

# THE LICH'S LAIR OF MARSICLAW GORGE

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For years, tales of what lies at the base of Marsiclaw Gorge have been told and retold over and over to the point where only scant details of the truth remain. Only a fool would venture into the former lair of a lich... right?

As a DM, this adventure is a classic grab-the-loot-and-run scenario where the primary goal is to find treasure and get out alive. Treasure tables will utilize contents in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, though you can certainly provide your own treasures. The lich's lair is only moderately puzzle-based, and a table at the end of this guide contains a list of random encounters you can use in just about any room you see fit. The only scripted encounter is with the lich's hand at the end.

A **Medicine**-trained PC is encouraged, allowing the DM to add various poisons/conditions in the lair.

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This scenario features:

Arcana  Perception  Medicine

And is particularly well-suited for:

Wizards/Sorcerers  Clerics

Paladins

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## BACKGROUND

*"At the base of Marsiclaw Gorge lies a hidden entrance to the lair of a lich that was*

*vanquished hundreds of years ago. Among the tales of dark magic and shadowy figures are equally tantalizing tales of mystical artifacts hidden within the keep. Surely a group of intrepid adventurers such as yourselves will find some amazing treasures to help you on your way. That is, of course, if you can make it out alive."*

## I. STONE ARCHES & SHADOWS

*"Following the combined tales of townsfolk from the nearby city of Opheal, you find yourself at the base of Marsiclaw Gorge. There are no signs of vegetation anywhere in this hot and arid land, save for the occasional tumbleweed or dried branch of ivy. The gorge was clearly a riverbed centuries ago, now a desert wasteland over 150ft beneath the plains above. Vertical cliff walls surround you as the hot midday sun beats down.*

*Straight ahead you see a carved out rift in the cliff wall. Stone arches and protrusions clutter the path forward as sunlight quickly turns to shadow farther ahead. A healthy dry wind rushes by frequently."*

The party will likely be very cautious moving forward under the stone arches. Closer to the entrance of the lair they will come across two wooden signs staked into the ground. Written in an archaic form of Common, the two signs translate as:

*"Danger! Do Not Enter! Death!" and  
"Warning! Turn Back Now! Death!"*

The group may attempt a **History** or **Insight** check (or similar language ability) to

determine how much of the archaic dialect they can read.

Eventually the party comes across two large purple double-doors with one of the doors swinging back and forth with the gusts blowing into the cavern. Once the party approaches, continue to the next part.

## II. ANTECHAMBER & ROUND TABLE

*“A large stone table sits before you in a room surrounded by carefully-crafted purple drapes and ornate unlit torches and moulding along the walls. Drifts of sand about 1-2ft tall are piled up against the walls and table, and cover the rest of the floor by about half an inch. Noticeably, there aren’t any chairs at this table. Directly in front of you is a large, well-made portrait of a slim, gaunt man holding a stone and metal object in his hand roughly shaped like a teardrop. The man looks unhealthily skinny, evidenced by his beautiful purple and red robes barely hanging onto his thin, bony body.”*

Purple drapes cover the rest of the walls, though there are doors behind them to the north and south as shown on the map. Notably, there is no course of light in this room, so be sure to take this into account as the party ventures in.

For an optional combat in this room, you may let the players find some Ghast creatures hidden behind certain parts of the curtains in a “sleeping” state until they are startled by the players’ presence.

**1-2 Ghast** (MM, p.148).

“Sleeping” behind the curtains.

Aside from the table and portrait, there are also 4 unlit torches sticking out from the walls. At first there isn’t anything notable about these torches, but as the party continues through the dungeon they will notice some similarities between other portraits in the lair and the metal hands holding up the torches in here.

Upon closer inspection of the torches, the party notices that the metal hands holding them each have unique jewelry forged on them (*despite each of them being all the same color throughout*).

1. One hand has two small rings on the ring and pinky fingers.
2. One hand has a woven bracelet around the wrist.
3. One hand has a leather strap across the back of the palm.
4. One hand has a metal gauntlet covering the entire hand.

While the party likely won’t attempt (*or even notice*) this on the first pass through this room, these hands are the key to passing through the portrait into the final hallway. The way you manipulate the hand corresponds to how it’s shown on the corresponding portrait farther into the lair. When each torch is manipulated in the correct way at the same time, the portrait will magically vanish and reveal a new hallway.

1. The hand of Vanessa Pollus - push to the right.
2. The hand of Julius Heathersbough - push straight down.
3. The hand of Dena Forester - push to the right.

