

The Necropolis of Melgore

Not wishing to be outdone by the high-status burials at Wyvern Citadel for the original Wyvern Lords, now long ages past, others who saw themselves as leading citizens of the area sought for a suitably monumental burial place too. Of the options available, the most accessible was in the Wisper valley south of Monseignor, a great 500 foot tall (150 metre) dolerite pillar, known locally as Melgore. Initially, a chapel and fairly simple tombs were cut into the lower pillar's northern side, towards the river. Over time, the tomb complex has become more elaborate and extensive, stretching deep into the mesa-like rock pillar, on two levels.

Some intact burials in sarcophagi or tombs are still carried out, although many more are of cremated remains stored in boxes, urns or jars, sequestered in more modest floor or wall spaces, somewhat like sealed, small cupboards. The cremations are often carried out on the rocky river beach, a little outside the pillar itself, towards the River Wisper.

Not all is quite as it seems, however, as a secret sub-cult within the priesthood operates here to its own agenda. This group removes select body parts, fragments, dust or treasure from tombs old and new, either for their own necromantic purposes, or to sell to others elsewhere. Only a small inner cabal is involved in these activities, which have so far remained undetected by others in the priesthood that serves at Melgore.

Unless stated, ceiling heights within the complex can be assumed as around 9 ft (2.75 m).

Numbered Mapped Areas

1) Entrance and Cremation Beach: A rocky, stony platform at the base of the Melgore pinnacle, leads north a short way to the edge of the River Wisper channel. Here, the road from Horsemart, that crosses the tributary channel of the Newberf by a stone bridge to the southern side of the Wisper, ends at the foot of Melgore itself, on its northern side. Almost sheer dolerite cliffs rise directly from the landward side of the beach. While not quite unscalable, these cliffs form a severe test for even the most experienced of climbers, and they are no easier anywhere around the pinnacle's base. Four identical entrances to the tombs have been cut into the base of the cliff here, only two of which allow access to the whole interior.

2) Old Chapel Entrance Hall: Second of the four entryways from the Beach (1) west from the most easterly, a short passage leads first to the stout metal door into this room, before turning east to link with the first (easternmost) entrance, a corridor which widens, then narrows again in a couple of turns, before reaching an identical metal door that leads to the Old Tombs (13 & 14) and the Great Chapel (5). Beyond this further door, a long corridor winds around to end at the platform for the Lift (15) to the upper tombs in the Catacombs (12). Back closer to the beach entrance, the first metal door provides access to this area, a calm, quiet spot, enhanced by the mildly enchanted statue of a veiled, robed figure in an attitude of mourning that stands on a round platform in the northwestern alcove. From here, there is a passage west to the metal-reinforced wooden door to the Old Chapel (7).

3) Waiting Chamber: The third opening west from the first two leads only a short way into this enclosed square chamber, which is used as a storage and waiting area for bodies for cremation or burial in the Necropolis, and sometimes for storing other materials, such as timber for the cremation pyres. Otherwise, it may be simply empty, as only rarely will some wild animal use it as a temporary shelter.

4) Blind Passage & False Door: The westernmost entrance opening at the base of the great pillar leads to a short stretch of dogleg passageway that ends in a closed metal door, apparently identical to the two other "external" doors to the Necropolis into areas 2, and the passage to 5, 13, 14 and 15. The main difference is this is not a door at all, just an immovable panel that looks like a door and its frame, which is attached firmly to the end wall.

