

Tales Of The Unknown
Volume I



The
**Bard's
Tale**

Clue Book



riend,

Long have I awaited thy coming of age. Our town of Skara Brae doth slowly wither under the cursed sorcery of Mangar, spawn of demons. Many hath challenged his power, only to encounter their doom.

One man didst nearly succeed. Lord Garrick, the viscount of our sister city Hamelon, became imprisoned here through Mangar's evil spell of winter. He failed, but in his failure lies the way to thy victory. Lord Garrick did keepeth a journal, and Mangar is either unaware of its existence, or believes it to have perished along with the impudent viscount. But the tome didst survive, and came into my keeping.

Thou art a brave warrior in thy fashion, and a scholar passing fair. Yet if thou wouldst accept this quest thou hast need of assistance. Look to the following pages for further counsel and aid.

The path thou must follow doth with danger abound. Go, and take with thee the journal of a brave knight, and the prayers of an old man.

Pellis

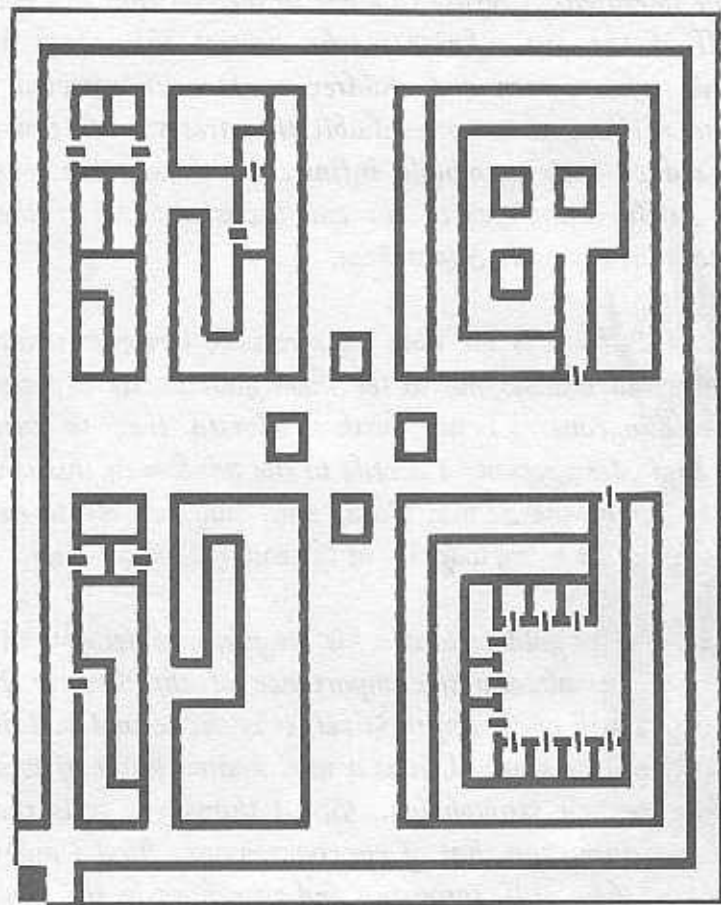


Skara Brae

It isn't to be tolerated! I refuse to kneel to the evil that has made its home in Skara Brae. All of the brave knights who protect this town have vanished, leaving frightened serfs, women and children to face unprotected the hordes of strange beasts and ruffians that now inhabit the streets. My brave party and I can do little to reduce their seemingly infinite numbers. We must destroy the wizard Mangar, surely the source of the evil invasion, and of the ungodly and impenetrable winter that imprisons Skara Brae.

My old friend Pellis tells me that my servants, however valiant, are yet no match for Mangar, and advises me to let them gain battle experience before we enter any of the dungeons. I am further advised that to enter a dungeon prematurely is to court destruction. I accede to the wisdom of this counsel, and will seek out the innkeeper of the Scarlet Bard, who may be able to assist me in my quest. The inn is convenient to my lodgings at the end of Rakfir Street.

This barkeep requires gold to loosen his tongue, and delights in pouring forth cryptic drivel. I knew already the importance of the Review Board, and its location. Journeying south on Trumpet Street, it is the second building on the left. As for gates that cannot be stormed, it is a well known habit of wise men to have concealed entrances to their strongholds. But I thank the gods that my taste in drink is of a higher nature than that of my companions. Had I ordered ale instead of wine we would be there still, carousing and wenching in the Inn until Mangar himself came to join us. But the barkeep is overworked, and sent me down into the cellar after my own wine. No mere cache of fine drink in dusty bottles and skins in this cellar — 'tis rather an extensive maze of corridors oozing niter and slime. We will return with our gear, and the remainder of our party.



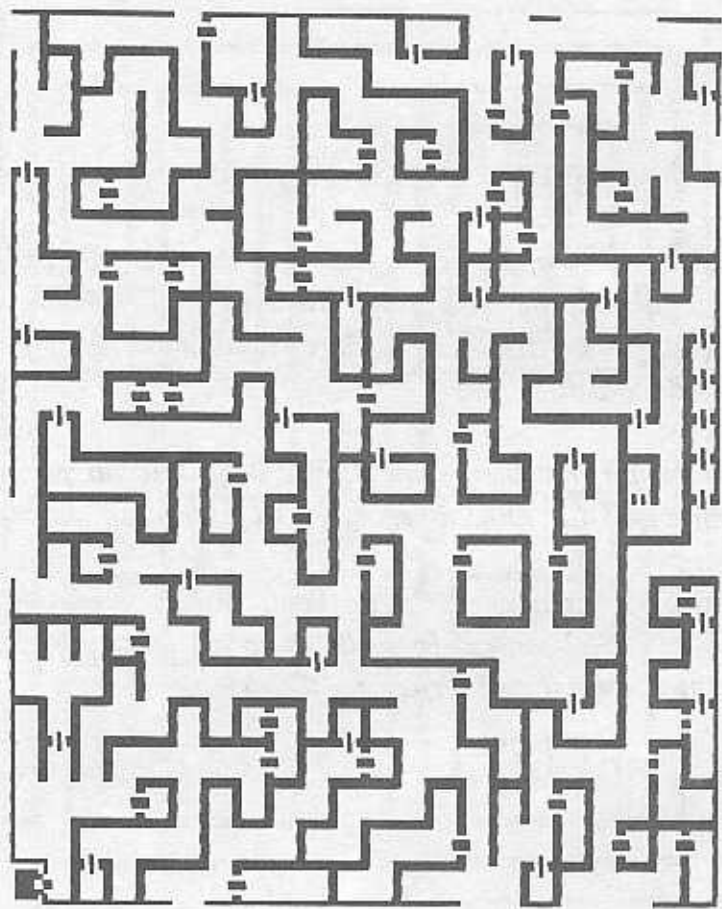
The Wine Cellar

The Wine Cellar

Ah, the rising stench of blood mingles with the cries of our fallen foes! We were set on immediately by groups of dwarves and kobolds, and acquitted ourselves with honor. It is difficult to put pen to vellum, the only illumination being that from enchanted weapons.