4. The hand of Gorrum Tarrofil - push down and to the left.

### III. GUARDROOM

*“The hallways leading north contain less sand than previous rooms. The dark purple curtains continue to line the walls as a strange smell of musky decay fills the air.”*

If the party moves to the Guardroom, read the following:

*“You enter a moderately-sized room with beddings and storage for about 6 to 8 people. Based on the polearm mounts and metal armors on the walls, this was likely a room where servants lived. On the wall is a portrait of a woman in leather clothes sitting on a small throne with several skeletal bodies standing below her.”*

You can describe the rest of the guardroom as you wish. This may be where you want to place the **Keyring** needed to access **V. The Necrotic Vaults** later in the dungeon.

If the players investigate the portrait on the wall, they see the **portrait of Vanessa Pollus** with her name written in gold leaf filigree on the bottom. In her left hand she is holding what looks like a large metallic seashell, leaning far to the right as she sits. She also has two small rings on her ring and pinky fingers.

### IV. AISLES OF VIALS

*“The hallways leading north contain less sand than previous rooms. The dark purple curtains continue to line the walls as a strange smell of musky decay fills the air.”*

If the party moves to Aisles of Vials, read the following:

*“The smell of decay and chemicals grows stronger. You open a flat metal door to find a room that is noticeably absent of purple curtains or rugs. Instead the walls are made of flat stone and mortar spanning a room about 30ft x 30ft in size.*

*On the south side of the room are five chest-high shelves forming aisles of chemical and medicinal items. Many vials and beakers are labeled with herbs, compounds, and magical components, while others are totally blank. These aisles extend about 5ft perpendicular from the wall.*

*On the north side of the room is a long standing table covered in books, journals, metal tools, and dust. On the wall within arms’ reach are six metal doors about 2ft x 2ft square, each sporting a metal handle on the front.*

*On the far west end of the hall are two closed metal doors and a portrait of a man examining a book.”*

This room is an experimental lab where the liches who lived here would find ways to better preserve their power (*or possibly better hold dominion over their subjects*). If the party chooses to investigate the small metal doors over the table, use this table to determine their contents:

1	A long-dead dried up shrub.
2	A +1 magic weapon of choice ( <i>only offer 1 of these at most</i> )
3	A scroll made of thin copper foil.

For a random encounter, you may choose to have one of these metal compartments contain **Mummified Dryads**, or a similar preserved creature brought back to life.

**2-5 Mummified Dryad** - Use the stat block for *Harpy* (MM, p.181) except that they are undead and cannot fly.

If the party investigates the portrait on the west wall, they see the **portrait of Julius Heathersbough**. He's facing to the left reading a book in his right hand. His left hand is dropped down to his side holding a blue beaker of some kind of fluid, along with a fancy woven bracelet around his wrist.

As indicated above, there are two closed doors on the far west wall. One of them (*the one on the right*) is magically locked and cannot be opened, though this may vary by DM discretion. The other (*the one on the left*) leads to **V. The Necrotic Vaults**. Details on unlocking the door to **V. The Necrotic Vaults** can be found in the next section.

## V. THE NECROTIC VAULTS

**Opening the Door to The Necrotic Vaults** - The key hidden within this dungeon is required to open this door, along with some basic Arcane skills. While the door does have a lock and handle, the lock is an illusion. Any attempt to insert a key inside it will still feel like the user is actually putting a key into a lock and turning it, but it does absolutely nothing. An **Arcane 10** check (*or similar Detect Magic style spell*) is required to sense the false lock, and to detect that the

actual lock is on the door, invisible, and about 1ft off the ground.

After entering the room, read the following prompt:

*"You unlock the door, and a warm stench practically pushes the door open towards you on its own. The horrid smell of rot and decay sweeps over you as a wispy purple and green mist seeps out of the room across the floor like dry ice. You enter a large room filled with bones across the floor in various states of decay. Most are so old and brittle that they would easily break just by stepping on them. In the corners of the room are several small piles of bones about 2ft tall, and along the walls are 6 massive metal doors like those that guard valuable items in a bank. The metal doors are dirty and corroded, and one of the six is swung wide open, revealing a 10ft x 10ft room lined with small locked drawers."*

Accessing this room is meant to be rewarding to the PC's, requiring not only magical detection but also the key itself to enter. The DM should be fairly liberal with letting them find magical items and/or valuable gems in the vaults, the drawers, the bone piles, or anywhere else seen fit. Items can be pulled from **Magic Table A** (p.144, DMG) for the most part, but it makes sense to reward each PC with at least 1 item from **Magic Table B or C** at DM discretion.

The giant metal doors can be either easily opened just by turning the large bronze cranks on them, completely sealed off, or the PC's can find the combinations (*such as 32-53-7, 17-44-5, etc.*) somewhere among the rubble or elsewhere in the lair.

To add intensity to this room, you may choose to have the bones reanimate and reassemble themselves to form **Ogre Zombies** and smaller regular **Zombies**, or similar creatures as seen fit. The creatures are summoned 50% of the time that a PC attempts to open one of the vault doors.

