

The Lich Queen's Temple Tomb

An extensive, mostly subterranean, complex of tombs and places of veneration, making an overall curious mixture of places long buried at different times under the more recent, simple, now ruined, former surface settlement of Vhangha Village. All parts of the tomb complex were here from long before the Village existed, and aside from the obvious overground ziggurat-like structure of the Temple Tomb, only the oval hill of The Barrow (raised above the Tomb of the Thunder Lizard King) suggests there might be more hidden underground.

There is just one entrance to the complex (as the blocked Old Well shaft does not connect into it), which was once concealed below the foundations of a surface building. Although that building is now a ruin, its more substantial, still partly roofed-over, section stands over the since-excavated Surface Entrance shown on this map. It is not clear if another surface structure once concealed this stairway in the days before the Village, as that now begins immediately at the submerged ground level of the ruined building's basement. Rubble from the ruins makes the first part of the steps a difficult challenge, becoming clearer of debris only further down, for all the steps are still ancient and rather worn. Like all the floors and ceilings of the Temple Tomb section, the steps are made from white marble. Ceiling heights throughout the tomb complex, unless noted, are typically about 7 feet (2.1 metres). The Entrance stairs descend a total of about 10 ft (3 m) from where the top step now is in the ruin's basement.

Temple Tomb

A stone door at the end of the Surface Entrance stairwell passage opens into the outer circuit passageway that runs all around the ascending part of this Tomb, leading up to the Queen's Chamber, in the upper right corner of the map. Another stone door on the western wall of the passage south just through the Entrance doorway leads to the Bloodlamp Halls and Divination Pools. The outer passage circuit narrows in its northeast and southwest corners, where each has an angled outer wall.

A secret door in the northeastern angled wall opens into the **Treasure Chambers**, a group of three rooms, the central, larger, of which has six walls. The south and west walls of this middle room have low wooden doors set into them, which open into smaller, square side-chambers. A total of five large chests are in this trio of rooms. Along with various valuable monetary and gemstone treasures (not itemised here), the following may be discovered too.

- 1) A gemstone-encrusted suit of leather body armour.
- 2) A beautifully-made cloak in shimmering, dark fabric.
- 3) A gold-inlaid, damascene-patterned, blade-breaking/parrying short sword.
- 4) A pair of red leather gloves, enchanted so their wearer always senses the presence of traps and ambushes nearby before they are sprung.
- 5) A gold brooch with a large central aquamarine gemstone, the stone inscribed with a holy symbol that will shine with divine radiance for up to sixty minutes after an appropriate prayer is said.
- 6) A rolled and tied finely-crafted magical tapestry, which when unrolled, hung up and viewed can be used up to thrice a day to cleanse and tidy the viewer's clothes and body (including trimming hair, freshening breath and suchlike), a process that takes about a minute each time.
- 7) A bone scroll-tube containing a map showing all major features, settlements, tombs, etc., within 25 miles (40 kilometres) of Vhangha.
- 8) A golden ring set with a shimmering blue-white moonstone, flanked by a pair of small pieces of cut jet, a Ring of Death Wish. This is a cursed item, very difficult to remove once put on, and which gives its wearer a sudden, very strong, desire to die gloriously.
- 9) A magnificent broadsword, Red Fang, which magically restores to its wielder half the damage it inflicts with every blow to an enemy (the sword will only function thus in the hands of a living creature).

- 10) A black crystal sphere, the Eye of Death, in which a viewer may see the moment of their own death.

All this treasure is cumulatively cursed, however. If one item is removed from the Temple Tomb area, insect vermin will be continually drawn to the taker. If two items, along with the vermin curse, that person now becomes oddly clumsy whenever they are getting dressed or putting on any items of clothing or gear, taking twice as long as normal to do so. Taking a third item adds in that the taker learns the darkest secret of their most beloved and trusted ally, changing how that person is perceived forever. If four or more items are removed, along with all these disadvantages, a formerly slain major enemy is restored somewhere on Nibirum as an undead creature with a powerful grudge against their killer(s).

The first white marble inner wall line of the Temple Tomb marks the outer edge of the surface ziggurat on the Vhangha Village map, for GMs needing clarification. Within this outer line, the square spiral stairs rise, beginning in the southeast corner. Along the inner walls, about halfway between the steps and ceiling, is embedded a horizontal line of very ancient clay tablets inscribed with writings of a form somewhat like a very spidery style of ancient-Earth cuneiform. If translated, these prove to be a mixture of mythological, religious and historical texts from the distant past of Mate Ora, seemingly from well before it gained its modern reputation as the "Isle of the (Living) Dead". It would take much time and effort to learn more details from these. Removing them (as some seem incomplete, so are likely inscribed on both sides, including that buried in the wall) would require even more time, especially if trying to extract them complete. Doing so would also risk the partial collapse of the internal stair structure's walls, and possibly even the ziggurat's, so firmly are they fixed in place.