One of our knights has been slain by mad dogs, but our party continues in a sobered state, our blood lust diminished. We will exact full recompense, Mangar!

There is a set of descending stairs in the northwest section of the cellar. The magician's spell "Scry Site" caused the walls to speak, revealing to us our location in the labyrinth. Here we rest, and prepare for the morrow.



The Sewer

The Sewer

We are in a muck-drenched stinking sewer, and the beasts and blackguards who attack us here are too numerous to be described. Here we gain much wealth, and our skills are honed like fine steel blades. As we explore, we discover strange writings on the walls of this foul hole. I will record them faithfully here — their value will perhaps become clear later in our travels.

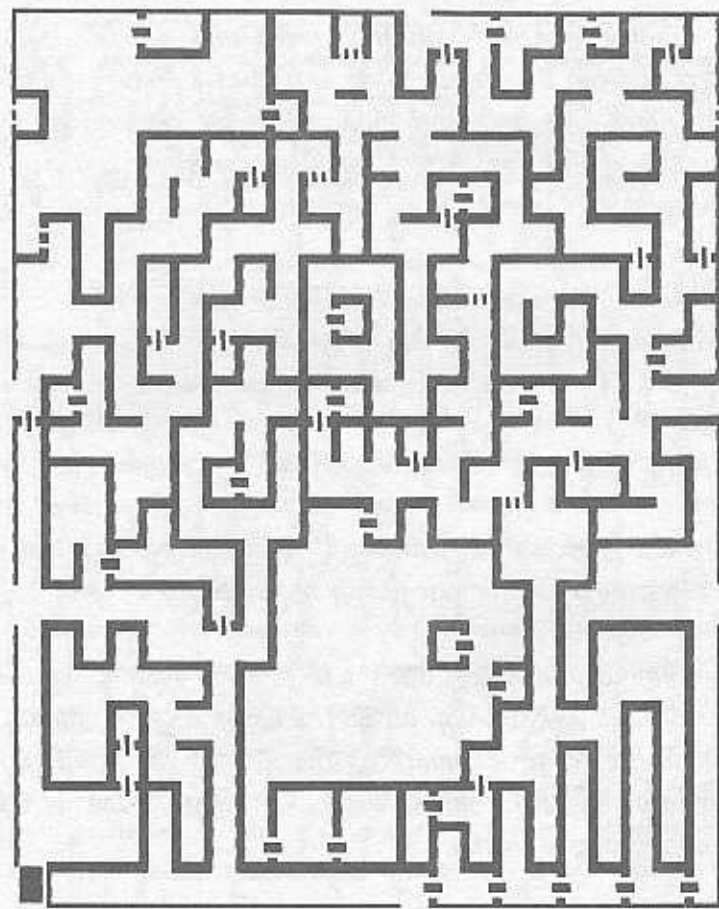
'Pass the light at night.' A cryptic verse indeed. This sewer conveys shadow messages, as does the fat barkeep above.

'IRXIM DLSMET DAEM.' I am no scholar, but neither am I a stranger to lore and letters. I can perceive no sense here.

'Golems are made of stone.' Is this meant to lighten our hearts against a fear of encountering a golem made from rice pudding?

This sewer abounds with sorcerer's tricks. We were teleported to different locations and spun about unknowing, all at the whim of foul magic. I am told that we are indeed fortunate to have among us the last of the great sage-sorcerers, for he can divine our location at all times, and has even provided us with rough maps of each wretched dungeon as we enter it.

We have found our way through devil darkness that no spell or flame can penetrate. There is a stairway in the midst of this darkness, leading down into further stench and blackness.



Sewer, Level Two

Sewer, Level Two

Cunning and deadly traps have claimed the lives of two gallant paladins. We have been constantly besieged since our entry into this noisome pit, and have borne many injuries. Corfid op Orfin, our noble bard, stepped into a ray of light, burning both his hands and one side of his body. I feel responsible, for now the meaning of the inscription, 'Pass the light at night' becomes clear. We waited until the setting of the sun and the beam faded, allowing us to pass unharmed. Corfid will, under the protection of two warriors, retire from these dungeons to seek aid for his injuries.

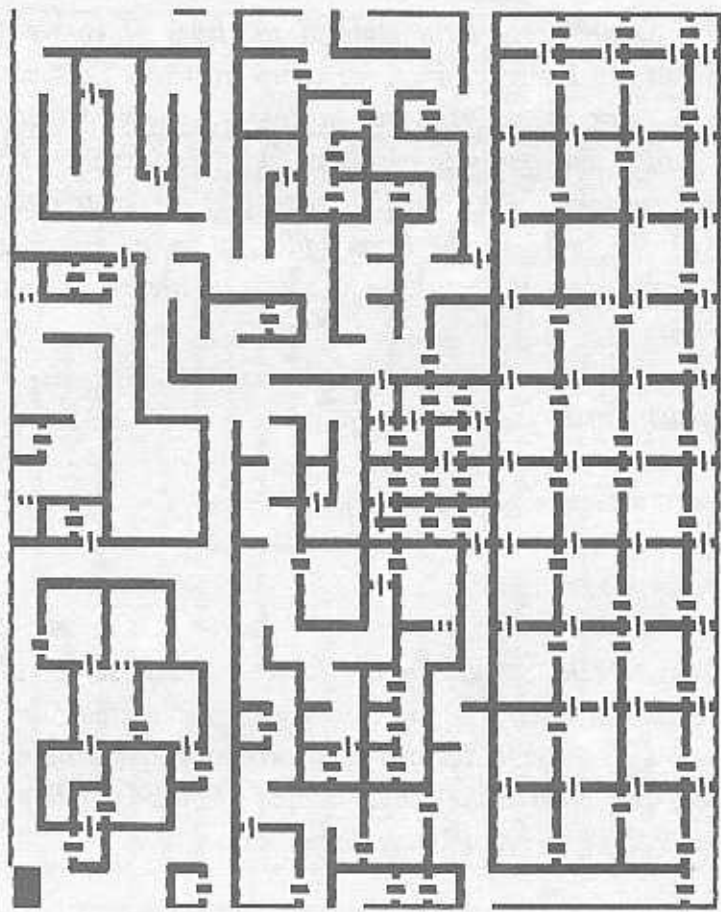
There are scrawled messages here:

'Flee not what is beyond understanding.'

'Thor is the greatest son of Odin.'

We encountered filthy sorcery in the form of a vile set of disembodied lips which speak to us these words; "Know this, that a man called Tarjan, thought by many to be insane, had through wizardry powers proclaimed himself a god. His image is locked in stone until made whole again." I forbade our magician to take the obscene thing with us, as it would serve no purpose.

The only apparent means to descend to the level below is through the use of portals that reek of sorcery. The magician will levitate our party down through the portal.



Sewer, Level Three

Sewer, Level Three

More inscriptions:

'The hand of time writes and cannot erase.'

'Seek the snare from behind the scenes.'

