COMPATIBLE WITH FIFTH EDITION

Six Seconds

A short adventure for one to four, at 1st level



LEVEL	PLAYERS	PLAY TIME	SCENES	COMBAT
1	1–4	2 hours	5	combat light

Every sack of grain in the valley goes through one wheel, and six nights ago that wheel stopped turning for six seconds and then started again.

Nobody heard it but the miller. He has told nobody, because a wheel that stops is a wheel that can stop again, and the whole autumn harvest is stacked in his loft waiting its turn.

He has not slept since. He wants somebody to go down into the wheel-pit and come back up saying it was nothing.

It was not nothing.

READ THESE TWO PAGES AND YOU CAN RUN IT

The Evening at a Glance

Everything below is expanded later. If you have twenty minutes before your players arrive, these two pages and the read-aloud boxes are enough.

How it opens

Open in the wheel-pit, in the dark, with the wheel still turning overhead. Grig Mullens will not stop it, and he says why before anybody asks: **stop it in the middle of the grind and the valley eats last year's flour.**

He lowers the lantern down on a rope rather than climbing after it. He counts out loud while he does it, one to eleven, and does not seem to know he is doing it.

Then, down the shaft, comes the sentence he has kept to himself for six days. "It went quiet. I've heard that wheel every night of my life and it went quiet. I counted six. Then it come back."

Start the noise immediately, because the noise is the adventure. The pit is deafening. Anything said down here is said twice, and every check that needs hearing is made at disadvantage.

Six minutes in, it happens again. No warning and no roll. The water goes flat, then runs backwards past their boots, and the wheel coasts to a stop. Count one to six out loud at the table. Then the water returns and so does the noise.

That is not foreshadowing. That is the gate downstream opening and shutting, and they have just watched it.

The order of things

	SCENE	WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE WHEN IT ENDS	FIGHT	PAGE
1	The Wheel That Will Not Stop	They have seen the six seconds happen, they know the mill itself is faultless, and they know the only way on is the channel.	—	14
2	Down the Race	They are past the joint, out of the mill, cold, and counting their own light for the first time.	—	17
3	The Old Overflow	They have taken the dry way, learned why it is dry, and paid for it in light on the way back down.	—	20
4	The Gate and the Sump	They have fought for the only dry room down here, understood what the gate is, and the decision about it is theirs.	hard	23
5	Six Seconds, Going Up	They get out, wet and carrying more than they came with, having felt the gate work once from the inside.	—	28

Also in here — Stat blocks 31 · What they carry out 32 · Handouts 33 · Random tables 35 · Battle maps 38.

The three things they will remember

- **Grig Mullens, six days without sleep, counting to eleven while he lowers a rope and not knowing he is doing it.**
- The six seconds happening in the channel on the way out, at knee height, with the DM counting aloud for the third time.
- Wedging a three-hundred-year-old flood gate shut with a piece of the mill it was built before.

The decision that is theirs

Wedge the gate or leave it. Wedged, the Hollow Mill is safe and whatever the gate was built for is finished. Left, the mill has a few years and then the valley gets a working flood gate back and no idea what to do with it. Nobody above ground knows enough to be asked, and the party are the only people who ever will. There is no correct answer and this adventure does not have one.

FOR THE DUNGEON MASTER

Running This Adventure

Six Seconds is a one-shot for one to four 1st-level characters, written to run in 2 hours at one sitting. Everything you need is in this file: the scenes in order, the people in them, every creature's numbers printed in full, the maps, the handouts, and 4 ready-made characters.

Read the boxed passages aloud. Everything outside them is for you. The dashed boxes marked *if it goes sideways* are there for when your players do something the scene did not expect — which they will, and which is the best part.

Running it with your own party

Any first-level characters fit without changing a line, one to four of them with the changes on the page One, Two, Three or Four Players, because the only thing this adventure asks is that they will go into a hole for a stranger. If nobody has a reason to care about the mill, Anwen gives them one on the way in: it grinds for eleven villages and there is no second wheel in the valley. A party with no light source turns back at the joint, so put the lantern in Grig's hand and let him lower it. A party with no Strength on it wedges the counterweight with two characters and twenty minutes instead of a check, which the text already allows. A party with a light cantrip skips the whole oil clock and should - the overflow still costs them twelve minutes and a rope.

When to hand out inspiration

> The moment is when somebody treats Grig as a man rather than as a job — asks after his wife, tells him to sit down, or says out loud that they believe him. He has been humoured for six days and the table will feel it the instant somebody stops.

If they try something that is not written here

They will. These are the ones this adventure actually gets, and what to do with each — not a list of the permitted moves, but eight worked examples of the same stance. Anything else: let it work if it is clever and costs something, and say what it costs before they commit.

- **Stop the wheel.** Grig refuses and means it; the valley eats last year's flour. If they stop it anyway, the pit is quiet and safe and the whole village knows by morning who did it. Let it work. It costs them Grig.
- **Send somebody down the channel alone while the rest wait.** Allow it. The one who goes is on their own with one light and the rest hear nothing over the wheel. Let the party choose who, out loud.
- **Bring the mill's spare shaft-timber down to wedge something before they know what.** Excellent. Grig will hate being asked and will say yes. It is the right length, and having it in hand changes scene four completely.
- **Ask Grig's wife instead of Grig.** Anwen has already worked it out and has quietly stopped taking grain in. She tells the truth in four sentences and will act on anything they bring back.

- **Wait at the top and time the six seconds until they understand it.** Good instinct, and the count is honest. What it tells them is the shape and not the cause, and it costs the light they burned watching.
- **Flood the dry way deliberately.** It can be done from the gate and it drowns the only room they can stand up in. Say that plainly, once, and then let them decide.
- **Go back up for more rope or more light.** Allow it. It is the correct answer and it takes long enough that the sump has changed by the time they are back down.
- **Leave the gate open on the way out.** The mill runs, the valley is fed, and something that was behind a gate is not any more. Do not warn them twice.

If a character dies

Death saving throws work as written, and so does any magic at the table that brings somebody back. If there is none, the death stands. What should not happen is a player watching for the rest of the evening. **From the next scene they play the person named below.** The simplest way is to keep the old character sheet under the new name. Take what that person wants and how they sound from *The Cast*, and keep what they are hiding to yourself unless it comes out in play.

> Anwen Mullens comes down the race with a lamp when the party is overdue. She helps anybody who is helping the mill, and she wants the grind finished badly enough to go where her husband will not.

When a fight goes too easily, or too badly

Too easily
Leave it won. A party that planned well has earned a short fight, and a creature that suddenly gets tougher halfway through is the one thing every table notices. Push the next fight instead: one more of its weakest creature, or its biggest one starting with a third more hit points. If it was the last fight, let it be short and give the scene after it the time.

Too badly
Every fight in this adventure has a line marked **Instead of killing the last one**. Read it before the first character drops, not after. It is written as something the creature would do anyway, so using it never looks like a rescue.

Give advantage more often than the boxes say

Every scene in this adventure has a **Give advantage if** box. Each one is an example of a standard rather than the list of times the standard applies. The standard: **when something the party did earlier would plausibly make this easier, give advantage on it, written down or not.**

- **It is cheap.** Advantage is worth about the same as a +3 on the roll, and it is worth most when the odds were already close to even. It turns a coin-toss into a good bet. It does not turn a bad plan into a good one, which is why handing it out costs you nothing you wanted to keep.
- **It pays attention rather than optimisation.** The player who asked a question two scenes ago, or talked to somebody nobody else talked to, gets something back for it. That is the behaviour worth rewarding at a table, and it is the behaviour these boxes are built out of.

- **Say why, out loud, in one sentence.** You spoke to the ferryman first, so you know where the rope is — roll with advantage. The table learns the standard by hearing it, and inside an hour they start playing towards it without being asked.
- **And the limit, which matters as much as the permission.** If it is going out on every roll it has stopped meaning anything. It is for the roll that an earlier decision earned, not for the roll that happens to be hard. Disadvantage is the same dial turned the other way, and the same rule holds: something they did, not something you wanted.

If this is your first time running a game

Skip this section if it is not. Four things nobody tells you:

- **You are allowed to make it up.** If the players do something this adventure did not predict — and they will — decide what happens, ask for a check if it is uncertain, and carry on. That is not a failure of the adventure. That is the game.
- **You do not have to memorise anything.** Every number you need is on the page in front of you when you need it. Looking something up at the table is normal.
- **Nobody at the table knows what was supposed to happen.** If you skip a scene, forget an NPC, or get a rule wrong, you are the only person who will ever know.
- **When in doubt, say yes.** A player who tries something clever should usually get to try it. Ask for a roll if it might fail, and let the dice make it interesting.