5) Great Chapel: A large, 20 ft high (6 m) rectangular chamber, with two stout pillars on the long-axis midline supporting the roof. An altar is flanked by two semi-circular pools of clear, fresh water, each around two feet (60 cm) deep, at the north end. On the opposite shorter wall are two metal-reinforced wooden doors, which provide access from the corridor running along the outside of the Chapel's southern wall. Bodies are traditionally laid between the two pillars before and during the ceremony. Preliminary rituals may be carried out here too, or in the Old Chapel (7). The stone secret door on the wall behind the northeastern pool is impossible to identify, access or open easily without specialist knowledge, as it looks just like any other part of the stonework. It is set above the pool's water level, and leads into the Secret Library (6). All the stone here is covered with foliate scrollwork over walls, ceiling and pillars, carved in a very fine style. The floor is tiled with pale sandstone flagstones that have no designs on them, as a contrast. Interments from here may go directly to the Old Tombs (13 & 14), or less commonly, to the Lift (15) and thence to the appropriate final resting place among the Catacombs (12). Bodies for cremation are taken back outside to their pyre, and once burnt, the ashes may be brought back here later for a brief blessing ceremony, before being taken to their interment place.

6) Secret Library: A small room above the general floor level of the Great Chapel (5), accessed by the secret door from there. Many sets of floor to ceiling shelves cover the walls and stand on the floor, making access tricky and slightly maze-like. These contain large numbers of books, papers and scrolls of varying ages and styles, all maintained with care, and preserving a record of everyone who has been interred at Melgore over the centuries. It would be a huge undertaking for anyone unfamiliar to locate specific records among these, for all there is a definite system as to where everything is stored. Only the highest-ranked priests here are able to access this room and make sense of the system. Most lesser priests do not even know it exists, and the few who do typically are unaware how to find or operate the secret door to it.

7) Old Chapel: Here stands the oldest altar in the complex, a weather-worn, quite crude, rectangular block of dolerite, which has clearly seen much use over a millennium or more. Obviously, it was not inside the complex originally, although it is said it was nearby even before the first tomb was cut, and its diorite appears to be the same as the Melgore mesa itself. The altar possesses magical powers of mild forgetfulness, that acts to help calm the grief of mourners especially badly affected by their loss. The chamber's ceiling is 15 ft high (4.5 m), and the room has a simpler form of foliate scrollwork decoration to that seen in the Great Chapel (5). Access from outside is through the Entrance Hall (2), while a second metal-strengthened wooden door leads into the adjoining New Chapel (8). The floor has the same plain, pale sandstone flagstones as the Great Chapel.

8) New Chapel: Continuing the simpler decoration from the connected Old Chapel (7), this larger, square chamber also shares its 15 ft (4.5 m) high ceiling, and its pale sandstone-flagged flooring. A second metal-reinforced wooden door, like that leading in from the Old Chapel, is in its west wall near the southern end, providing access to the Staircase (9) to the complex's upper level. The altar by the south wall here is the most elaborately-decorated of the three at Melgore, and is enchanted to enhance the ceremonies performed in this Chapel. Ceiling to floor wall hangings on the east and west walls are woven with colourful foliate scrollwork designs, and help disguise the fact the carved stonework decoration does not extend to either of these walls, only much of the north and south walls, and the ceiling. Most of the ceremonies held here are for cremations, with full burials far less common. Such burials are normally only for the highest-ranked of people.

9) Staircase: This leads up from the New Chapel (8) to the State Room (10) on the level above. Its stonework is plain and undecorated, with the steps and floors all of the same pale sandstone as found in the three Chapels.

10) State Room: A large, six-sided, though not formally hexagonal, chamber on the complex's upper level, reached primarily by the Staircase (9) rising from the New Chapel (8). It has an 18 ft ceiling (5.5 m). Its walls and ceiling are plain, but the floor is covered with high-quality, blue-glazed tiles with a foliate design on each. A total of eight stone sarcophagi are evenly ranged in a row of four along opposing walls, each made from a different stone type and each carved with varying designs. All have markers or nameplates on, some identifying the individual interred, others with a family name on. People from the Monseignor area will be likely familiar with many of the names, of the families at least, as of notable stock (or formerly so) across the district. Three broad steps rise to a low triangular platform occupying the southwest corner, on which stands a statue of a goddess in a heavily-pleated cloak and robe. She is offering protection to several smaller, huddled figures in some of the elaborate folds of her garments. There are empty folds too, of a size sufficient for a small adult Human, or smaller, to hide there. The statue also helps conceal the stone secret door in the south wall behind it that opens into the Catacombs (12). While the door's outline and access trigger are nicely concealed in the normal stonework lines, the floor leading to it shows definite signs of wear, so it is not so secret as might be expected. A far-better concealed secret door in the north wall leads to the Secret Cult Room (11). Bodies may be brought here to lie in state for a time, either before burial or cremation. It is though extremely rare for anyone to be allowed to be buried in a new sarcophagus here. However, those from families who have a sarcophagus in this Room already may be laid to rest in one if cremated (only - there is insufficient room in any for full body burials now).

