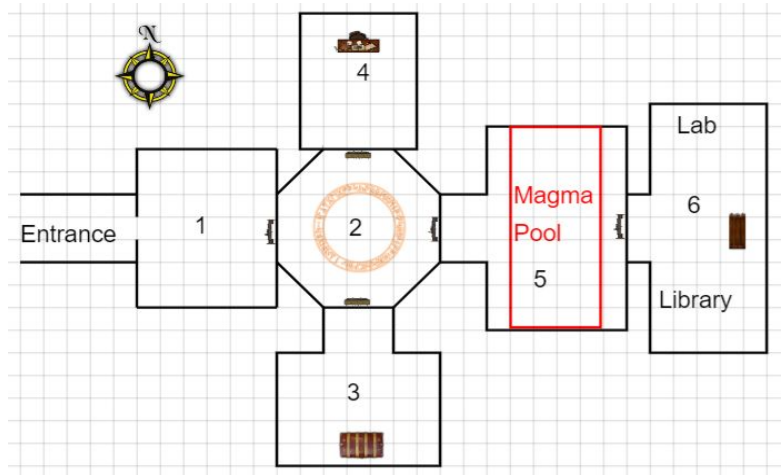


The Taxman Cometh

by Jeff McKelley

Set Up: It is Tax Day. The town council would like to hire the PCs to collect the taxes from a local mage, Circe the Red. As always, Circe is reluctant to pay her yearly taxes. She has barricaded herself in her underground lab, setting defenses against unwelcome tax collectors. If the party can work their way through her lair and officially present to Circe the council's Tax Assessment Writ, she will capitulate and pay her taxes. At least she has in past years. To gain their reward, the party must deliver the Tax Writ to Circe by the end of Tax Day.



1. Entrance tunnel leads down to an underground room:

Four salamanders (two normal, one with mid-level mage abilities, and one with mid-level cleric abilities) guard this room. The salamanders will tell the PCs that they should

turn back and mind their own business, if they know what's good for them. The salamanders will block the entrance to the room, attempting to bottleneck and attack the PCs at the entrance. When a salamander near death, it will surrender and ask for mercy.

The east stone door leading out of area 1 has no lock or handle. Etched in the door is an outline of a hand and the poem "Blue of Kings, Red of Dogs, Hot of Temper, Cold of Frogs." Putting a blood-covered hand on the outline will open the door.

2. Effreeti: An efreeti stands in a summoning circle in the center of the room. He will civilly greet the party and state that to pass through the room, they must answer his riddle. If the party agrees and engages the efreeti in conversation, the efreeti will launch into a long, dull monologue on himself and the Plane of Fire, making it as boring and tedious as possible. Each minute the PCs listen, they must save vs. magic or fall asleep for 8 hours; PCs may be shaken awake. If the efreeti is asked to say the riddle, he will obliged, saying "How long is a piece of string?" There is no correct answer; answer and passage is left to the DM's discretion. If the PCs answer satisfactorily, the efreeti will disappear. If the party attacks the efreeti, it will respond in kind. Normal doors are in the N and S of the room. The door in the E has no lock or handle, but does have a small hook (to hang a picture on) in the upper, center area.

3. Stone Golems and Pictures: When the party enters this area, they are approached and attacked by two basalt stone golems, which fight until destroyed. The only other object in the room is a large wooden chest in the S. The chest is locked and trapped. Inside the chest are seven pictures depicting a woman performing the following activities: harvesting cotton, carding cotton fibers, spinning cotton into thread, weaving at a loom, dying fabric in a barrel, cutting cloth, and sewing with a needle and thread.

4. Trade Time: A friendly, officious man (Garrett) in red robes sits at a desk in the N part of the room. In exchange for a magic item or item of sufficient value, Garrett will give the PCs a clue to help safely open the E door of the efreeti room. If an exchange is made, he will say that the door can be opened by "the picture of the woman with three eyes." Once the clue is given, he will teleport from the room, taking the item. If attacked, he will teleport from the room. He has no interest in combat and is only there to barter and trade.

The Efreeti east door can be opened by hanging the picture of the woman sewing with a needle and thread (from room 3) on the hook; this picture has three eyes, two on the woman and one in the needle. If an incorrect picture is hung on the door, an efreeti will be summoned and will attack the party.

5. Magma Pool: A magma pool bubbles up and fills the central portion of this room. An oppressive heat and sulfurous smell permeates the room. A skull rests on a pedestal near the E door. One minute after the party enters the room, six magmins will climb out of the pool to attack. At the same time, the skull will levitate and laugh mockingly. It is revealed to be a Flameskull, which also attacks. The magma is, well, hot, so touching it should hurt a lot. Every other turn, an additional magmin will climb out of the pool.

The Magma room east door does have a handle and lock. The key to the lock may be found inside the Flameskull.

6. Laboratory/Library: The N half of the room appears to be an alchemy lab while the S half is a library. In the middle, back portion of the room, a woman dressed in red (Circe, a high level tiefling mage) sits at a large well-lit desk. The item traded in room 4 will be seen on the desk. Circe will greet the PCs in a confident, courteous tone, asking what they plan on doing now that they are here. She will attempt to bribe the party into not presenting the Tax Writ. If that fails, she will make vague threats implying great pain to dissuade them, but really has no interest in combat. If the Tax Writ is officially presented to her, she will study it and find it in proper order. She will then pay her tax of one gold piece and ask the PCs to find their way out in a "don't let me detain you" sort of way. If attacked, Circe is a formidable mage who can summon creatures from the Plane of Fire to aid her.