> **And about this one in particular.**
>
> Written for a DM who has never run anything. One fight, one map, five short scenes, no branching, and every check says what happens when it fails. If a check fails and the text says nothing, they succeed anyway and it costs them time.

Words this adventure uses

The d20
The twenty-sided die. Almost everything uncertain is settled by rolling it, adding a number, and comparing the total to a target.

Ability check
A roll to see whether a character manages something difficult — climbing, persuading, spotting, remembering. Roll a d20, add the relevant bonus from the character sheet, compare to the DC.

DC (Difficulty Class)
The number to beat. This adventure gives you one for every check. 10 is ordinary, 15 is genuinely hard, 20 is exceptional. Equal to the DC counts as a success.

Saving throw
A roll to avoid something happening TO a character, rather than to make something happen. Same procedure as an ability check — d20 plus a bonus against a DC — but it is the reaction, not the attempt. "Make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw"

means: roll, and if you fail, the bad thing lands.

Armor Class (AC)
How hard a creature is to hit. An attacker rolls a d20, adds their attack bonus, and must equal or beat the target's AC.

Hit points
How much damage a creature can take before it drops. At 0 a monster dies; a player character falls unconscious and starts making death saving throws.

Initiative
The order of turns in a fight. Everyone rolls a d20 and adds their Dexterity bonus once, and you go around in that order until it is over.

Action, bonus action, reaction
On their turn a character does one main thing (an action), possibly one quick extra thing if they have one (a bonus action), and can move. A reaction is something they do on somebody else's turn.

Advantage / disadvantage
Roll two d20s instead of one and keep the higher (advantage) or the lower (disadvantage). It is the game's way of saying "that should be easier / harder" without doing arithmetic. Use it freely.

Short rest / long rest
An hour of sitting down, or a night's sleep. Characters get some abilities back on a short rest and nearly everything on a long rest.

Challenge Rating (CR)
A monster's rough difficulty number. You do not need to do anything with it — this adventure has already worked out how hard each fight is for the party size on the cover.

Stat block
The boxed set of numbers for a creature. Everything you need to run it is inside the box; you never need another book.

Read-aloud text
The italic boxed paragraphs in this adventure. Read them out, or reword them — they exist so you always know how to start a scene.

For a bigger table

Five or six players
Add one more of the weakest creature in each fight. Do not add a second boss.

A player who has never played
Hand them one of the pre-generated characters and tell them their character does one thing very well. That is enough for an evening.

A table with both veterans and newcomers
Ask the veterans to say what they are doing in plain language rather than rules language. It fixes almost everything.

And for Six Seconds specifically.

Another table size. For five or six, keep six fen-needles and put two on the far ledge so there is a second front - the dry floor is big enough and the fight is over too fast otherwise.

How long it runs. Two hours at a normal table. The pit is twenty minutes and should be, the overflow is fifteen, the sump is forty, and the walk out is ten.

The pace. The six seconds happen on YOUR count, not on a roll: once in the pit, and once in the channel on the way out. Do not use it a third time.

The noise. The wheel-pit is deafening and the tailrace is silent. Play both. It is one free trick and it does more work than any description in this file.

FOR THE DUNGEON MASTER

One, Two, Three or Four Players

Six Seconds is written for four characters and plays just as well with one, two or three. With four, play it as written. With fewer, everything that changes is on this page, and the numbers for each fight are also printed in the fight itself; anything not mentioned here stays as it is.

With fewer players, take whichever ready characters they like. For one player, Davin Holt or Sela Fen come through the fight best.

One player

Anwen Mullens goes down the race with the one character from the start instead of coming later. She carries the spare candle-ends and knows which channel is which, but she does not fight, and she hands the light over at the gate.

- **Scene 4, The Gate and the Sump.** Two Stirges.

Two players

Anwen Mullens goes down with them if they ask her to, carrying the spare candle-ends. She does not fight.

- **Scene 4, The Gate and the Sump.** Four Stirges.

Three players

- **Scene 4, The Gate and the Sump.** Four Stirges.

GETTING THEM INTO IT

Hooks

> Grig Mullens meets them at the mill gate before they have asked for anything, which is not like him, and offers two gold and a dry night to go down a hole he will not go down himself.

> The Autumn Grind runs day and night for nine days and the mill takes anybody who can lift. Whoever is on the floor when the wheel stops is the one who hears it.

> A miller from up-valley is quietly asking whether the Hollow Mill will finish this year, and offering to take the overflow at a price that says he already knows the answer.

WHO THEY WILL MEET

The Cast



Grig Mullens

Miller of the Hollow Mill, forty years at the same wheel

Looks like. Flour in the creases of him and nowhere else, because he washes his hands and forgets his face. Six days without sleep have left him calm and slow and a beat behind the conversation, which is worse to watch than panic would be.

Wants. Somebody to go down, come up, and tell him it was a stone in the race. He would pay a great deal to be told that.

Is hiding. He has not told his wife either. She thinks the not-sleeping is the grind. He is more afraid of being thought mad than of the mill flooding, and that is why nobody in the valley knows yet.



Anwen Mullens

His wife, runs the mill floor and the accounts

Looks like. Moves like somebody with nine days of work and eight days to do it in. Wipes her hands before she shakes yours.

Wants. The grind finished. She helps anybody who is helping the mill and obstructs anybody slowing it, and does not much care which the party is until she has seen.

Is hiding. She has already worked out that something is wrong and has quietly stopped taking new grain in. Grig has not noticed. Tell her the truth and she is the one who acts on it.

GIVE THESE AWAY WHEREVER THEY DIG

Secrets and Clues

These are true, and none of them belongs to a particular scene. When your players search somewhere you did not plan for, or ask a question you did not expect, hand them one of these. Cross it off. You will not run out, and the adventure cannot stall.

1. The wheel did not stop. The water stopped for six seconds, and the wheel coasted and picked back up when the water came.
2. The race ran backwards during those six seconds. Something downstream took a room's worth of water in one swallow.
3. Forty feet along the tailrace the mill's stonework ends and older, better-cut stone carries on.
4. That stone is a sluice: a flood gate with a counterweight sump beside it, built to let water out.
5. It was built when this valley was the bottom of a lake, which means it was built to drain the lake.
6. The sump has been silting up for three hundred years. As silt compacts the counterweight drops, and every few years the gate cracks, swallows, and shuts.
7. It opens wider each time. Six seconds this year. It was two seconds when Grig was a boy, and he has only just remembered that.
8. Six fen-needles came up through the gate the last time it opened. They cannot get back down and have been living on what the race brings.
9. There is a mark cut low on the gate stone, below the old waterline: one horizontal line with a smaller line dropping from its centre.
10. Nobody in Lowmere can read that mark, and it is cut on old stone the length of the valley.
11. The counterweight can be wedged. The mill's spare shaft-timber is the right length, and Grig will hate being asked for it.

What they need to work out

> The wheel stops because a gate downstream opens and takes the water.
>
> - **The wheel-pit, area 1** — It happens again while they are standing in the pit. The water runs the wrong way over their boots and the wheel coasts to a stop. *(automatic)*
> - **The race, area 2** — Intelligence (Investigation) DC 11: two tidemarks on the race wall. The lower is the mill's working level. The upper is chalky, older, and higher than this pit has ever flooded. *(check)*
> - **The sump, area 6** — Reaching the gate itself and watching the counterweight settle a finger's width in the time it takes to look at it. *(earned)*

> It will happen again, wider, and one day it will not shut.
>
> - **The wheel-pit, area 1** — Grig, asked twice, remembers that his father stopped the grind one night forty-four years ago and would never say why. *(automatic)*
> - **The sump, area 6** — Wisdom (Perception) DC 12: the counterweight has scoured a bright groove down its slot, and the bright part is a hand's width and growing downward. *(check)*
> - **The old overflow, area 4** — The overflow is dry and has been dry for generations, and its floor silt is undisturbed. The water that used to come down here now goes under the gate instead. *(earned)*

SCENE 1 OF 5 · A MOMENT FOR THE ONE WHO TALKS

The Wheel That Will Not Stop

What this scene is for. They have seen the six seconds happen, they know the mill itself is faultless, and they know the only way on is the channel.

It begins when. Grig lowers the lantern, which he does within a minute of them agreeing to anything at all.

> READ ALOUD
>
> *The pit is a stone box under the mill floor with two tons of turning oak filling the top of it, and it is loud in a way that gets into your teeth. Water comes in white at one end, goes under the wheel, and leaves black down a channel barely wide enough to walk in bent over.*
>
> *The lantern comes down on a rope, swinging. Above you, past the wheel, a man is counting to eleven and does not seem to know it.*

THE NOISE IS THE RULE HERE. Nothing quiet is heard in the wheel-pit. Anybody relying on hearing is at disadvantage, a shout is understood on the second try, and a whispered plan is not a plan. Say it once, hold it, and the silence in scene two does the rest.