There is an evil place here at mid-point along the eastern wall that we must eschew as if 'twere the Plague. Men pass and vanish, condemned to haunt an endless void till life itself begins anew. Ghaklah, our magician, scryed it as he meditated, proving yet again his usefulness.

We came upon a long set of stairs continuing on to further upward passages, but battle and trickery have rendered us too weary to go on. We will return to the light, and Skara Brae.



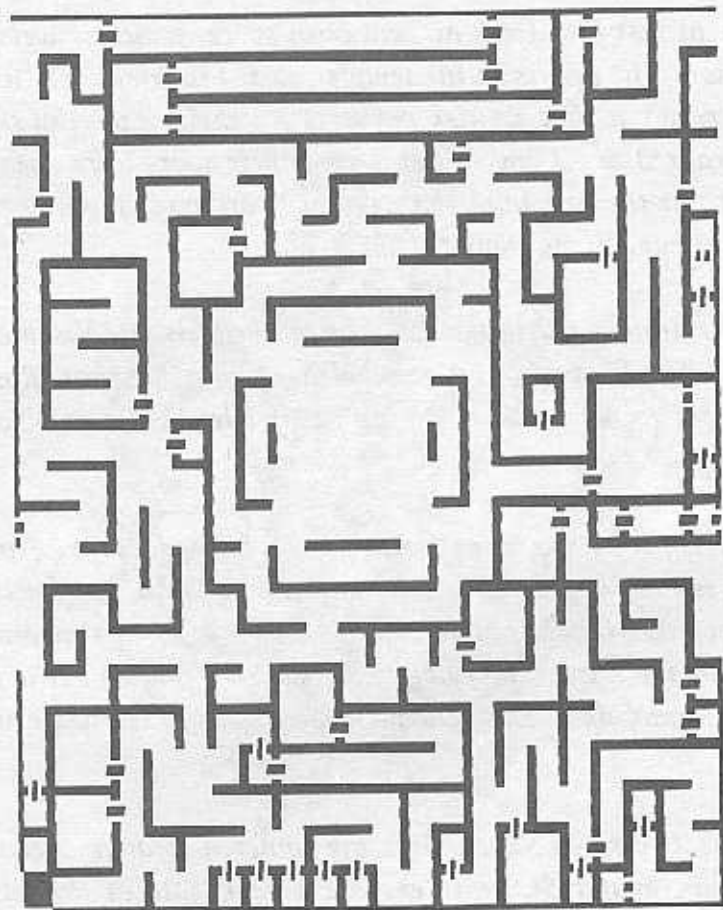
Skara Brae

We emerge at last into fresh air and open space, which is welcome, and into night, which is not. The priests in the temple exacted usurious fees to attend to our wounded. They care not that we risk our lives for their unworthy skins as well as for the rest of Skara Brae. I am grateful that their doors were open to us, e'en at night. Such was not the case with the Review Board and Garth's equipment shop, no matter how we cursed and pounded the doors.

'Twas a fair dawn. Garth has deigned to open his establishment, as has the Review Board. Furthermore, we were pleased to find that Roscoe's Energy Emporium was still to be found at the corner of Grey Knife and Serpent Streets, northwest of the Gran Plaz.

Pellis tells me that we were fortunate to have departed from the sewers when we did — to have continued would have meant our doom, for those stairs are the secret entrance to Mangar's courtyard. He extracted this information from a captured minion of the wizard's. I hope the gods will forgive Pellis the method he used to gain this knowledge. Even the permissive gods of learned men do not smile upon torture.

Some of the streets of Skara Brae are under a strange enchantment. We travelled south on Sinister Street to explore a back gate of the city, and found ourselves endlessly walking past silent houses, through eerie stillness in which no human stirred, no bird uttered forth the slightest song. We hastily returned to our lodgings, to prepare for our next task, to challenge the Mad God in his lair.



The Temple Of The Mad God

The Temple Of The Mad God

We blundered for a day, wasting precious time trying to gain admittance to the temple before I realized that we had been given an important clue in the sewers. The message spoken by the disembodied lips! No sooner had I uttered the name than we found ourselves in a catacomb. Dark and twisting tunnels lay before us like a maze of hardened entrails, and human bones reached out from the hard-packed earth like ghastly pallid fingers. I wish myself back in my castle at Hamelon. We move on.

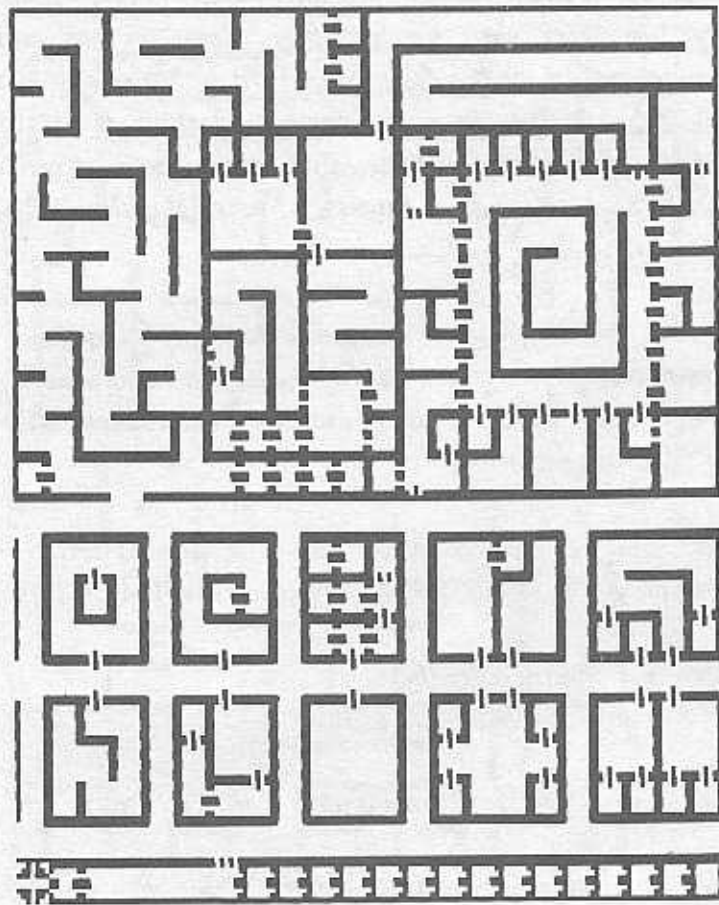
Night and day flow together. We battle constantly endless numbers of the Devil's horde, undead creatures vomited from the depths of Hell. Weapons fall from our nerveless fingers, the screams of our slain comrades filling our ears until we who remain can bear no more.

And now a message, scrawled in blood. 'The ancient witch King yet lives. Are there greater terrors yet to be encountered? Etched into the wall we find this:

*'Fifteen doors east and thou art there,
On souls they feast in the Dark One's lair.'*

Hope trickles from us like blood from a wound that refuses to heal.

We have found a stairway leading down. Three men have bolted in panic, mindless dread overtaking their senses. Eight remain — myself, Corfid the Bard, Ghaklah the magician, Isli the paladin, Soriac the archmage, and three serf warriors. We go forward, not through courage, but because the thought of going back the way we have come cannot be borne.