11) Secret Cult Room: This is a recently-made room, cut in great secrecy, and without the knowledge of any but the handful of cult members, a tiny sub-group of the Melgore priesthood, who did the work themselves, removing and disposing of the stone in the river with equally great care. The ceiling here is irregularly low, no more than 4 to 5 ft high (1.2 to 1.5 m), although the walls and floor are somewhat more regularly smoothed. This is the place cult members meet to carry out their dubious ceremonies, typically in the dead of night, and where ashes, dust, body parts and treasures removed from elsewhere in the complex, again in great secrecy, are stored. Such items are ordinarily labelled, for all there is little else to indicate why they are here at all, or what ceremonies may be carried out with them.

12) Catacombs: An extensive series of passageways on the upper level of the complex. Many have walls with alcoves along them, while burials have been, and continue to be, made here in walls and floors over many parts of the mazy structure. As most such interments are of cremations, many thousands of individuals are represented by the small plaques scattered liberally over many of the surfaces. For all that, much space remains for a great many more burials, even without expanding the Catacombs further (which would be eminently possible, given the enormity of the dolerite pillar). The area can be accessed by the not-so secret door in the State Room (10) or by the Lift (15). A couple of room-sized areas

open out from the passages in places, the larger of which has a metal-strengthened wooden door off it, leading north into a more typical rectangular Last Room (16).

13) Old Tomb: East of the Great Chapel's southeastern door (5) on the complex's lower level, the passageway turns south, then opens directly into this long, rectangular room, which has a 10 ft ceiling (3m). A short passage further south to the Oldest Tomb (14) is closed-off by a stout wooden door. Many burials have been made here for a millennium and more, in both floor and walls, most indicated in some way by carvings or plaques, a mixture of full-body interments and cremated remains. Spaces for more are few, often small, and more typically higher up on one or other of the walls.

14) Oldest Tomb: Earliest of the tomb-chambers set up at Melgore, all the very oldest interments are here, again in floor and wall spaces, both burials and cremations. The complex has been hugely expanded and adapted since, of course, but of all the tombs here, it is likely some of these may still contain the richest treasures and magics of any, if they could be located. Space for more interments is now non-existent in this room.

15) Lift: At the end of the longest straight corridor at Melgore, is a platform able to raise those to be interred to the upper level Catacombs (12) using ropes and pulleys. Normally, the platform is stored in a locked position at the upper level. There is though always the chance someone forgot, leaving a 15 ft drop (4.5 m) to the lower level's floor for anyone passing along the upper corridor with insufficient light or caution.

16) Last Room: At one end of a room-like expansion of the Catacomb corridors (12), a metal-reinforced wood door opens into this final room on the upper level. It is large, rectangular, and has a 12 ft high ceiling (3.5 m), all cut directly from the local diorite. It looks almost as if it was meant to be a fourth chapel, yet remains unfinished and seemingly unused, although the walls and ceiling have been carved with the shapes of local tropical trees and vines (rather unlike the more abstract foliate scrollwork seen over the rest of the decorated chambers at Melgore). Quite a number of the priests are unaware the room even exists, and nobody seems very sure what to do with it (or at least, no one will admit to such knowledge).