WHY NOBODY HAS ALREADY BEEN DOWN. The wheel has not stopped in forty years and Grig will not stop it now. The Autumn Grind runs nine days, eleven villages send grain, and there is no second wheel in the valley. That is the whole reason this hole is unexplored, and it is a good one.

IT HAPPENS AGAIN, SIX MINUTES IN. Not a roll and not a check anybody could fail. Water flat, then backwards over their boots, wheel coasting to a stop. Count one to six aloud. Then the noise returns.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY WRONG WITH THIS PIT: nothing. Wheel sound, gearing sound, axle warm and true. A party that takes the pit apart learns the mill is not the problem, which is worth more than a clue.

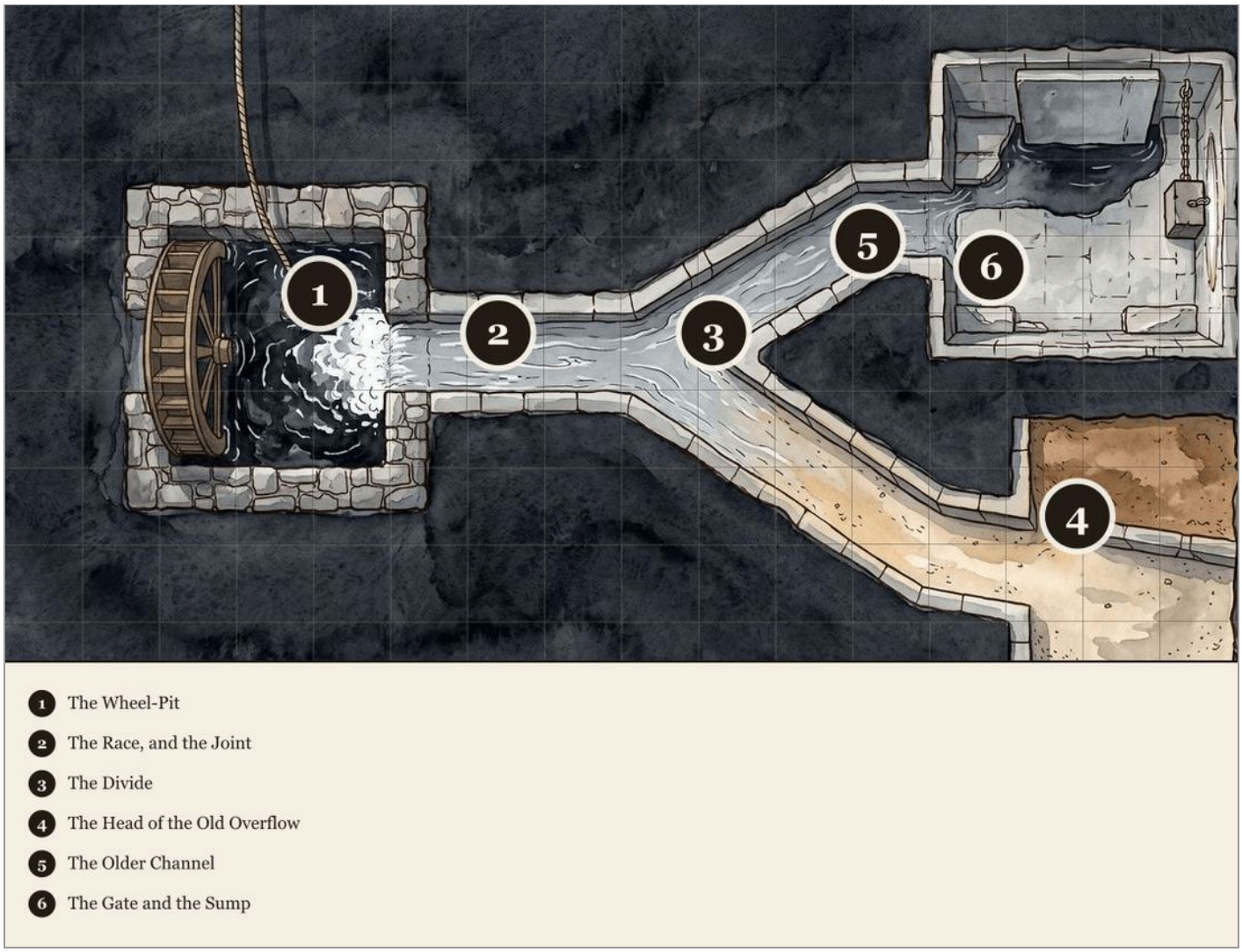
GRIG WILL NOT COME DOWN, and not from cowardice - he has been in this pit a thousand times. He is holding the rope, he says so, and if somebody else takes the rope he finds another reason. **Play exhaustion, not fear.** Six days awake makes a man slow, agreeable, and unable to finish a sentence he began.

ASK HIM WHETHER IT HAS DONE THIS BEFORE and he says no, twice, then goes quiet, then remembers his father stopping the grind one night when Grig was eight, and never saying why.

ANWEN IS ON THE MILL FLOOR and is the one to talk to about anything practical: rope, oil, timber, or how much grain is upstairs. She has already stopped taking new grain in and will say so if asked directly.

> **Give advantage if.** Anybody told Grig they believed him before they went down. He has spent six days being humoured and one sentence of being believed is worth more to him than the fee.

CHECK	DC	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Charisma (Persuasion)	10	Grig gives them the whole of it, including his father, without being pushed. He also gives them the good lantern instead of the cracked one.	He tells them what he told himself: it was a stone in the race. He believes it slightly less each time he says it, and says it three times.
Intelligence (Investigation)	11	The mill is faultless. Every bearing, tooth and pin is where forty years of care put it. Whatever stopped this wheel was not in this building.	Too loud and too dark to be sure of anything, and the pit keeps offering things that look wrong and are merely old.
Wisdom (Insight)	12	He is not hiding something. He is a man who has decided that being believed matters more than being helped, and has just changed his mind about that.	A tired man who will not meet anybody's eye, which reads as a guilty one.



Under the Hollow Mill — DM copy

1 ### The Wheel-Pit

A stone box under the mill floor, three hundred years wet, with two tons of turning oak filling the top of it. Water comes in white at one end and leaves black down a channel at the other. Deafening: anything said here is said twice, and listening is at disadvantage. Grig holds the rope at the top of the shaft and will not come down.

2 ### The Race, and the Joint

The tailrace: two and a half feet wide, four feet high, ankle-deep and moving, walkable bent double. Forty feet along, the mill's stonework ends in a clean vertical joint and older, better-cut stone carries on. The noise stops at that joint the way it stops when a door shuts.

3 ### The Divide

The channel opens out and splits. The right-hand way runs level and wet toward the sump. The left-hand way climbs slightly and is dry, and dry is the direction a cold party wants. Both are cut stone and neither is marked.

4 ### The Head of the Old Overflow

The passage in from the divide climbs forty feet and opens into this chamber, which is where the overflow ends. One whole wall is packed silt behind a dressed stone lip, three centuries of it, undisturbed. Dry floor, dry air, no way on. Going back DOWN that forty-foot slope in the dark is where lanterns get dropped.

5 ### The Older Channel

Twenty feet of dressed stone between the divide and the sump, ankle-deep, no ledges, ceiling at eight feet. The water in this stretch is the water that ran backwards, and it will do it again.

6 ### The Gate and the Sump

A cut chamber with square corners and a flat floor, high enough to stand in and the only dry stone down here. Most of one wall is a stone slab hung in a slot with the water going under it. Beside it a counterweight block the size of a cart hangs on a chain, with a bright scoured groove down the wall behind. The mark is cut low on the slab, below the old chalky waterline. Six fen-needles roost on the dry ledges.

Ways on from here. Down the tailrace, bent double, into the quiet

SCENE 2 OF 5 · A MOMENT FOR THE ONE WHO HITS THINGS

Down the Race

What this scene is for. They are past the joint, out of the mill, cold, and counting their own light for the first time.

It begins when. They enter the channel, which is the only way on and needs no persuading.

> READ ALOUD
>
> *Forty feet in, the noise stops. Not fades - stops, the way it does when a door shuts behind you. What is left is a wet, close quiet, and water going past your ankles.*
>
> *The channel changes here. The mill's cut stone ends at a clean vertical joint, and what carries on is older and bigger and better made. The ceiling lifts. The air past the joint is colder and smells of nothing at all.*

THE SILENCE IS THE EVENT. After a scene of shouting, everybody can suddenly hear everything. Let that sit. Do not fill it.