Catacombs, Level Two

Catacombs, Level Two

Insane Tarjan, who in his beneficence shares his malady with us all! We crawl forward, attacked at every turn, sustaining many injuries from sorcerer's tricks.

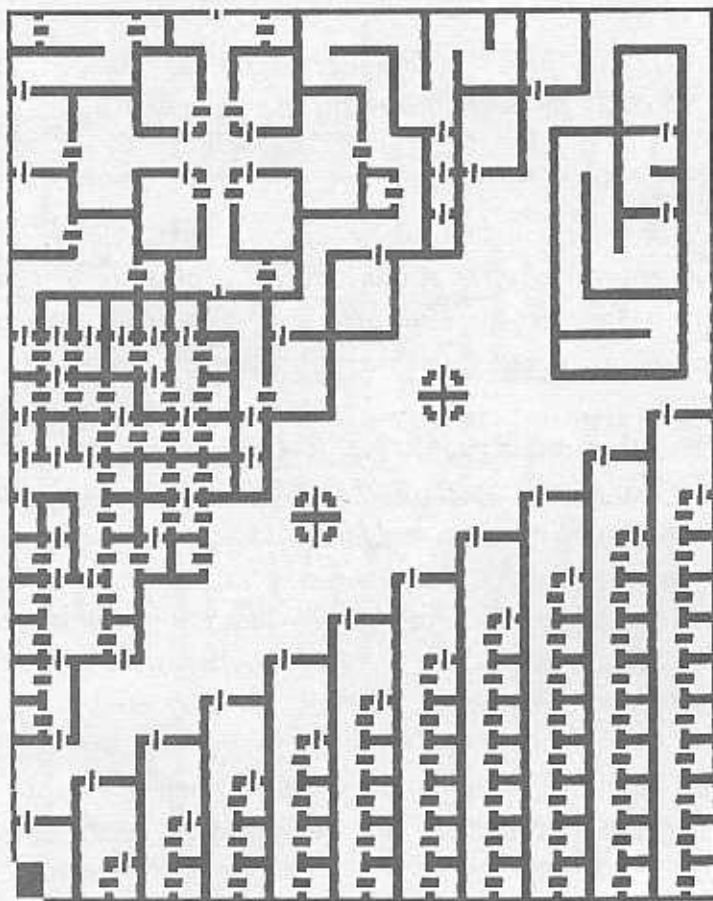
There are places here where magic dies – would that we could battle Mangar in one of those regions! An inscription warns us to beware of Bashar Kavilor, High Priest, but the warning affects us but little. We are fey, and the blood lust lies heavy on us. Come, Priest Kavilor, we await thee. Lay on!

The High Priest proved a mighty foe, and one of our warriors lies dead. We dispatched the dragon that guarded Bashar Kavilor's treasure and, though such glitter means little to us now, we plundered his horde.

A bodiless voice uttered these words: 'To the tower fly, a mad one die, once lost the eye.' Loss of an eye (or both) would be a gift from the gods in this hideous place!

Ghaklah has scryed a place of danger here where men stay frozen in time with no chance of escape. It is to the extreme southwest of the contorted tomb- we will avoid the area.

We descend the stairs in the southeast quadrant of these catacombs.



Catacombs, Level Three

Catacombs, Level Three

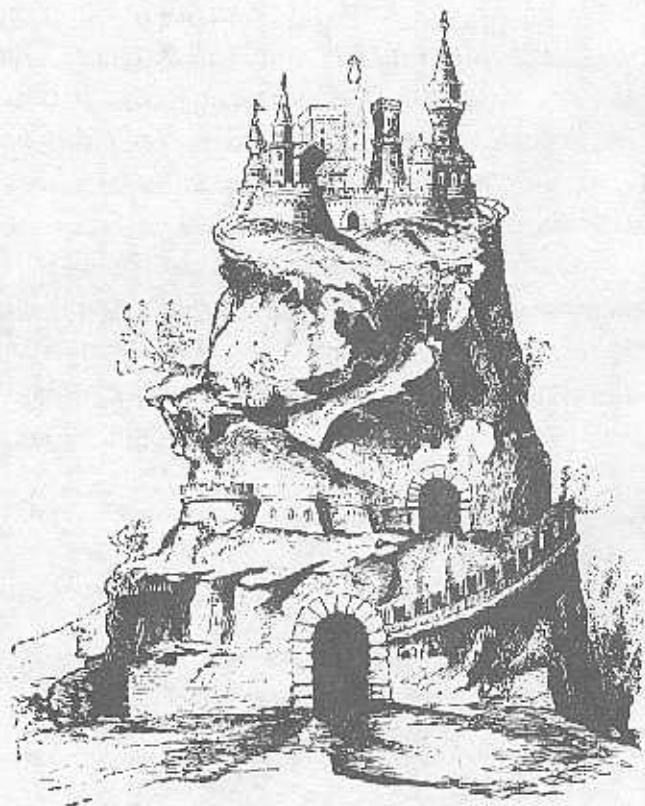
We have become accustomed to the legions of undead, and doing battle with them holds no special terror. While exploring the north wall, we stumbled by chance into the chamber of King Aildrek. It was as if we expected to meet him, having been warned of "the dead witch king's" existence. But to say that he lives! Evil had bound his long dead sinews together, and it was with savage glee that we assigned him to Hell. We found in his possession a bauble made in the likeness of an eye. Verily, this must be the eye of which we were told on the previous level, and is of some hidden import. Soriac will pocket the trinket.

Teleportation magic enabled us to leave the witch king's locked chambers.

There are no lower levels here. We avoided a large dragon, and discovered another cryptic message: "Seek the Mad God's stoney self in Harkyn's domain."

We will return to the town.