Random steps along the rising spiral staircase are magically trapped. If stood on, the trapped stairs cause all those below them to snap into an extremely slick ramp-slide, careening the unwary all the way back to the start. Every 90 minutes, this system resets to a different step as the trigger.

At the top of the stairs is the square, open **Queen's Tomb** chamber, with its impressive sarcophagus set off towards the northwestern corner. Lead-lined pipes run down from the ceiling to the mouth of the figure carved and painted on the sarcophagus' lid, continuing down into its interior, carrying blood and life force from anyone sacrificed on the altar in the chapel on top of the outer ziggurat (see the separate Vhangha Village Atlas map). The sarcophagus' lid does not open or move. Instead, the Lich Queen simply teleports to or from the sealed interior when she wishes to rest here, or when (as rarely) she is claiming a sacrifice. She may be in the sarcophagus, or the room, or anywhere else in her small domain, either within the full Temple Tomb underground complex, or the area of The Glade in the surface Village. The Lich Queen is detailed further by a separate Atlas portrait drawing.

Bardic Mirror Tomb

The southern exit from the Temple Tomb section leads through a series of darker, native stone corridors and small, empty chambers westwards to both the Tomb of the Thunder Lizard King and the southeastern entryways to the Bloodlamp Halls and Divination Pools. Soon after passing through the first chamber south of the Temple Tomb heading west, there is a double-width doorway on the south wall that leads into this southeastern section of the complex. Instead of doors, however, this entrance is blocked by a pair of large-door-sized, door-hinged, magically locked, mirrors. The Lich Queen can open these with ease. Others will find passing through them more of a challenge. The mirrors cannot be broken or damaged by any means, magical or mundane, repelling all such attempts. All the rooms inside this section are made from similar white marble to the stone lining the interior of the Temple Tomb. Here though, all the surfaces have been highly polished to a near mirror-like reflectivity, including the secret doors to the Mirror Elemental Chamber. The two wooden doors to the Audience Chamber are set with mirror panels on both sides too, although neither door is locked, and the mirrors on them do not completely conceal the fact they are wooden.

The octagonal **Bardic Mirror Tomb** chamber contains four larger-than-life-sized statues of the four Muses, each carved from a much older and slightly yellower marble than the Tomb's structure, two silvered sarcophagi, and a large, very ancient, stone altar near the south wall. Behind

the altar is a floor-to-ceiling, heavy, double curtain covering the whole south wall, concealing the fact this wall is really a huge mirror. The curtains can be opened or closed easily using a side-rope. The sarcophagi contain the remains of two legendary lizard-folk bards, Lethe (west tomb) and Arette (east). On the altar are laid four musical instruments, all of exquisite quality, at least as ancient as the two bards, and possessed of minor magical enchantments for those able to make suitable music using them, a lute, a harp, a drum and drumsticks, and a flute.

On the west side of the Mirror Tomb chamber, the wall is missing, and opens instead directly into the **Scroll Room**. In here is a library with vast numbers of shelved scrolls, set around the walls and in two lines in the centre of the room. These represent everything the two bards collected and recorded during their lifetimes. There is a system to how these are stored, and while an invaluable collection, tracing specific items in here without the bards' assistance would be a lengthy nightmare. The south door from the Scroll Room leads into the long west-east **Audience Chamber**, in which there is just a single piece of furniture, a large, comfortable, high-backed armchair. This faces a pair of large, heavy curtains identical to those in the Mirror Tomb room, concealing the stretch of wall that adjoins the southern mirror-wall there. These curtains too can be opened or closed using a side rope, which works both sets of curtains together, those here and in the Mirror Tomb. Doing so reveals the mirror to be one-way, as from the Audience Chamber side, it seems to be merely a gigantic pane of clear glass. It is also magical, as whoever sits in the armchair can command the spirits of the two bards to appear in the Mirror Tomb chamber to communicate or perform as required. The ghosts can be seen and interacted with in this way only by someone seated in the chair, to whom they are also clearly audible. To anyone else, the Mirror Tomb chamber seems as still and quiet as normal throughout any exchanges.

In the northeast corner of the Audience Chamber is a door to an empty cupboard, one which has a second secret door to that in the Mirror Tomb, here in its north wall, that similarly provides access to the **Mirror Elemental Chamber**. There is a hissing, sizzling sound in here, with light that plays and shifts continually from enchanted glyphs that pass over the roomward face of the large, standing mirror towards the middle of the east wall. This mirror traps a mirror elemental within it, using its harnessed energy to power all that happens magically in this quadrant of the tomb complex, including maintaining the mirror-like sheen on all the stone surfaces, a literal reflection of the elemental's life force.