LIGHT IS THE RESOURCE AND IT IS TRACKED ON THIS PAGE. Grig's rope reaches thirty feet and no further, so past the joint they are on what they carry. Write it down at the table:

- **The mill lantern** - one hour of oil, and Grig knows exactly how much is in it because he filled it.
- **Candle-ends** - Anwen has four, ten minutes each, and they go out in a splash.
- **A cantrip** - lasts the evening and needs no tracking, and a party with one should feel clever rather than exempt, because it can still be dropped.

Say how much light is left out loud once it drops under twenty minutes. The lantern burns down whether or not anybody is watching it, that number is the clock for the rest of the evening, and it is the reason the wrong turn costs what it costs. Thirty feet of rope from the mill changes the arithmetic and Grig will hand it over for the asking.

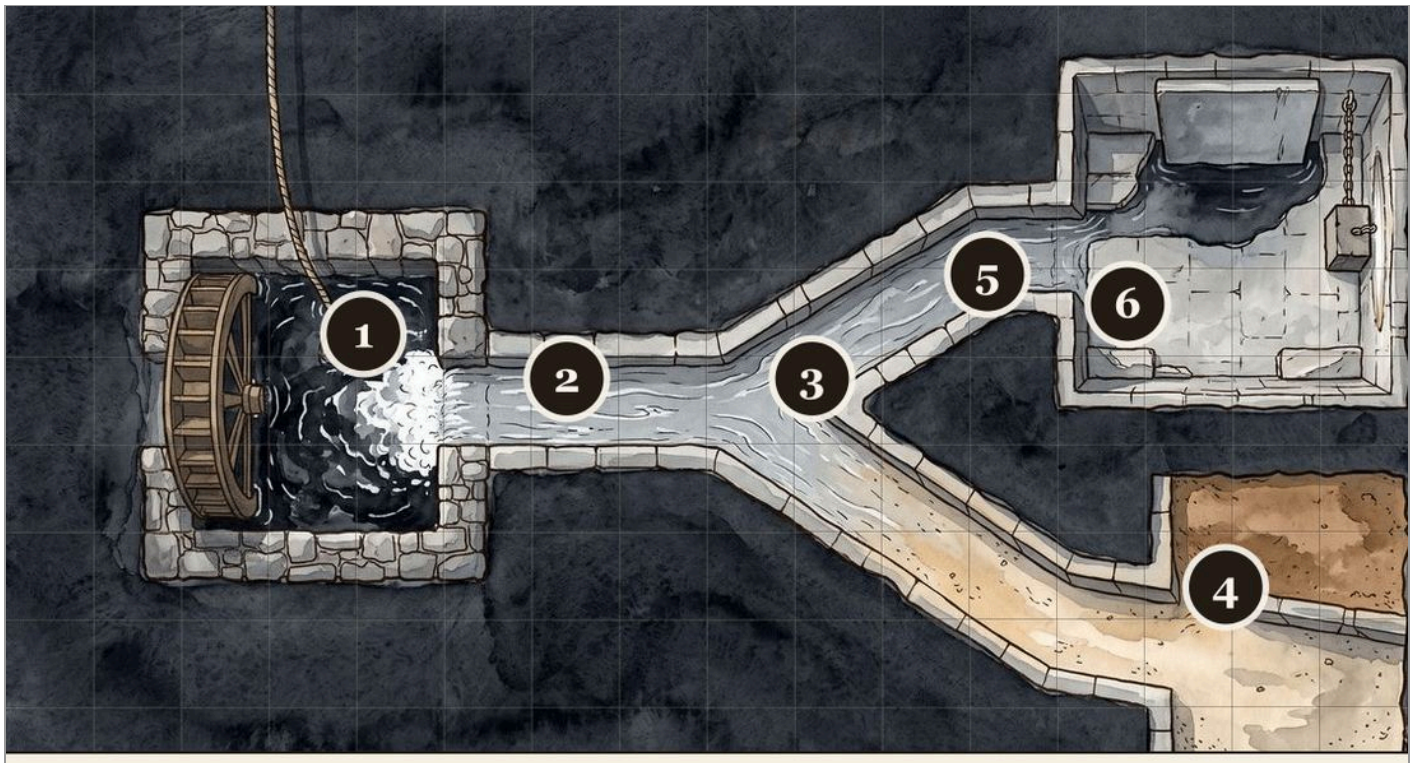
COLD IS THE SECOND COST. Ankle-deep water for two hours. Nobody takes damage for it and nobody rolls for it, but say it every scene, because a table that is being told they are cold plays faster and searches less thoroughly, and that is the intended effect.

THE JOINT ITSELF IS THE FIRST REAL FACT. The mill was built against something older. Anybody who looks at the two stones side by side can see which was cut with more care, and it is not the one the village made.

IF SOMEBODY GOES BACK FOR MORE LIGHT it takes twenty minutes, Grig gives it willingly, and nothing down here changes while they are gone. This is not a trap and should not be run as one.

> **Give advantage if.** They found the scratch marks above the waterline in the pit. They already know what they are looking for on wet stone, and they are looking at the joint rather than past it.

CHECK	DC	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Strength (Athletics)	10	Down, in, and moving without going face-first into eight inches of cold water. The light stays lit.	They get in anyway and are wet to the chest before the adventure has properly started. A candle-end is gone.
Intelligence (Investigation)	11	Two tidemarks on the wall. The lower is the mill's working level. The upper is chalky, higher than this pit has ever flooded, and runs on downstream out of sight.	Wet stone in lantern-light, all of it the same wet stone.
Constitution	10	Two hours in cold water is unpleasant and nothing more. They keep their hands steady for the fine work later.	Shivering by the sump, which means disadvantage on the first check made in there and a reason to hurry that the party set themselves.



1. The Wheel-Pit
2. The Race, and the Joint
3. The Divide
4. The Head of the Old Overflow
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Ways on from here. On to where the channel opens out and splits

SCENE 3 OF 5 · A MOMENT FOR THE ONE WHO KNOWS THINGS

The Old Overflow

What this scene is for. They have taken the dry way, learned why it is dry, and paid for it in light on the way back down.

It begins when. They reach the divide, where the channel splits into a wet way and a dry one.

> READ ALOUD
>
> *The channel opens out and divides. The right-hand way runs level and wet, ankle-deep, the same as everything behind you.*
>
> *The left-hand way climbs, and it is dry. Not damp. Dry stone, dry silt, dry air, for the first time since the mill floor.*
>
> *Neither one is marked. Both were cut by the same hands.*

THE DRY WAY IS THE WRONG WAY AND IT IS SUPPOSED TO LOOK RIGHT. Forty minutes of cold water makes dry stone the obvious choice, and this scene is built to reward taking it and then charge for it. Do not signpost either channel. **NO COMBAT IN THIS SCENE.**

WHAT IS UP THERE. The passage climbs forty feet and opens into a dry chamber, and one whole wall of it is packed silt behind a dressed stone lip, three centuries deep. It is a spillway that has not spilled in living memory. That is the discovery: **the water that used to come down here goes somewhere else now**, and the somewhere else is the thing they came to find.

WHAT IT COSTS, AND THE STRUCTURE ASKS FOR THIS EXPLICITLY. Coming back down a forty-foot dry slope in the dark, carrying light, is where light gets dropped. **The first character to descend makes Dexterity (Acrobatics) DC 11.** On a failure the lantern goes down the slope ahead of them and out, into the water at the bottom, and it does not relight. That is not a punishment and not a save-or-die - it is the reason the last two scenes are lit by candle-ends, and it is why the resource on the page has teeth.