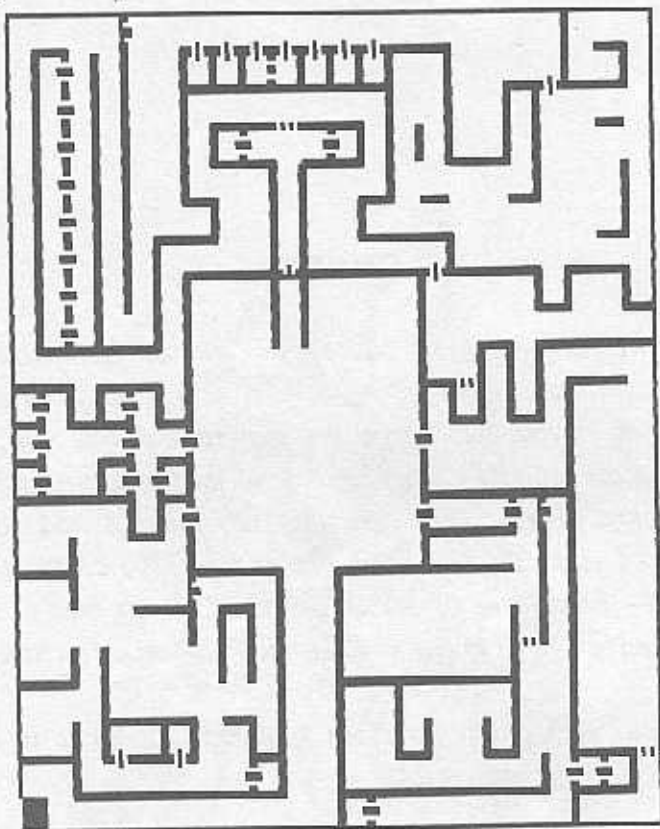




Skara Brae

Our spirits are healed by the feel of sunlight on our faces. Rumor of our quest has spread through Skara Brae like a fire through the dry grasses of summer. Many seek to join our party, yet our number has not greatly increased. We separate the wheat from the chaff, and send packing those who lust after gold and not freedom, and thieves and assassins who would add to their purses by pillaging a murdered comrade. I have been advised to allow at least one rogue to accompany us — he will be of use in disarming traps and detecting danger. I give my reluctant consent. One of our number will keep watch on him at all times.

Our next task will be the invasion of Harkyn's castle in northwest Skara Brae.



Harkyn's Castle

At last we breached the defenses and entered the castle from the courtyard on the east wall. The guardians were fierce fighters, but we proved the stronger.

A jabberwock! Such a magnificent beast — surely the last of its kind. We skirt its lair with caution, and move on.

I notice from the maps provided me by Ghaklah that all the underground complexes in Skara Brae are roughly of a size. Was Skara Brae perchance built over the ruins of an ancient single complex, the like of which does not now exist, save in the minds of men?

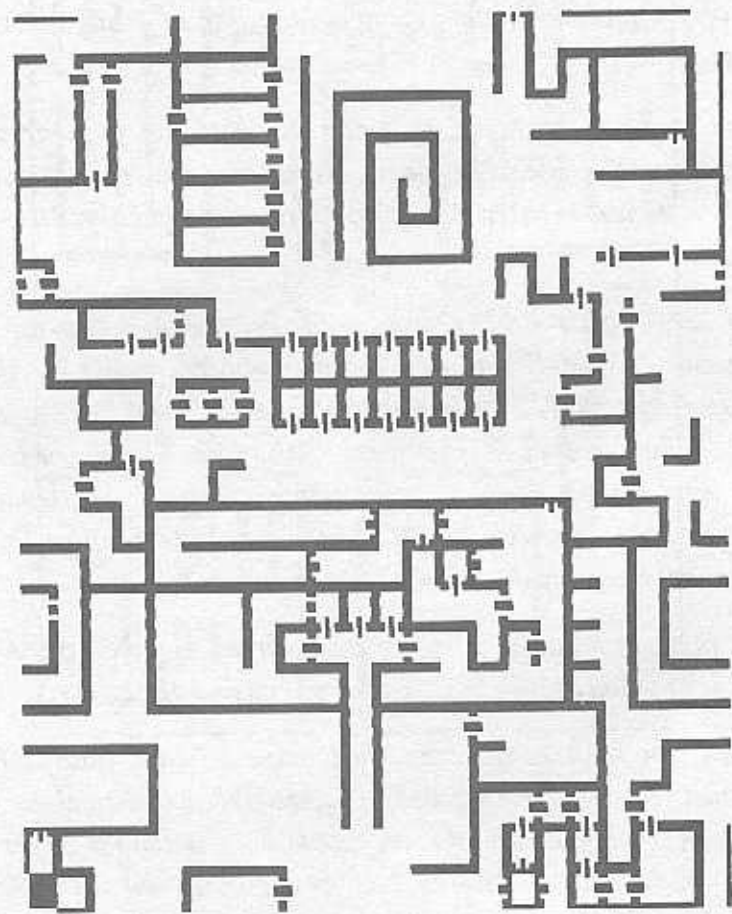
We found a sword wrought of a crystal substance as near to perfection as we are ever likely to see. The rogue's nose twitched when we discovered it. I trust not this man. The sword is entrusted to the care of the paladin Isli. She will guard it well.

We have done battle with golems, and discovered a throne. No doubt 'tis Harkyn's. We were asked if any of our party wished to sit on this throne, and before I could stop him Corfin, impetuous as bards are wont to be, jumped onto the dais and planted his arse upon the seat. We waited, horrified, for him to be transmogrified into a wart-faced, slimy swamp creature. Instead, a secret door opened to reveal a passageway. Why do the gods indulge in these curious humours, and reward and punish at such chaotic random?

We have just done battle with six men garbed in green robes. We will don their robes, as it is apparant that they are of some considerable value.

We waited not long to discover that value. Many guards have passed us by without notice, for they are garbed in green robes identical to those we have donned. The smirk upon the face of our ignoble bard is too much for mortal man to bear!

We find here a wasteful illusion. The stairs at the norther section of the west wall appear to lead down, but actually they ascend. We will follow them, pausing only to remove our cumbersome robes.



Harkyn's Castle, Level Two

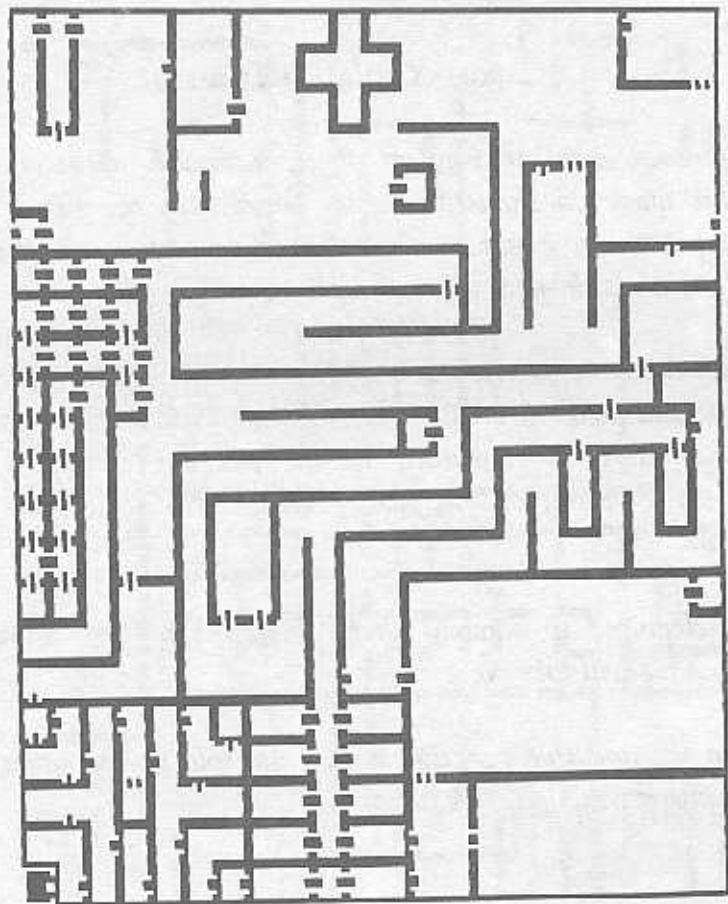
Harkyn's Castle, Level Two

We encountered another bodiless floating mouth uttering an incomplete poem. When the magician shouted out the word that completed the rhyme, an Ybarra shield appeared from out of the ether, a powerful protective gift indeed. We will make haste while the gods yet smile upon us.