Bloodlamp Halls & Divination Pools

Two passageways beyond the mirror-like doors to the Bardic Mirror Tomb west from the Temple Tomb enter the southeastern part of the main Divination Pools hall here, with a third passage leading directly from the Temple Tomb's northwest corner into the middle of the long northeastern wall of this same large chamber. A near-identical passage exits the opposite long wall southwest, then south, into the Tomb of the Thunder Lizard King. Most of the connecting and side passages here, as well as the main hall, have smaller alcoves along them. These collectively form the **Bloodlamp Halls**, as each alcove (and one in the passage between the Bardic Mirror Tomb and the room at the foot of one set of steps leading to the Thunder Lizard King's Tomb) contains a magical, spherical, lantern suspended from the alcove's end wall. Two more such lamps stand on top of the central altar stone in the large chamber. Passing close to one of these lamps, or examining one, allows the lamp to draw off a small amount of life force from that living person, and the lamp lights up with a distinctive blood-red glow for a short time. When the lamp goes out, it resets and becomes able to draw off a modicum of life force again. If removed from their normal locations, this power does not function again until the lamp is replaced in its correct spot.

While the floors and ceiling here are of the typical native darker rock, the walls (as shown) are of the same white marble as that seen in the central Temple Tomb and Bardic Mirror Tomb, albeit without the same mirror-sheen as those in the Bardic Tomb. However, and somewhat like the inner stairwell's walls in the Temple Tomb, one line of the wall tiles - that at the height the Bloodlamp supports are fixed to their respective walls - has been mortared-in using crushed bones mixed with blood. Although it does look subtly different to the normal mortaring elsewhere, it would need a very careful inspection to confirm its true nature.

In the largest, central chamber in this quadrant are two shallow, rectangular water pools, surrounded by low edging walls to help keep the water in. These are the **Divination Pools**, which those versed in such matters may use to discern events elsewhere or nearby. One Pool shows the future, the other the past, although which is which can swap even between consecutive sessions, something that is not always obvious, unless the diviner is especially skilled. The source of the water is uncertain, as is how it remains fresh. Anyone drinking it will have no immediate ill-effects, but they will suffer random visions of the past and future at discomfoting times and frequencies during the following day and night, something that will, amongst other things, prevent them from resting properly.

Tomb of the Thunder Lizard King

The southwestern quadrant of the tomb complex is rather different in character to other parts. The ceiling above this Tomb is level, but only the southernmost apse has a 7 ft floor to ceiling separation (2.1 m). The ceiling over the larger, main segment is around 11 ft high (3.3 m), with the broad, angled steps on the northwest and northeast corners rising up from the floor level of most of the other parts of the complex by some 28 inches (70 centimetres). The broad stairs at the south end of this main chamber rise another 3 ft (90 cm), so the narrow platform at their top is about 8 ft (2.4 m) below the ceiling there. The final set of steps rises 16 in (40 cm) more. The stonework is like that in the corridors back east to the Temple Tomb from here, the typical darker native rock.

Throughout this part of the complex (including in the secret side-chamber) are low stone circular daises, each with a stone pillar in its centre supporting a kobold's skull. These skulls are magical lanterns that light-up when there is any motion they can detect (effectively "see") nearby. If removed from their pillars, or broken, they cease to work as lanterns permanently.

In the east and west side alcoves, and the northern small apse off the main chamber is an oval stone platform that supports a single, large, pterosaur skull, while along the floor's centre line are two stone sarcophagi. The northern sarcophagus has a large, custom-made, pterosaur saddle on top of it. Needing two normal adult humanoids to lift and carry it, the saddle is richly decorated, including with precious metals and gemstones, and would be very valuable if removed and sold. Inside this sarcophagus, as its external inscriptions tell, when they can be translated and understood (they are very ancient), are the intermingled ashes of all the King's pterosaur mounts. The southern sarcophagus has similarly old inscriptions indicating it to be the final resting place of the Thunder Lizard King, a formerly great, lizard-folk ruler who led his Pterosaur Knights in battle on Mate Ora in the distant past.

Extending from the back wall where it meets the ceiling in the southern apse, is a carved stone, oversized, pterosaur head and neck, posed as if it were coming down through the ceiling. It is very lifelike.

The secret door to the **Treasure Chamber** is further concealed by the oval stone platform and pterosaur skull, at the back of what seems merely a mirror-image of the alcove in the east wall. The Chamber itself is lit by a kobold skull lantern, and its west wall is dominated by a huge weapon-rack holding ten Sacred Dart Lances. These are beautifully-made, magical combat weapons, richly decorated, each able to shoot dagger-like projectiles from its tip repeatedly. Such Lances were once used by the King and his Knights from their pterosaur mounts.

For all The Barrow above ground extends some lateral distance all around this final Tomb area on the surface, partly due to slumping of the mound since it was raised, it was originally built as surface cover just for the Thunder Lizard King's Tomb. The upper parts of the Tomb are in fact a short distance above the general ground level still, something The Barrow continues to completely conceal. There is nothing to indicate there was ever an access-route to the Tomb from The Barrow, so how (if at all) the Ghost Temple on The Barrow above ground relates to this Tomb, is unclear. Quite when this Tomb was connected to the rest of the complex here, while clearly anciently done, also cannot be determined.