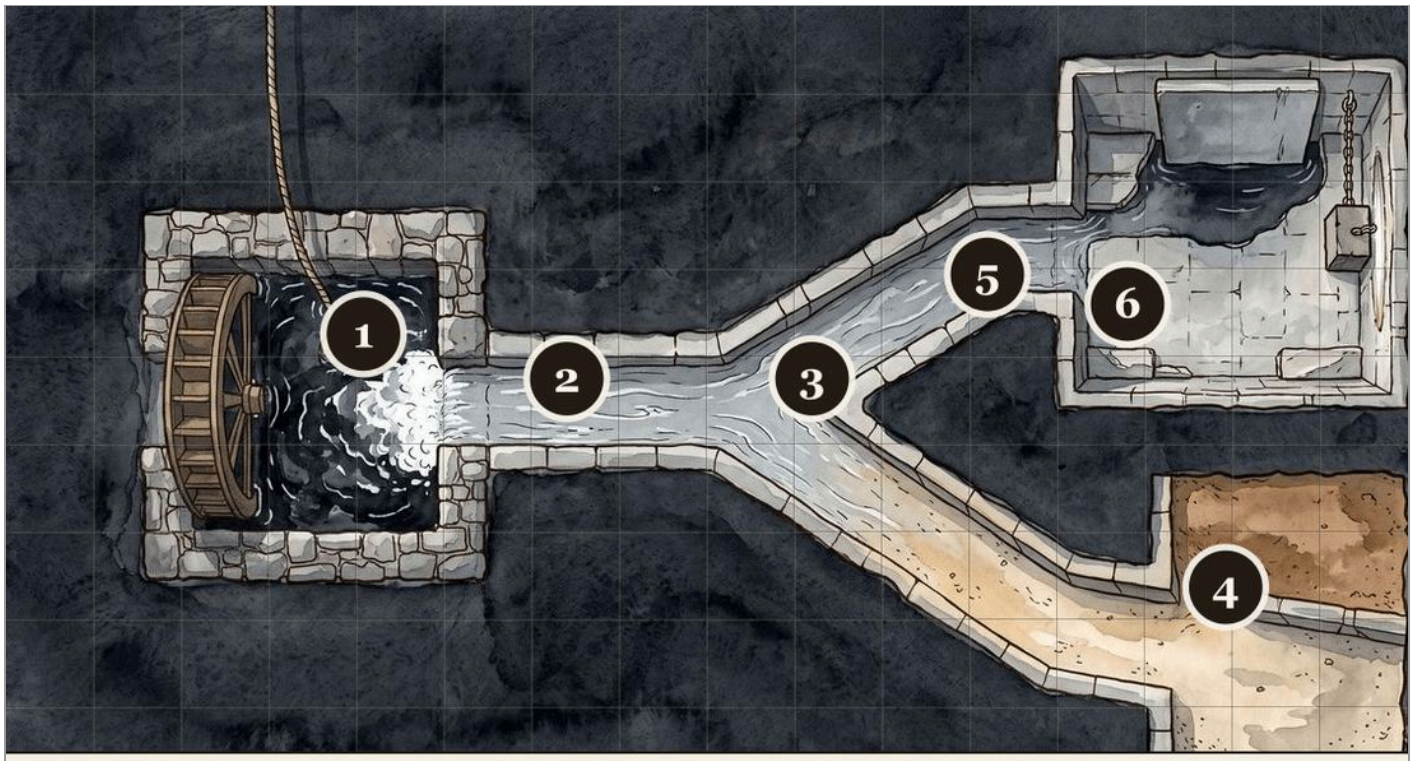
IF THEY ROPE IT PROPERLY - and the mill has rope, and Grig will give it - nobody drops anything and the scene costs them twelve minutes instead. **A party that solves this loses nothing, which is the correct outcome for solving it.**

THE SILT AT THE LIP IS UNDISTURBED, which anybody can see and which matters: nothing has come down this way and nothing has gone up it. Whatever is living in these channels came from the other direction.

DO NOT LET THEM MISS THE DIVIDE ON THE WAY BACK. The wet way is still there, still ankle-deep, still going. Leaving underground entirely is a real option and it is for the party to take: the mill is thirty feet above them and Grig is still on the rope.

> **Give advantage if.** Somebody read the two tidemarks at the joint. The chalky upper line and the line in front of them are the same line, and saying so out loud is the whole of the check.

CHECK	DC	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Intelligence (History)	12	This is a spillway. It carried overflow away from something that needed a level kept, and it has not been needed in three hundred years.	A dry stone corridor going nowhere, which is disappointing and is all it appears to be.
Dexterity (Acrobatics)	11	Down the slope in the dark with the light held out and steady, and nothing is lost.	The lantern goes ahead of them down the slope and into the water at the bottom. It does not relight. Candle-ends from here.
Wisdom (Perception)	10	The silt at the lip has never been walked on. No tracks, no drag marks, nothing has passed this way in generations.	Dust and dark and a wall of packed earth, and no way to tell how long it has been there.



1. The Wheel-Pit
2. The Race, and the Joint
3. The Divide
4. The Head of the Old Overflow
5. The Older Channel
6. The Gate and the Sump

Under the Hollow Mill — DM copy

1 The Wheel-Pit

A stone box under the mill floor, three hundred years wet, with two tons of turning oak filling the top of it. Water comes in white at one end and leaves black down a channel at the other. Deafening: anything said here is said twice, and listening is at disadvantage. Grig holds the rope at the top of the shaft and will not come down.

2 The Race, and the Joint

The tailrace: two and a half feet wide, four feet high, ankle-deep and moving, walkable bent double. Forty feet along, the mill's stonework ends in a clean vertical joint and older, better-cut stone carries on. The noise stops at that joint the way it stops when a door shuts.

3 The Divide

The channel opens out and splits. The right-hand way runs level and wet toward the sump. The left-hand way climbs slightly and is dry, and dry is the direction a cold party wants. Both are cut stone and neither is marked.

4 The Head of the Old Overflow

The passage in from the divide climbs forty feet and opens into this chamber, which is where the overflow ends. One whole wall is packed silt behind a dressed stone lip, three centuries of it, undisturbed. Dry floor, dry air, no way on. Going back DOWN that forty-foot slope in the dark is where lanterns get dropped.

5 The Older Channel

Twenty feet of dressed stone between the divide and the sump, ankle-deep, no ledges, ceiling at eight feet. The water in this stretch is the water that ran backwards, and it will do it again.

6 The Gate and the Sump

A cut chamber with square corners and a flat floor, high enough to stand in and the only dry stone down here. Most of one wall is a stone slab hung in a slot with the water going under it. Beside it a counterweight block the size of a cart hangs on a chain, with a bright scoured groove down the wall behind. The mark is cut low on the slab, below the old chalky waterline. Six fen-needles roost on the dry ledges.

Ways on from here. Back down, and along the wet way instead

SCENE 4 OF 5 · A MOMENT FOR THE ONE WHO SNEAKS

The Gate and the Sump

What this scene is for. They have fought for the only dry room down here, understood what the gate is, and the decision about it is theirs.

It begins when. They follow the wet way twenty feet past the divide, into worked stone.

> READ ALOUD
>
> *The channel opens into a chamber that was cut, not worn: square corners, flat floor, and a ceiling high enough to stand under.*
>
> *Most of one wall is a single slab hung in a slot, with the water going under it. Beside it a block of stone the size of a cart hangs on a chain, and there is a bright scoured groove down the wall behind it.*
>
> *Something drops off the dry ledge above you. Then five more.*

THE FIGHT FIRST, THEN THE ROOM. Six fen-needles - long, grey, hook-mouthed, mostly wing - have been roosting on the only dry stone under this mill. Use the **Stirge**. They came up through the gate last time it opened, they cannot get back down, and the fish are nearly gone.

THEY ARE GENUINELY DANGEROUS AND THE FIGHT IS SHORT. Two hit points each and hard to hit. At first level that is real, and almost anything that lands kills one.

THE MERCY IS IN THE CREATURE AND IT IS MECHANICAL. A fen-needle that has drunk its fill - ten hit points, as the stat block says - detaches and leaves for good. A character dropped here goes down with the thing already going, which means **death saves in the dark with the others still fighting** - the frightening version, not the lethal one.

AFTER THAT, THE ROOM EXPLAINS ITSELF and needs no check to do it. The slab is a gate. The block is its counterweight. When the block descends far enough the gate lifts, water goes through, and the gate falls shut. **Six seconds.**

WHY NOW. The sump under the counterweight has been silting up since the water left the valley. Silt compacts, the block drops, and it is near the bottom of its slot. Two seconds when Grig was eight. Six this week. When the block lands, the gate stays open and the Hollow Mill stops for good.

WHAT THE GATE WAS FOR. It faces the wrong way to keep water out. It was built to let water **out**, and the valley it drains is the one they are standing in. **Do not explain this and let nobody down here explain it.**

WHAT THEY CAN DO. Wedge the counterweight in its slot. The mill's spare shaft-timber is the right length, it is in the loft, and Grig will hate being asked. Two characters and twenty minutes, or one and a Strength (Athletics) DC 13.

AND WHAT IT COSTS. Wedged, the gate is sealed and whatever it was built for is finished. Left alone, the mill has a few years, and then the valley has a working flood gate and no idea what to do with it.

Give advantage if. They roped the dry slope instead of scrambling it. They come into the chamber quiet, with their hands free and the light still lit.

CHECK	DC	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Dexterity (Stealth)	10	Into the chamber low and dark, with the light shaded. The fight then starts on a count of somebody's choosing rather than on the ledge's.	Light up and six things come off the ledges at once.
Wisdom (Perception)	12	The groove behind the counterweight is bright for a hand's width and dull above it. It has moved further this year than in the thirty before it.	Scratched stone behind a hanging block, and no telling how old the scratching is.
Intelligence (History)	13	Not valley work. Dressed joints, a true slot, gear and time and a reason - and done before there was a village here to do it for.	Old stone, well made, and nothing else it is willing to say.

ENCOUNTER · A HARD FIGHT FOR 4 1ST-LEVEL CHARACTERS

Starts when. Any light is raised above head height in the chamber, or the second character steps through the opening.

6× Stirge

Fewer players. One: Two Stirges. **Two:** Four Stirges. **Three:** Four Stirges. With fewer fen-needles they still come in two waves, half from each ledge.

What winning means. Take the room. It is the only dry stone down here and everything else in the adventure happens in it.

Tactics. They drop in two waves of three from both ledges, at whoever holds the light rather than at the weakest. Any one that attaches drinks until it has taken 10 hit points, as its stat block says, and then leaves for good, fight over or not.

The ground. Dry flat floor - the only good footing in the adventure, and worth saying so. Ledges seven feet up on both long walls, DC 10 Athletics. The counterweight shaft is a hole in the floor a character can be pushed into and climbed out of at DC 10. A dropped light on this floor stays lit.

How it ends. All six are killed, or three or more have drunk and gone, or the party backs out into the channel - the fen-needles hold the dry room and will not follow into the water.

Instead of killing the last one. A fen-needle that drops the last character standing does not stay on them. It has what it came for: it detaches, flies up to the ledge, and is out of the fight for good. Nothing down here finishes anybody off, because nothing down here wants meat - it wants blood and then it wants to be left alone. A character at nought hit points in this room makes death saves on dry stone, in light, with the rest of the fight still going on around them.

Stirge

Tiny Beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

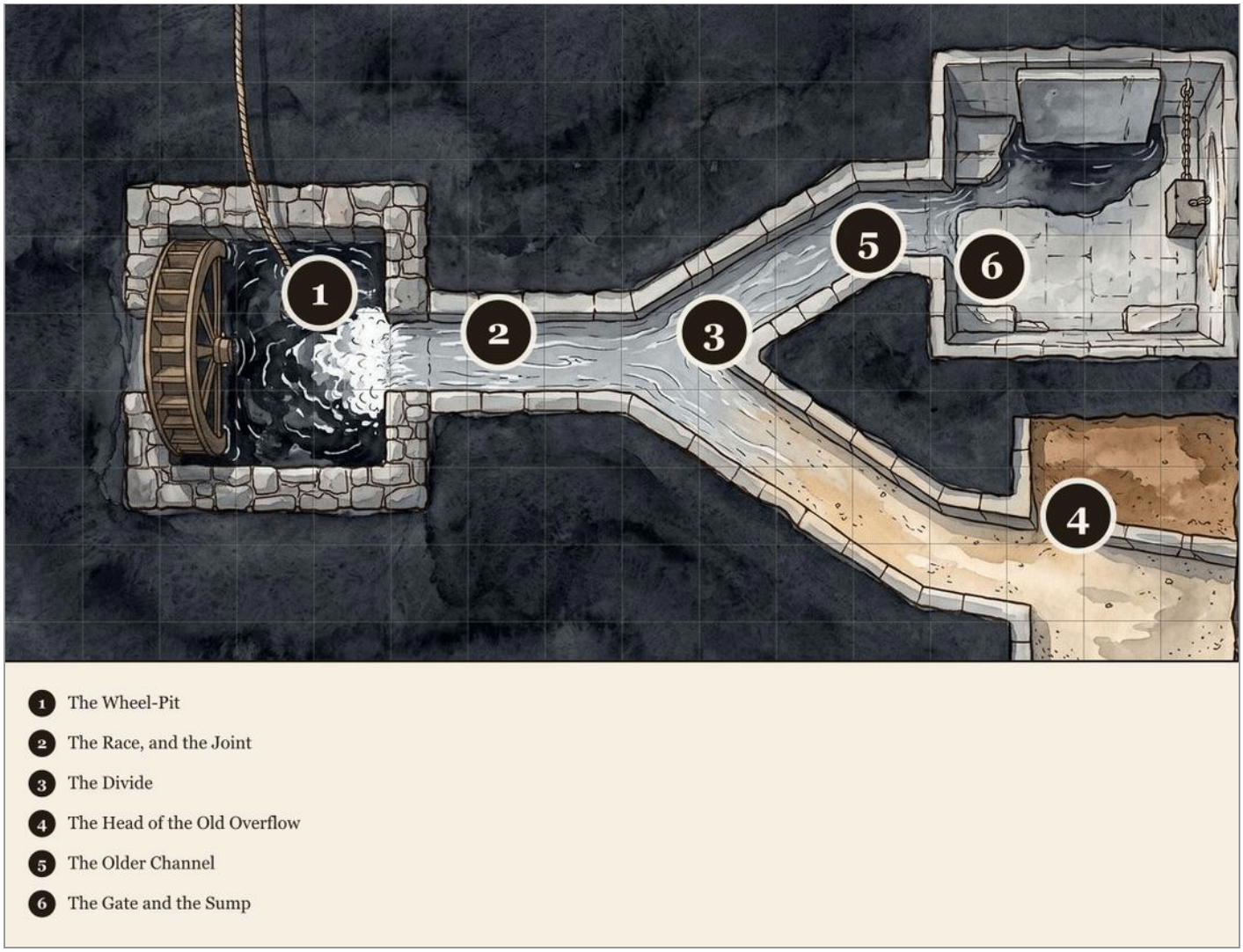
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 -3	16 +3	11 +0	2 -4	8 -1	6 -2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Blood Drain. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the stirge attaches to the target. While attached, the stirge doesn't attack. Instead, at the start of each of the stirge's turns, the target loses 5 (1d4 + 3) hit points due to blood loss. The stirge can detach itself by spending 5 feet of its movement. It does so after it drains 10 hit points of blood from the target or the target dies. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach the stirge.



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2 The Race, and the Joint

The tailrace: two and a half feet wide, four feet high, ankle-deep and moving, walkable bent double. Forty feet along, the mill's stonework ends in a clean vertical joint and older, better-cut stone carries on. The noise stops at that joint the way it stops when a door shuts.

3 The Divide

The channel opens out and splits. The right-hand way runs level and wet toward the sump. The left-hand way climbs slightly and is dry, and dry is the direction a cold party wants. Both are cut stone and neither is marked.

4 The Head of the Old Overflow

The passage in from the divide climbs forty feet and opens into this chamber, which is where the overflow ends. One whole wall is packed silt behind a dressed stone lip, three centuries of it, undisturbed. Dry floor, dry air, no way on. Going back DOWN that forty-foot slope in the dark is where lanterns get dropped.

5 The Older Channel

Twenty feet of dressed stone between the divide and the sump, ankle-deep, no ledges, ceiling at eight feet. The water in this stretch is the water that ran backwards, and it will do it again.

6 The Gate and the Sump

A cut chamber with square corners and a flat floor, high enough to stand in and the only dry stone down here. Most of one wall is a stone slab hung in a slot with the water going under it. Beside it a counterweight block the size of a cart hangs on a chain, with a bright scoured groove down the wall behind. The mark is cut low on the slab, below the old chalky waterline. Six fen-needles roost on the dry ledges.

Ways on from here. Back up the way they came, with the block still settling

SCENE 5 OF 5 · A MOMENT FOR THE ONE WHO HITS THINGS

Six Seconds, Going Up

What this scene is for. They get out, wet and carrying more than they came with, having felt the gate work once from the inside.

It begins when. They turn to leave the sump, whether or not they wedged anything.

> READ ALOUD
>
> *Going back is the same cold channel and it is not the same journey. It is uphill, the water is against you, and your hands are full now.*
>
> *Twenty feet along, the water goes quiet and flat.*
>
> *Then it starts moving the wrong way, and it is faster here than it was in the pit, because you are much closer to the thing that is taking it. The dark ahead of you smells of wet stone.*

THE GATE OPENS ONCE WHILE THEY ARE IN THE CHANNEL, and this is the scene where they feel from the inside what they watched from the wheel-pit. **Unless they wedged it** - a wedged block does not descend and this does not happen, and a party that gets a quiet walk home earned it.

WHAT IT IS. Six seconds of the race running backwards, at knee height instead of ankle height, in a channel four feet high. **Strength (Athletics) DC 12** for anybody standing in the wet way. On a failure they are carried thirty feet back down the channel toward the sump, bruised and soaked, and have to walk it again.

NOBODY DIES HERE AND THE DM SHOULD KNOW THAT GOING IN. There is air the whole way, the water is knee-deep at its worst, and it lasts six seconds. Count them out loud again. It is the third time in the evening the table has heard that count and it should land hardest here.

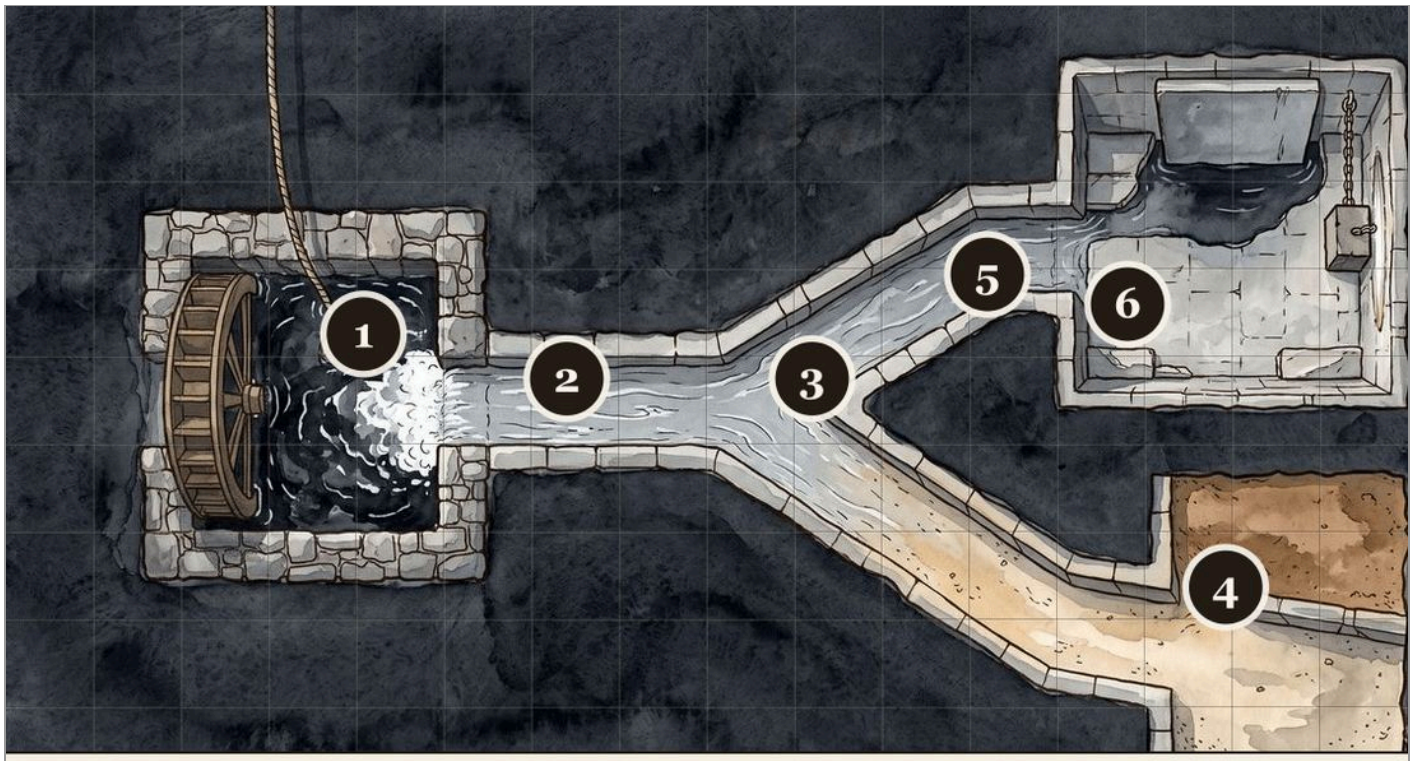
UP IS HARDER AND THEY ARE CARRYING MORE, which is the point of this scene: a satchel, eleven copper, a brass whistle, an oak wedge that somebody cut to fit that slot and never used, and possibly a fen-needle in a jar. The last thirty feet is the climb to the pit with the wheel turning again over their heads.

GRIG IS AT THE TOP OF THE SHAFT WHERE THEY LEFT HIM, two hours later, and has not sat down.

IF THEY LOST ALL THEIR LIGHT, and some parties will, the way out is forty feet of one-directional channel with a current to follow and a wheel to hear. Say so. **Being in the dark is frightening and is not a death sentence**, and a first-time DM needs to be told that in as many words.

> **Give advantage if.** They wedged, jammed or even tried to move the block on the chain. Whatever it did or did not do, they now know exactly what it weighs and where it wants to go.

CHECK	DC	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Strength (Athletics)	12	Braced against both walls, and the six seconds pass with everybody where they were standing.	Carried thirty feet back down the channel. Bruised, soaked, and walking it again in the dark.
Wisdom (Survival)	10	The current runs one way and the wheel is audible past the joint. There is no getting lost down here, with or without light.	Every stretch of this channel looks like every other, and the walk out takes twice as long as the walk in.
Charisma (Persuasion)	11	Grig hears the whole of it, believes it, and sleeps that night for the first time in a week.	He hears the part he wanted - a stone in the race - and thanks them for it, and does not ask a single further question.



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EVERYTHING WITH A NUMBER, AGAIN, IN ONE PLACE

Stat Blocks

Each of these is also printed beside the scene that uses it, so you never have to turn back here mid-fight.

Stirge

Tiny Beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 -3	16 +3	11 +0	2 -4	8 -1	6 -2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Blood Drain. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the stirge attaches to the target. While attached, the stirge doesn't attack. Instead, at the start of each of the stirge's turns, the target loses 5 (1d4 + 3) hit points due to blood loss. The stirge can detach itself by spending 5 feet of its movement. It does so after it drains 10 hit points of blood from the target or the target dies. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach the stirge.

WHAT THEY CARRY OUT

Treasure and Ending

> **Worth.** 2 gp per character

> **Worth.** 11 cp

> **Worth.** 2 sp
>
> Carries the length of the tailrace over running water, which is further than a shout does. A party that keeps it has solved being separated underground for good.

> **Worth.** nothing
>
> It fits the counterweight slot exactly. Somebody cut it to do the job the party is deciding whether to do, and then did not use it. It changes the last scene from a decision about a mill into a decision about whoever came here first.

Back Up the Rope

Grig is at the top of the shaft where they left him, two hours later, and has not sat down.

If they wedged it, he takes good news the way an exhausted man takes it, which is badly: he asks them to say it again twice, then sleeps for fourteen hours, and Anwen quietly starts taking grain again. He never entirely believes it is finished. Every few weeks for the rest of his life he goes down and looks at the timber.

If they left it, he is not angry. He is worse than angry - he thanks them, pays them, and does not ask what they saw, because a man six days without sleep has worked out there are answers he cannot afford this week. The mill finishes the grind. It will finish next year's. Somewhere after that, it will not.

Either way they are the only people alive who know what is under the Hollow Mill, and nobody up here asked them for it.

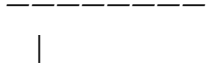
PRINT THESE AND PUT THEM IN THEIR HANDS

Handouts

HANDOUT

The Mark on the Gate

Cut into the slab, low, below the chalky old waterline and worn soft at the edges:



One straight line, and a smaller line dropping from the centre of it.

Hand this to the players as a drawn thing, not a described one. Do not tell them what it means. Nobody in Lowmere can read it, it appears on old stone the length of the valley, and it is always below the line the water used to reach.

HANDOUT

What Grig Mullens Said, Word for Word

"It went quiet. I've heard that wheel every night of my life and it went quiet, and I counted six, and then it come back.

Forty years. Forty years and it has never once done that.

My father stopped the grind one night. I'd have been eight. He wouldn't say why and my mother wouldn't ask him, and I have not thought about that until just now, standing here.

Don't stop my wheel. Whatever's down there. There's nine days of grind and the whole valley's bread in my loft."

HANDOUT

The Light, and How Long It Lasts

Give this to a player and make it their job. It is the only bookkeeping in the adventure.

THE MILL LANTERN	*60 minutes*	*Grig filled it. He knows exactly how much is in it.*
CANDLE-END 1	*10 minutes*	*Anwen has four. They go out in a splash.*
CANDLE-END 2	*10 minutes*	
CANDLE-END 3	*10 minutes*	
CANDLE-END 4	*10 minutes*	
A CANTRIP	*all evening*	*Needs no tracking. Can still be dropped.*

Cross a line off as it goes. Say the number out loud when it drops under twenty minutes.

ROLL WHEN YOU NEED SOMETHING

Tables

What the race has brought down here (d6)

1	A milling sack, Hollow Mill mark, split and empty and not old.
2	Eleven copper pieces in a leather satchel gone to slime, and a brass whistle that still works.
3	A child's wooden boat, tarred, with a name burnt into it that nobody at the mill recognises.
4	Fish bones. A great many, all river fish, all this season.
5	A hand-cut oak wedge, exactly the right size for a counterweight slot, and somebody put it here before.
6	A shoe. Just the one, dry, on the ledge, above every waterline in this channel.

When the light gets low, and somebody asks what that was (d6)

1	The wheel, three hundred feet behind, changing note as the grind upstairs changes sack.
2	A fen-needle that has drunk and gone, working its way back up the channel past them.
3	Silt letting go of the overflow lip and sliding six inches. Nothing follows it.
4	The counterweight chain taking up, one link, somewhere ahead in the dark.
5	Their own light, guttering, and it is the third time this hour.
6	Nothing at all, and it takes about a minute for anybody to be willing to say so.

Pre-Generated Characters

Four characters, finished. Ability scores, armour class, hit points, attacks, spells and the two or three things each one is for. Nothing to roll, nothing to look up, nothing to buy.

Davin Holt



Human · Fighter 1

Grew up two fields from this mill and has been in the wheel-pit before, as a dare, and did not enjoy it.

AC	HP	SPEED	INIT	PROF	PASSIVE PERC
18	12	30 ft.	+2	+2	13

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 +3	14 +2	15 +2	9 -1	13 +1	11 +0

Saving throws STR +5, CON +4 (others are the plain modifier)
Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3
Attacks Longsword +5 to hit, 1d8 +3 slashing (two-handed 1d10 +3) · Javelin +5 to hit, 1d6 +3 piercing
Gear Rope, 50 ft., Bedroll, Tinderbox
Fighting Style: Defence. The +1 is already inside the armour class printed above.
Second Wind. Once per rest, a bonus action gives you back 1d10 + 1 hit points.

Sela Fen



Halfling · Rogue 1

Owes Anwen Mullens money and would rather work it off underground than be asked for it on the mill floor.

AC	HP	SPEED	INIT	PROF	PASSIVE PERC
14	10	25 ft.	+3	+2	15

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 -1	17 +3	14 +2	12 +1	13 +1	11 +0

Saving throws DEX +5, INT +3 (others are the plain modifier)
Skills Stealth +7, Perception +5, Acrobatics +5, Sleight of Hand +5
Attacks Shortsword +5 to hit, 1d6 +3 piercing · Shortbow +5 to hit, 1d6 +3 piercing · Dagger +5 to hit, 1d4 +3 piercing
Gear Thieves' tools, Crowbar, Ten feet of waxed cord
Sneak Attack (1d6). Once a turn, add the dice when you have advantage, or when an ally is beside your target.
Expertise. Double proficiency on two skills — already inside the numbers above.
Halfling Luck. Reroll a 1 on any d20 and take the second roll.

Pre-Generated Characters

Brannoc Idle



Half-Elf · Cleric 1

Has been told the mill is fine by three people who all looked away while saying it.

AC	HP	SPEED	INIT	PROF	PASSIVE PERC
16	10	30 ft.	+1	+2	13

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13+1	13+1	14+2	10+0	16+3	10+0

Saving throws WIS +5, CHA +2 (others are the plain modifier)
Skills Medicine +5, Religion +2
Attacks Mace +3 to hit, 1d6 +1 bludgeoning
Spells save DC 13, attack +5, 2 slots of level 1
Cantrips Sacred Flame, Guidance, Light
Prepared Cure Wounds, Healing Word, Bless, Shield of Faith
Gear Holy symbol, Bandages, A flask of something warm
Ritual casting. A prepared spell marked as a ritual can be cast without spending a slot.
Fey Ancestry. Advantage against being charmed, and magic cannot put you to sleep.

Wren Coble



Gnome · Wizard 1

Wants to see the old stone under the valley and has waited years for somebody to have a reason to open a way down to it.

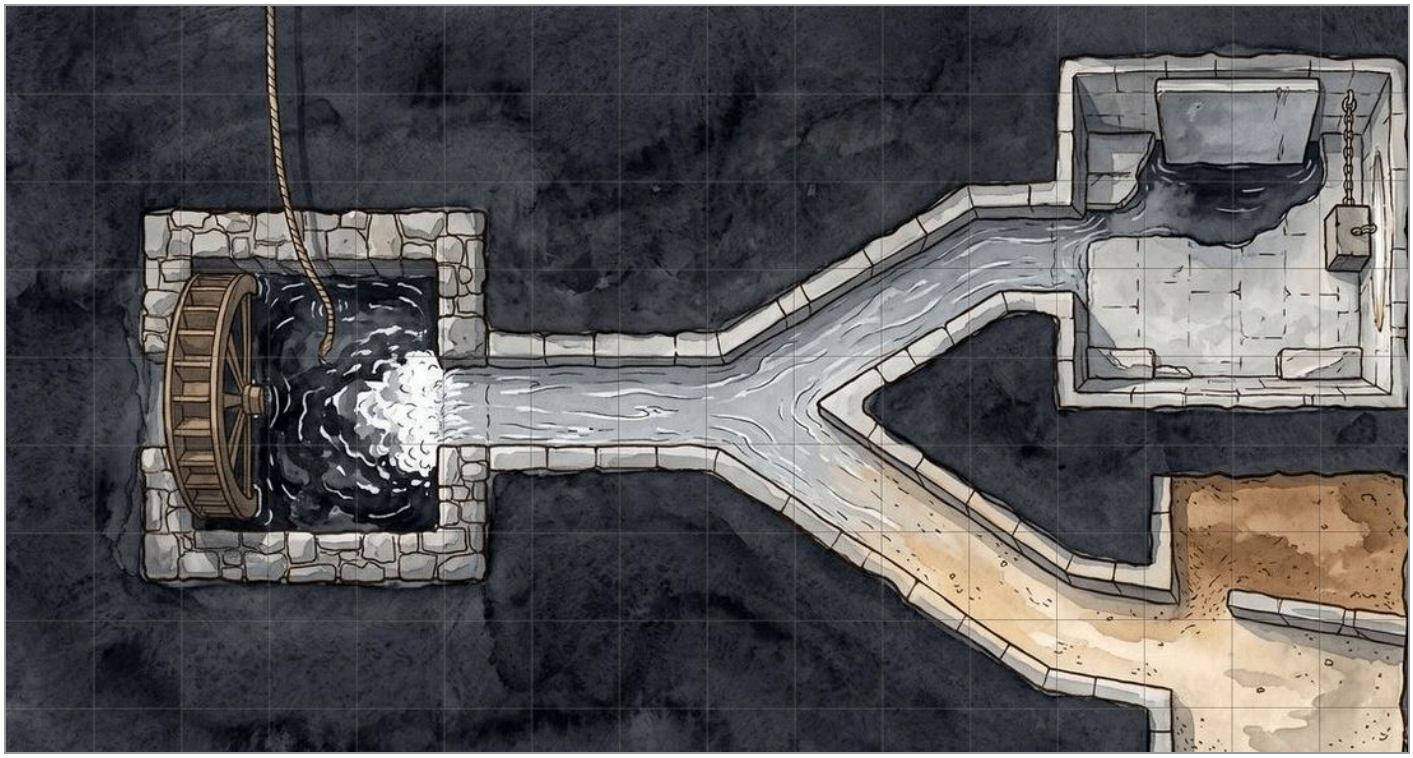
AC	HP	SPEED	INIT	PROF	PASSIVE PERC
11	8	25 ft.	+1	+2	11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8-1	13+1	14+2	17+3	12+1	10+0

Saving throws INT +5, WIS +3 (others are the plain modifier)
Skills Arcana +5, Investigation +5
Attacks Quarterstaff +1 to hit, 1d6 -1 bludgeoning (two-handed 1d8 -1) · Dagger +3 to hit, 1d4 +1 piercing
Spells save DC 13, attack +5, 2 slots of level 1
Cantrips Fire Bolt, Mage Hand, Light
Prepared Magic Missile, Shield, Mage Armor, Sleep
Gear Spellbook, Ink and a dry pen, Component pouch
Arcane Recovery. Once a day, a short rest gives back spell slots worth half your level, rounded up.
Gnome Cunning. Advantage on INT, WIS and CHA saves against magic.

BATTLE MAP · PRINT IT, OR DROP IT INTO A VIRTUAL TABLETOP

Under the Hollow Mill



Player copy — no labels, no secrets. 70 pixels per 5-foot square, so it imports at the right scale without rescaling.

A NOTE FROM US

Thank you for playing

We are a small studio, and we read everything our players tell us. What you say decides what we make next — and how we fix what we have already made.

So, once you have played: what worked? What dragged? Was anything unclear? Did anything surprise you?

> TWO WAYS TO TELL US
>
> *1.* ***Leave an honest rating on itch.io.*** *Sign in, open* ***onegoodeveningdnd.itch.io/six-seconds****, and under More information choose Rate this. The stars help other players find it; any words you add are read only by us.*
>
> *2.* ***Or leave a comment*** *at the bottom of the same page. We answer every one.*

If anything in the file is wrong or missing, tell us and we will fix it. Good or bad, it all helps. Thank you.

LICENCE

Legal

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