An old man accosted us with this riddle; 'Once man alive, now living death, it drinketh blood, and stealeth breath.' Soriac knew the answer, and it was with a bloodless visage that he responded to the old one's verse. 'Vampire,' he whispered, and we were allowed to pass. Need I relate that we continue, very much on our guard?

We were teleported to a room where we found a flat square of silver, an odd device of which we will take possession.

A portal in the northwest section will, I am told by my magician, enable us to ascend to the uppermost rooms. We press on.



Harkyn's Castle, Level Three

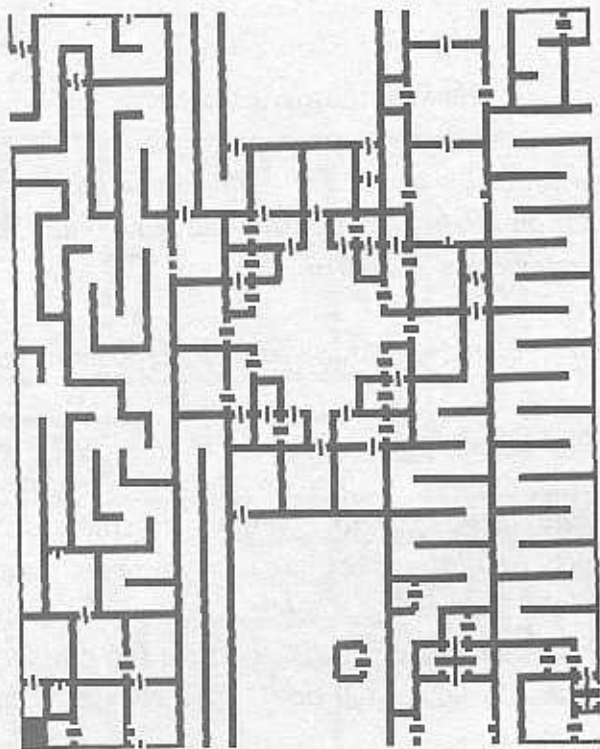
Harkyn's Castle, Level Three

We encountered a doddering old fool who barred our path until we told him the name of the tavern on Archer Street. The answer, Skull Tavern, was found to be disquieting to some members of our party.

Teleport traps abound, and we shrug them off like so many buzzing flies.

Ah, pride before a fall. Once again we are challenged to the utmost of our abilities, and emerge not unscathed. The berserkers! They attacked in an endless flowing stream, to slay them akin to holding back the tide with a bottomless bucket. We found out (too late!) that our recently abandoned green robes would have rendered us immune to attack. At last we stumbled, blind with weariness, over hundreds of corpses, four of our slain warriors lying hidden beneath stinking mounds of the Baron Harkyn's dead legions. We can spare no time to hunt for them – may the gods forgive us.

I write from within the gates of the wizard Kysearan's tower, where we were teleported after the battle. As we approached an old statue in the uppermost level of Harkyn's domain, the eye shaped bauble we had collected floated from Soriac's belt pouch, up, up..... and the statue became animate! We fought, desperate for our lives, and finally bested the foul thing. The archmage tells us that this dreadful foe was Tarjan, the mad god. It is little wonder that the battle cost us dear. We are now but seven in number.



Kylearan's Tower

*And now the mad Tarjan, our fallen comrades, our surroundings — gone.
We will enter the tower and demand an explanation for our presence here.*

*Soriac told us of a ritual that must be followed to enter the tower. We took
one step west, one step south ... only then were we able to enter the amber tower.*

We received two messages here:

*'Made of earth, without soul, as living statue, he is whole,' and
'As a guardian he must walk, the first part of his name means rock.'*

Remembering the message from the sewers, we approached the magic mouth (as Ghaklah is now calling them). It challenged us to answer the riddle: 'Name the one of cold, foretold, twofold,' and, because we were forewarned, we did so with ease.

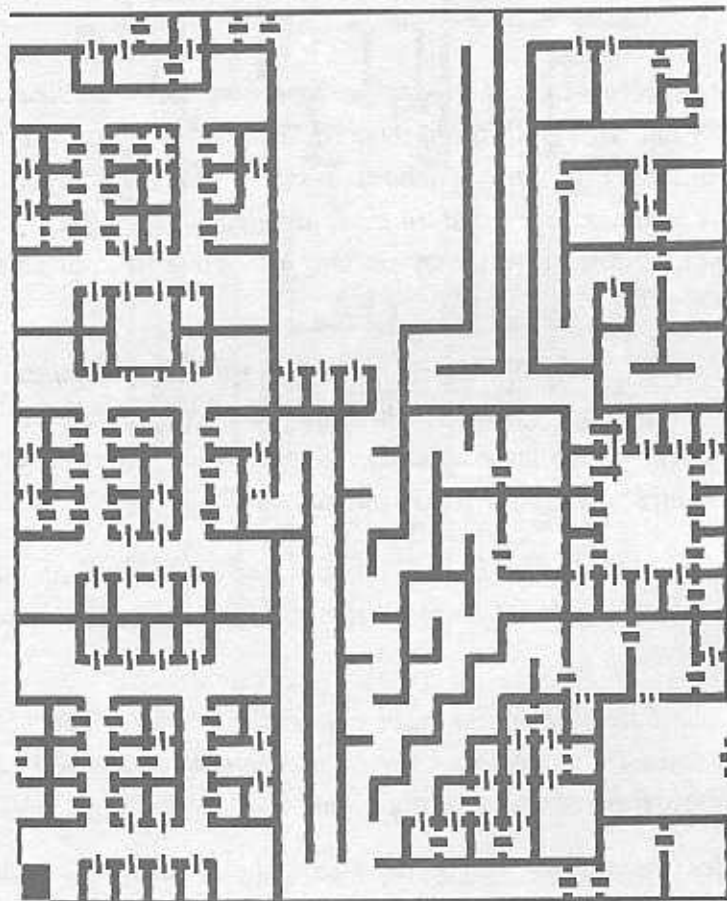
We were teleported to a vast dark area where we stumbled upon a second magic mouth. 'Name the endless byway,' it demanded of us. I shuddered and answered, remembering that eerie, enchanted street of Skara Brae. But although our answer was correct, it appeared to have no immediate effect. It was not 'til later that we found a door in another part of the maze, a door that had hitherto been invisible.

We found a triangle of silver, akin to the silver square discovered in Harkyn's castle. I have given them to the rogue to carry. Perchance he will return our trust with loyalty. And then perchance he will not — the silver is of little value, and I am sure he knows this best of any in our company.

An inscription warns us to beware of the sting at the end of the serpent's tail. Ghaklah tells us this refers to a room at the end of a snake-like maze of corridors. We will avoid this area.

We have done battle with and slain a golem of crystal. The melee went ill for us until the paladin Isli stepped into the fray, wielding the crystal sword. A few blows and the golem splintered into tinkling shards.

We stumbled upon three rooms, all identical, all with doors leading in every direction. One of these led into a small hallway. Exploring this, we were teleported, to confront the wizard Kylearan. We readied for battle, but his intentions were peaceful. He approves of our quest, and offered us aid in the form of a key wrought of shining onyx. A noble gift indeed, none other than the key to Mangar's front door! We take our leave of the friendly wizard.



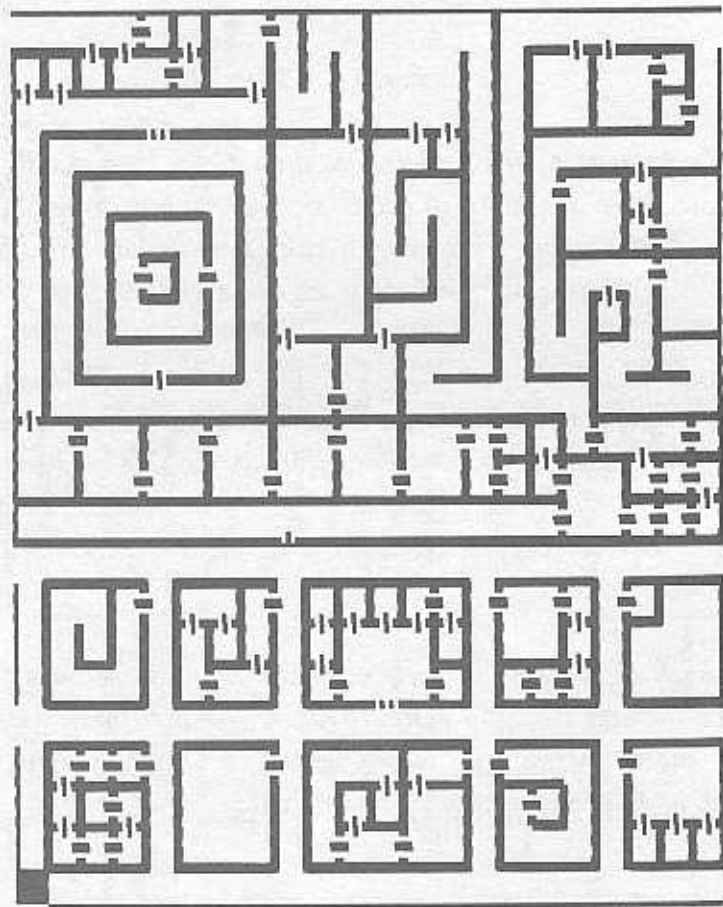
Mangar, Level One

Mangar, Level One

And now the final test. We are healed, and rested, and our fighting strength is again a fair number. We are ready to challenge the vile wizard in his lair. Only one thing rankles – the rogue has disappeared, taking with him the silver shapes. We searched for him, but to no avail. There is no more time – we leave now for the wizard's castle.

We entered Mangar's domain by ascending the stairs in the third level of the sewers, and using the key of onyx. Hordes of creatures abound here, protecting their master from intruders. They fall before us like wheat beneath a scythe. There are tricks and illusions, but we expected this from a wizard. We smell his vile stench, and his nearness lends us wings.

A magic mouth lectures to us on the virtue of perseverance. I was angered, thinking this to be the evil wizard's mockery, until Soriac informed me that the actual words uttered by the magic mouth are the means to unlock a door in the northeast section of this level, and be teleported to the next level.



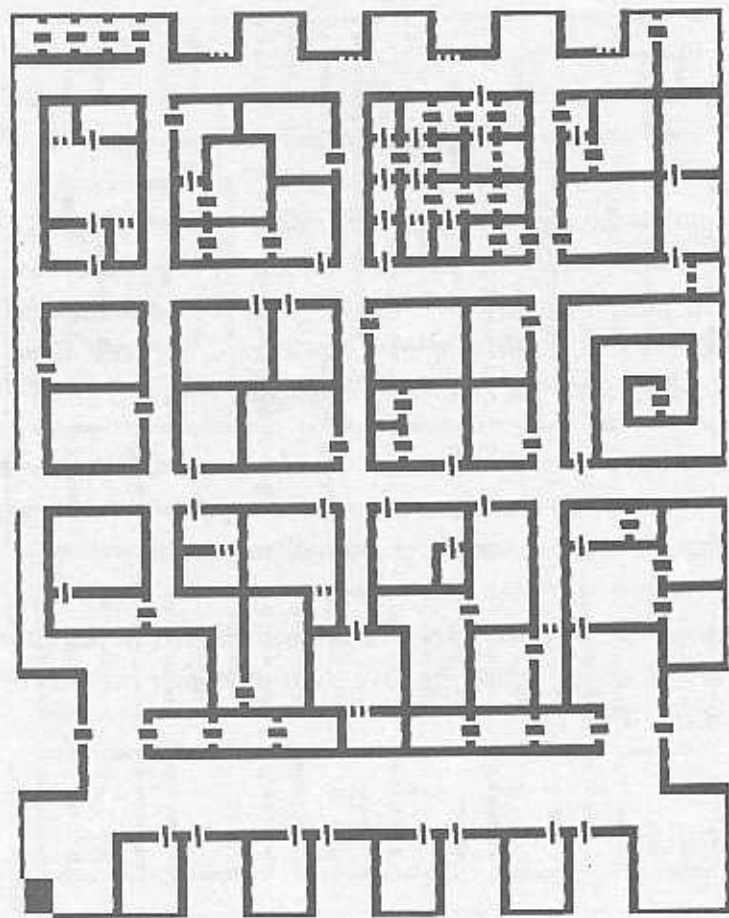
Mangar, Level Two

Mangar, Level Two

A magic mouth assailed us with a riddle: 'Two shapes yours, and one's around, speak the shape, and final found.' This gave us pause until Soriac, who is of a scientific bent, gave the answer: 'Circle.' He was provided with a flat, silver circle that matched the ones stolen by the cursed rogue. Could it be that the shapes are of some great import? May the evil, villainous rogue burn in Hell!

The demons, vampires and furies that are here unleashed take their toll on our party. The plunder here is wondrous beyond compare, yet we gather it quickly, reluctantly, resenting the time it steals from our real purpose.

We are attacked without respite, and our spirits decline as do our numbers. It is with leaden feet that we proceed. We find the door to the next level in the southeast section of this area.



