep. The bottom crunches with **debris**: fallen stalactite and malak shells discarded by the selkis. Within it can be found **remnants** of failed initiates (and foolhardy explorers): skulls, bones, knives, brass or silver icons of the Face of Spring. All of these objects are sacred to living Wives, as well as the wraiths in the pool (see over).

THE SELKIS

15 rubbery, milk-white finned seals have free reign in the caverns until it drains, at which point they retreat to the shallows. They are intelligent and sociable, and enjoy frolicking, hunting malak, or taunting **Ulthis** (too slow to catch them). They are curious, but grow aggressive if neither entertained nor fed by swimming visitors.

d6 Cavern Encounters

1-2	Immature malak, dog-sized
3	d3 giant aquatic spiders
4	A lost, swaying outfit of clothes
5	d6 Selkis
6	Ulthis <i>Craw-Wizard</i>

THE WIVES OF SPRING

The wives are a secret cult, devotees of spring. Each year, their task is to find the Spirit of Winter (not described here) and destroy it so that spring can come anew. Winter can take any form (a gray hart, a noble, a tree, a silver-eyed child), and has strange allies. Over the years, the wives have infiltrated many communities, all the better to watch for it. Wives are selected for their position and skills. All can fight; some know magic. All have been blessed in the pool, and so **cause fear** when angered (in groups of three or more).

ULTHIS CRAW-WIZARD

Overuse of wraith-given magic has transformed poor Ulthis into a massive crawdad, too large to leave. Once per day they can take the form of a large, barnacle-encrusted man. Ulthis visits the sanctum from time to time, hoping (in vain) to glean a ritual to undo their predicament. They are depressed and torpid, but quick to anger once moving—if not placated or flattered. They scuttle rapidly, grabbing with their two great claws, both with a permanent **blade of insight** effect upon them.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES