

Once More Into the Fire

Theme

Calcination

Poem

The All-Mother cares.

*Years ago, we built spires at her direction
Stone spikes to protect us from the fire
Because the All-Mother cares
We lived then, in peaceful sorority, building monuments for the All-Mother's glory*

The All-Mother bleeds.

*They came then, the low things of fire
Burning her webs in the daylight, storming our temples
Because the All-Mother bleeds
We fled then, in warlike sorority, leaving traps for the All-Mother's vengeance*

The All-Mother watches.

*They were foolish, looting our temples
The All-Mother did not tell them which pockets hid the fire
Because the All-Mother watches
They died then, at the hands of the fire she had webbed away, in her mercy*

The All-Mother knows.

*We grew up in her webs, with legends of how she saved us from the fire
We rest, and grow, in her nurturing darkness
Because the All-Mother knows
We live now, in peaceful sorority, working together for the All-Mother's pride in us*

The All-Mother chose us.

*She sent spiders into our dreams, waking us to her purpose
No longer do we rest in our deepest abode
Because the All-Mother chose us
Together we climb now, into those ancestral grounds, to once more tame the fire*

Background

You are a daughter of the All-Mother, compelled by divine visions to pursue a heretical quest up into the ancestral home of your people. Your people have lived underground for centuries, subsisting on fungus and insects, with only an oral history of when you lived in gleaming crystal spires in the world above. You will be the first to return, and upon returning may find that you can never again retreat down below.

This incursion is not meant to echo racist tropes in existing OSR lore about underground societies. I hope it achieves that.

Why only daughters?

Matriarchal societies are fun to contemplate, and just as titles in contemporary human society are often derived from male-coded words even if they're applied to women, titles in this society are feminine. This does not mean treasure hunters must be female.

Occupations, backgrounds, and rituals are meant to supplement, not replace, what is in the core rules of Trophy Gold.

Occupations

1. Spider-mother (beasts, aiding, traps)
2. Altar-tender (performance, rituals, symbols)
3. Herb-gatherer (herbs, alchemy, tracking)
4. Story-weaver (lore, performance, illusions)
5. Fire-tender (protection, weapons, security)
6. Cavern-digger (strength, persistence, lore)

Backgrounds

1. Fungus farmer (plants)
2. Scorned sister (rituals)
3. Beguiled babe (improvisation)
4. Forgotten mother (command)
5. Unheeded prophet (omens)
6. Inspired spiderborn (transformation)

Rituals

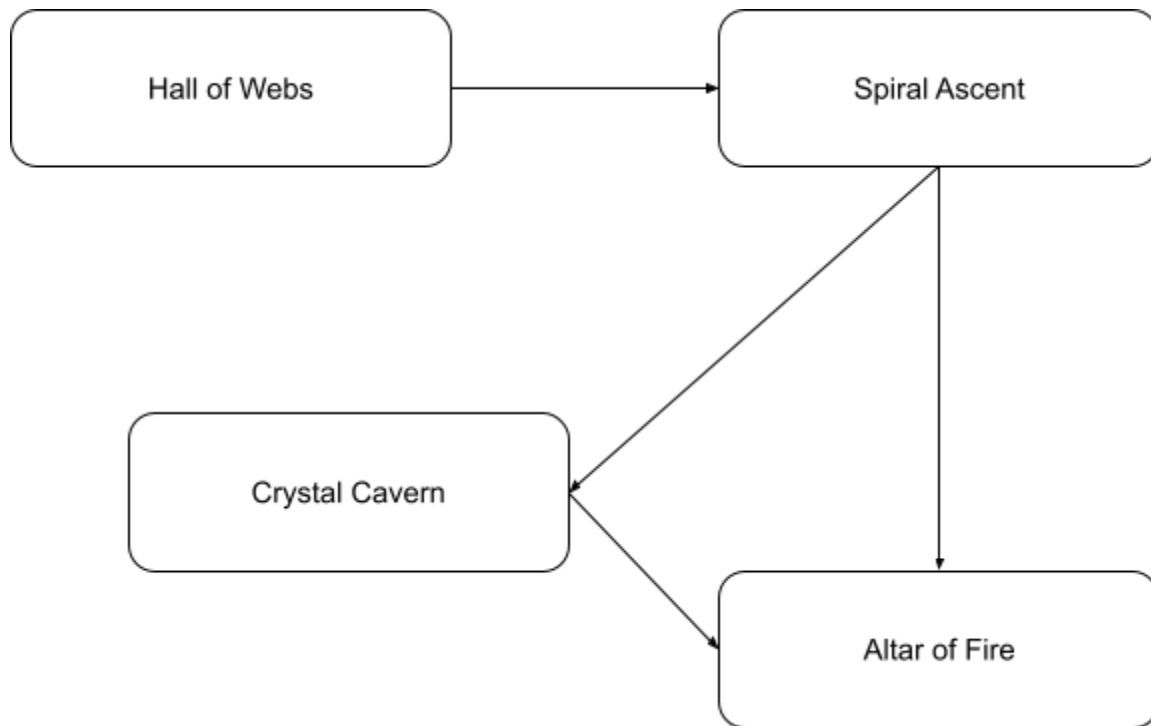
1. Glow - imbue a being with light such that you cannot lose track of it
2. Blind - remove sight from a being
3. Entangle - cover a surface with sticky webbing

4. Recall - compel a person to revisit recent memories
5. Duel - hold a being's attention in combat
6. Conjure - borrow a physical object from a near-future you

Combat Equipment

Treasure hunters may have spider companions in addition to any other combat equipment. Each spider companion has one skill, and costs the character one burden.

Set Flow Chart



Note: the scavengers and other invaders entered through the Crystal Caverns.

Hall of Webs

This great hall sits at the apex of the underground cavern system in which you were raised, and which you have never left. It is a large natural cavern, carved by water which even now drips audibly down the walls. The halls you were raised in were engraved by generations of your people, but this one seems as if it were hastily abandoned, as it remains completely untouched by mortal hands. You are familiar with the pervasive damp chill of your underground society, and so the humid heat of this place takes you aback. The cavern is shrouded in defensive webbing and guarded by seven portal sisters, elite warriors chosen from the greatest among your society. All seven stand, statuesque, in silent decorum as you approach. Your presence is forbidden here, and the sisters, if they see you, will prevent you from investigating any portal.

Goal:

Travel through the Maia Portal.

Props:

There are 7 portals leading from this room, each identically covered in webs and guarded by a portal sister. Close inspection reveals the subtle differences between the portals, but cannot be achieved without passing the portal sister guarding it. The sisters frequently rotate, and so may each display symptoms of having come too close to multiple portals.

- *Halcyone Portal* - Water flows continuously from this jagged opening in the rock wall. From somewhere beyond the opening, a burbling like a gentle sob can be heard, and the water is salty. Gleaming minnows can be seen in this stream, though they cannot be caught.
 - Traps:
 - Coming too close to this portal will cause you to sprout gleaming green feathers.
- *Asterope Portal* - Approaching this portal causes your hair to stand on end.
 - Traps:
 - Touching the webs covering this passage will result in lightning lashing out at you.
- *Celano Portal* - The webs in front of this portal sway, as if from the breath of some great beast.
 - Traps:
 - Attempting to pass through this smooth opening will be met with a giant tongue wrapping around you, drawing you into the gaping maw that waits beyond.
- *Electra Portal* - These webs gleam brighter than the others, and are spun of some fine metal instead of the familiar spidersilk.
 - Traps:
 - Touching the gleaming webs will result in your limbs stiffening as your skin takes on a metallic hue.
- *Merope Portal* - This portal buzzes with malicious energy, and metallic movement can be seen through the webs.
 - Traps:
 - Giant wasps wait beyond, to sting any spider people so bold as to approach and carry them off to daub into their nests for hungry larvae.
- *Taygete Portal* - This opening is too narrow to pass through and a hot wind can be felt from beyond.
 - Treasure:
 - Green herbs grow just inside, barely outside of arm's reach, and may be carefully gathered with some tool.

- *Maia Portal* - The other side of this portal is engraved with runes reminiscent of your writing. If you use a ritual or otherwise make a risky attempt to read them, they can be interpreted as ancient runes of warding, now deactivated. Something gleams in the darkness, through the webs, and all treasure hunters hear a whispering cajoling them to pass through.

Moments:

- A web catches your feet, and you have a brief flash of life as a bird, pulling a writhing fish from black water.
- You see a woman through a web, naked but for elaborate jewelry, and she turns to flash you a beguiling smile before passing through a portal, unnoticed by the sister guarding it.
- Lightning sparks from a portal to your companion, and then to you, and you are briefly aware of everything your companions see and hear, a cacophony of light and noise through too many perspectives overwhelming your senses.

Traps:

Webs do not just cover the portals, but cover every other available surface in this place as well. Careless actions here will result in the treasure hunters being easily entangled in these webs.

Treasures:

Each portal sister wears a mycelium breastplate and carries a spear forged from cold iron. These weapons and armor are holy weapons, decorated in honor of the All-Mother, and connote the respect that the sisters wearing them are owed. Taking them will mean you can never return.

“Monster”: Portal Sisters

The mightiest warriors of your people, these women stand impassive guard in front of each portal. They may have patches of gleaming metal skin, green feathers, or charred hair from close brushes with the more malignant portals. You recognize these women, and may know them by name from growing up around them. Each portal sister wears a breastplate and carries a spear.

Endurance:

8

Habits:

1. Resting, fatigued, on her spear.
2. Facing the portal she guards, spear ready.
3. Facing the treasure hunters, spear ready.
4. Plucking green feathers from where they sprout from her skin.

5. Greeting the treasure hunters by name, scolding them for being in this forbidden chamber.
6. Sharpening her spear.

Defenses:

- Pierce - The spear is sharp and highly effective.
- Armored - The fungal breastplate can deflect a heavy attack.
- Commanding - You are used to obeying women of her rank.

Weakness:

- Affection - This sister knows you, and does not want to hurt you.
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Spiral Ascent

Unlike the caverns of your youth, this chamber is wide and airy, carved with delicate niches and alcoves set into the walls. Sculptures and engravings, some broken by time or blunt force, line the wall to your right. Crystals studded into the wall to your left allow sunlight into each chamber, throwing multicolored spots of light onto every surface. This hall climbs gently, but winds ever upward. Following it will stretch many miles up to the apex of your ancestral spire.

Goal:

Learn something of what drove your people underground.

Props:

- *First Spiral* - The glints of light here are few and far between, as most of the crystals in the wall to your left seem to have been covered from the other side. Smashed statues in alcoves to your right look especially menacing in the resulting gloaming.
 - Traps:
 - Warrior echoes lurk behind the statues, looking to attack anything that comes from below.
 - Treasure:
 - The echoes wear chainmail emblazoned with alien crests.
- *Second Spiral* - The light here is brighter, as almost all of the crystals are unobscured. The statues and engravings in the wall to your right are also mostly intact. As time passes and the colored blots of light move across the wall, the engraved scenes appear to animate, portraying familiar myths.
 - Traps:
 - The passage of time here is distorted. Watching the animated myths will make time seem to pass faster, meaning that treasure-seekers may be

hungrier and more exhausted than they anticipate by the time they climb past this section of the ascent.

- Treasure:
 - The statues wear still-intact jewelry. Golden spiders climb over their delicate hands, and symbols of the all mother decorate their necks.
- Animated myth fragments:
 - A woman with a spear stands over young children, fending off a giant wasp that has come to steal a neighboring kingdom's princeling.
 - A woman traces her fingers over soil, causing mushrooms to 'sprout, providing food for a flock of thin children.
 - A woman helps another climb down a rope into the earth, avoiding a rampant fire on the surface.
- *Third Spiral* - The statues and engravings here have been charred, and almost all the crystals have been pried from the wall to your left. Only crimson jewels remain, such that flames appear to flicker in the narrow alcoves. Investigating the removal of the crystals will lead the treasure hunters to the crystal caverns, otherwise the ascent will continue to the Altar.
 - Traps:
 - Investigating the charred alcoves will cause ashlings to arise and attack the living fuel of the treasure hunters.

Moments:

- Your companion's shadow smiles and winks at you before opening its maw wide and waiting for you to step into it.
- One of your companions glances at the wall once, and then again, and then stare transfixed at an engraving for over an hour, even as you try to move them.
- A jingle rings behind you, as some spectral battalion marches down the spiral towards the portal you left open.

Monster: Warrior Echoes

These are the shambling remains of alien warriors. They're eyeless, flesh dropping from them even as they move, but they retain the chainmail and tabards of their alien cult. Scorching is visible on their chainmail, even if most of their remaining flesh appears unaffected by fire.

Endurance:

7

Habits:

1. Clutching a shattered statue, using the structure to support its decaying form.
2. Slouched on the floor, a terrible puddle of armored flesh.
3. Standing at attention, facing up towards some invisible commanding officer.

4. Chewing bits of its own dissolved flesh.
5. Cursing the treasure hunters for their foul necromancy.
6. Begging the treasure hunters for the release of death.

Defenses:

- Armored - chainmail can deflect many attacks
- Painless - unaffected by past injuries

Weakness:

- Eyeless - cannot see the treasure hunters
- Shambling - slow

Monster: Ashlings

Spiraling whirls of ash, these elementals are the offspring of the Fire Lord above. They seek living fuel so that they may grow. They are voiceless in this stage, but all consuming.

Endurance:

9

Habits:

1. A formless pile of dust, apparently harmless.
2. A haze of ash in the beam of light from a single crimson crystal.
3. A charred shape on a wall, mimicking the form of some surprised being.
4. A second shadow stretched along the floor, only barely distinct from your own.
5. A second face on a singed statue.
6. A black serpent slithering through a shadow in part of the charred wall engraving.

Defenses:

- Formless - Physical attacks pass through the ashling, allowing it to reform afterwards.
- Consuming - Living flesh that touches the ashling turns to ash itself.

Weakness:

- Wind - The ashling can be blown apart.

Crystal Cavern

This 20-foot tall cavern, which branches off one of the alcoves, was once covered with crystal frescoes, but some force has broken a jagged hole into the far side of the cavern. Constant

movement in this opening reveals a troupe of people ferrying empty sacks into the cavern and full sacks out. Others cling to the walls, chipping away at the remaining frescos with picks, prying gems from their rightful places.

Goal:

Stop the theft of your history.

Props:

- *Intact Fresco* - The only intact fresco in this cavern is a slab with a bejeweled scene depicting an 8-legged woman standing above a man made of fire. It is elaborately carved, and parts of the rock supporting it are paper thin, almost translucent.
 - Treasure:
 - This fresco can be taken in its entirety, if more than two people are there to help move it.
 - Neighboring partial frescos:
 - An 8-legged woman distributing clothes to the masses. The faces of the recipients have been chipped away, and soot painted onto the stone in their place, such that the recipients appear to be smirking demons.
 - A sobbing woman confessing formerly jeweled prophecies to her 8-legged matron. The prophecies have been removed, and painted-soot spears protrude from the oracle's back.
 - A woman of ice giving birth to a hoard of spiders. The woman's form has been all but chipped away, and flame-shaped blotches of soot envelop her spider children.
- *Mining Encampment* - Near the gaping hole in the wall is a semi-permanent encampment where the scavengers sleep and eat. An ever-burning fire sits in the center, with a stewpot simmering above it. Surrounding this fire is a collection of leather and fur bedrolls.
 - Traps:
 - This encampment is strung with tripwires. When triggered, a large gong in the center of the camp will ring, attracting the attention of all nearby scavengers.
 - Treasure:
 - The pot of stew contains enough for 8 nice meals. A fully stocked medicine kit sits near the fire.
- *Subtle staircase* - Metal bars are embedded in the walls, untouched by the scavengers. They stick out just enough such that they can be climbed up to a small crack in the ceiling, leading to the altar room above.
 - Traps:
 - The upper bars of this stair are slippery with soot, and should prompt a risk roll to be successfully climbed.

Moments:

- One scavenger pokes another, and makes some gesture with their hands while talking in an alien language. The second laughs crudely and draws a rude shape in soot on the wall.
- A booming voice sounds from above, causing all of the scavengers to freeze. One of the largest sighs and points at a small one, who drops his pick and begins climbing the wall.
- The fire in the encampment flares and a nearby scavenger rushes over, dumping crystals into it until it dies down.

Monster: Crystal Scavengers

These are unfamiliar people dressed in leather and furs. They all carry picks, and their pockets are full of stolen gems.

Endurance:

7, 11 if in a group of 3+

Habits:

1. Chipping at a crystal embedded in the wall with a pick.
2. Resting against a defiled wall, smoking some foul-smelling herb.
3. Carrying a sack of gems towards the hole in the wall.
4. Talking to a compatriot in some alien language.
5. Eating stew in the encampment.
6. Sleeping in a bedroll in the encampment.

Defenses:

- Piercing pick - the picks the scavengers carry are heavy and sharp, and the scavengers have 0 hesitation in using them on the treasure hunters.
- Chosen by the Fire Lord - touching the scavengers bare-handed burns.

Weakness:

- Greed
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Altar of Fire

The spiral ascent and subtle stair both lead up into a segmented antechamber, which surrounds a wide depression in the floor. Inside this depression, a form of fire snores loudly. With each snore, a gust of hot air floods the antechamber.

Goal:

Defeat the Fire Lord

Props:

- *Segmented antechamber* - This low antechamber overlooks the depression in the center of the room. Comfortable seating areas have been carved into the stone walls in each segment, where attendants or worshippers might sit to look down on the Fire Lord himself. The stone here is singed, as if great hands of fire had plucked people from each alcove.
 - Traps:
 - Speaking while in the antechamber will wake the Fire Lord, upon which he will reach for anyone he can see.
 - The gusts the Fire Lord exhales are strong enough to knock you over, and scorching hot. Bare flesh is singed by the heat. It is easy to anticipate his exhales, but you still must prepare for them.
- *Fire Lord's bower* - The shallow depression in the middle of the room is nearly completely filled with a man's reclining form. The man is a giant sculpted from fire, resting on a pile of gold and gems. He can easily reach each segment of the antechamber from his position in the center of the room.
 - Treasure:
 - Below the Fire Lord lays a pile of gold and gems. Identifiable among the hoard is jewelry snatched from the statues below and crystals pried from the walls.

Moments:

- The Fire Lord wakes, briefly, rummaging about in the wealth below him, increasingly irritated, until a shower of stones appears in his hand, appeasing him.
- A scavenger clings to a crack in the wall, sobbing, the stone around him singed from where great hands of fire have reached for him again and again.
- The sleeping Fire Lord snorts, a gust of fire rushing out from him, singeing the treasure hunters and leaving behind the smell of old tobacco.

Monster: Fire Lord

A giant man made of fire, the treasure hunters are no taller than the width of his palms. He is irritable and spoilt, accustomed to being fed the wealth of the spire in which he has made his home.

Endurance:

Habits:

1. Snoring loudly in the middle of the room.
2. Sleeping fitfully, in the grasp of some nightmare.
3. Shouting at the scavengers below to bring him treasure.
4. Throwing a writhing scavenger into his open maw.
5. Laughing as he wallows in his stolen wealth.
6. Scratching faces in fire into the walls of the antechamber.

Defenses:

- Made of fire - Any wood, fungus, spiderweb, or flesh touched by the Fire Lord burns easily.

Weakness:

- Cold iron - Running a cold iron weapon through his body will cool his flames, rendering that part of his flesh heavy and useless.

Aftermath

The Fire Lord is dead, and you stand triumphant in the seat of your ancestral home. In the ashes, you can see the gleaming of silver webs in the room's bower, where once the All-Mother herself might have rested.

You have a choice, now. You can try to return below, triumphant from your heretical climb up above. You will bring your people parts of their history, and stories of how you may all reclaim at least one spire. Will they join you in reclaiming the surface world? Will they welcome your artefacts?

Alternatively, you can leave the spire, just as the crystal scavengers would have, to sell your treasures to the highest bidder. Those outside may speak an alien tongue, but you have seen the green herbs and fine leather that they wear. Perhaps you alone have outgrown the comfort of your subterranean home.