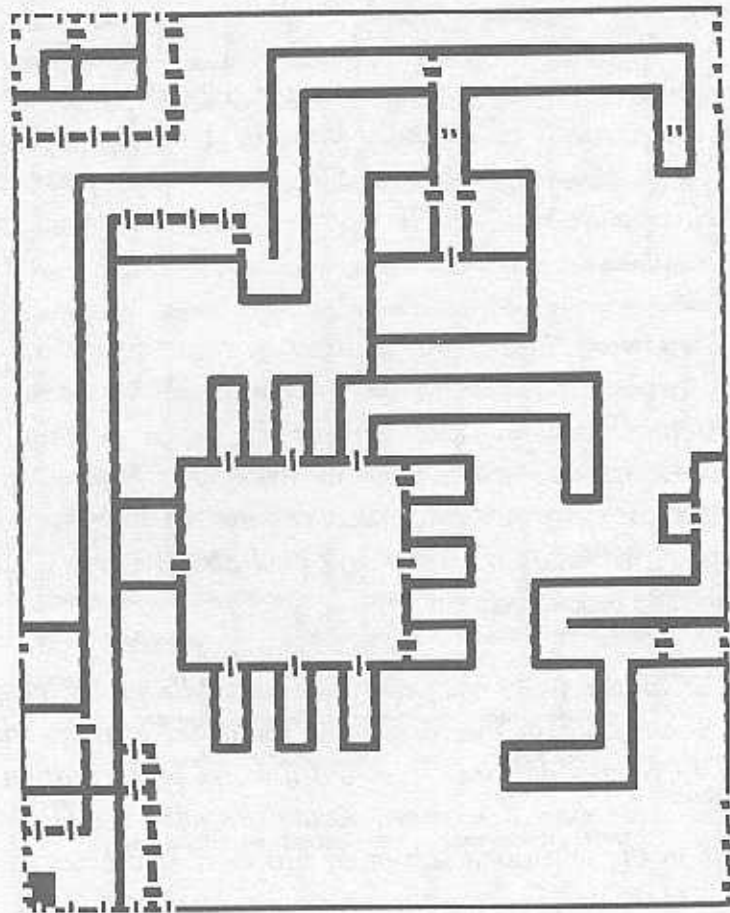
Mangar, Level Three

Mangar, Level Three

One by one our noble group falls prey to the wizard's servants. Magic mouths and disembodied voices assail us at every turn, their messages too numerous to be set down here. I fear this may be the end of our glorious quest, to be doomed to wander in this hellish place until the last of us is slain, or driven mad by the ever-present mouths.

We have encountered a merchant, a filthy merchant who tried to sell us a key! The absurdity of finding such a one in such a place overcame us all, and we collapsed in laughter. The old man claimed that the key would gain us admittance to both the gates of Kylearan's abode and to Mangar's. Knowing the nature of merchants, it would not surprise me to discover that the key was to a rusty, empty chastity belt in a deserted lady's chamber! We paid his high price — the lift he gave to our failing spirits was beyond gold.

Soriac, wisest of the wise, has answered the riddle of the magic mouths. He tells us we must seek the mouth that asks us to reveal the answer, and say this: "Lie with passion and be forever damned." To find a moral proclamation in this place is obscenity, and I am ever more determined to lay the wizard and his works to ruin. We find the mouth in the southwest section of this level, and utter the answer. Stairs are revealed slightly to the northwest of the mouth, and we ascend.



Mangar, Level Four

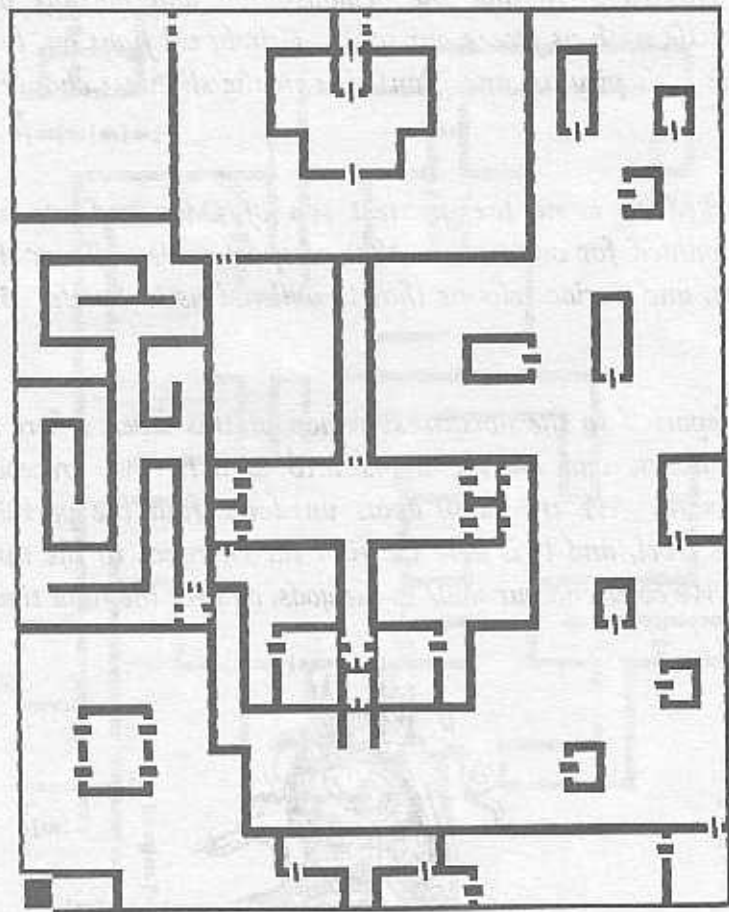
Mangar, Level Four

'We have entered Hell, and the demonspawn and mutant brood of undead things that do battle with us freeze our souls. Grimly we fight on, the five of us who remain. May the gods pity us, and grant us e'en the slightest chance to complete our task.

'We are asked to name the greatest son of Odin and we answer correctly, pleased to be rewarded for our time in that cesspool sewer. From the ether is given us a small statue, and Soriac tells us that it will aid us in battle. Have our prayers been answered?

'We are teleported to the northwest region of this level, where suddenly all the walls turn into doors, and all the doors into walls! We proceed west and are teleported once more. We try many doors until we find the portal in the extreme southwest of this level, and it is here we find the entrance to the uppermost level of Mangar's castle. We commend our souls to the gods, and for the final time, ascend.





Mangar, Level Five

Mangar, Level Five

We are defeated at the last. The silver shapes were the key to entering the main chamber wherein resides a gloating Mangar. We are trapped like rats in a tiny room where even now the wizard sends his minions to storm the door.

But we are given wise counsel by Soriac, who advises us to try and get this journal to Pellis, in the hope that he will pass on the experiences written here to one capable of defeating Mangar. One final spell, using the life forces of Soriac, Corfid and myself, will render Isli invisible for a time, enabling her to escape this place with the journal. Yet it is evil magic. Everything we have accomplished will be rent from the fabric of time and destroyed, and as the spell burns itself out Isli will be consumed.

I embrace my companions, and taste the salt of Isli's tears. Ghaklah has asked for my dagger — he has no wish to be captured alive. As he prepares the spell, I can but reflect that no man could wish to die in better company.

Ghaklah begins. They come.

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Clue book by T.L. Thompson

With research by John P. Manley and Maryrose Doherty

Edited by Nicholas Lavroff

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1820 Gateway Drive, San Mateo, CA 94404 (415)571-7171