**0-2 Ogre Zombies** (p.316, MM)  
**0-4 Zombies** (p.316, MM) or (p.311, PHB).

## VI. INVISIBLE CREATURES IN STEEL CAGES

*“The hallways leading south contain less sand than previous rooms. The dark purple curtains continue to line the walls as the faint scent of animal fur fills passes by.”*

If the party moves to room **VI**, read the following:

*“You enter a room filled with metal cages of various sizes, anywhere from 1ft cube up to a size big enough to hold several full-grown humans. They’re all completely empty. On the south wall is a portrait of a woman in leather clothes looking into the distance. On the west wall is another door.”*

This room contains essentially nothing except the portrait, the cages, and an **Amulet of Speak With Animals**, a magic item that allows the user to cast **Speak With Animals** once per long rest.

If the PC’s examine the portrait on the wall, it’s seen to be the **portrait of Dena Forester**. She’s laughing, looking off to the

right as her leather-clad hand is being pulled to the right by the leash or reins she’s holding in her hand. She appears to be in the deep woods.

Aside from the cages and portrait, the players may occasionally hear a faint whimpering sound or dog growl in this room. Nothing they do will fully reveal the other-dimensional creatures held in these cages.

## VII. THE LICH’S PRISON

*“You walk down a very long hallway with multiple sets of stairs along the way, leading you about 60ft farther underground. The purple curtains and rugs continue to adorn the walls and floor, but there are clear signs that a struggle once took place here. Parts of the curtains have small tears in them, and there are small scuffs and torn threads in the rugs leading down. At the base of the stairs you see a large wooden door with two large suits of armor standing on either side.”*

When the PC’s open the door:

*“This room was clearly used as a prison of some kind. Metal bars and stone walls form jail cells, all empty and with open doors. On the west wall is a portrait of a man shouting down at something out of frame from atop a castle parapet. The floors are surprisingly clean and well-kept compared to other parts of the lair. Within the jail cells are iron shackles and some small spears.”*

**When the PC’s leave this room** they will notice that the two sets of standing armor that were outside the entrance are missing without a trace. You may choose to have them fight these **Animated Armors** somewhere else in the lair, or simply leave the PC’s in suspense

wondering what happened to them, and worrying that they may ambush them at any point for the remainder of this scenario.

## **2 Animated Armors** (p.19, MM).

If the PC's investigate the portrait on the west wall, they'll see that it is a **portrait of Gorrum Tarrofil**. He is wearing heavy metal armor on his entire body, including thick metal gauntlets that look more decorative than for actual use in combat. He is pointing with his gauntlet-clad hand down and to the left at something out of frame.

You may choose to leave a magic item in this room somewhere, with recommendations towards a spell scroll containing some kind of **Zone of Truth** or **Paralysis** effect (*anything that a prison guard would find useful*).

## VIII. LICH INTERRED

The only way to access the hallways behind the large painting in the central room is to tilt the torches on the walls in the direction that the corresponding paintings showed. For example, Gorrum Tarrofil was wearing the metal gauntlets while pointing down and to the left in his portrait. Therefore, the torch being held by a stone hand wearing metal gauntlets must be tilted down and to the left.

All torches must be moved as indicated in **II. Antechamber & Round Table**. Upon successful opening, read the following:

*"The portrait on the wall fades away slowly in a sparkling black and purple mist, revealing a hallway behind it. Sand covers spots on the ground and forms small drifts*

*against the walls as the hallway turns to the south for a way, then to the west. From your current position you can't even see the end of this portion of the hall, as it delves even deeper underground than the passageway leading to the prison cells. The amount of sand starts to lessen, as does the amount of fine gold trim and sconces on the walls."*

If the PC's choose to continue down, read the following:

*"Farther down, you eventually see what looks like a large pile of wood. As you get closer, you can tell it's a pile of chairs and dressers haphazardly thrown into a massive mound against the wall at the end of the tunnel."*

If the PC's move the furniture, they find a closed yet unlocked door. Upon entering, they find a room that looks like it was once used for royal ceremonies, except everything of monetary value appears to have been stolen. Feel free to describe the nature of this room at DM discretion.

As the PC's investigate the room, they hear a loud pounding sound from within a wooden chest in the corner of the room. There's no voice coming from the chest, only a pounding sound. If the PC's open the chest, the rotted arm and ribcage of a long-dead lich bursts out and attempts to flee.

**Lich Carcass, Arm & Ribcage** - Use the stat block for Wraith (p.302, MM) except that the Life Drain attack does (3d8) necrotic damage, and all damage resistances and immunities listed are ignored.

Throughout this fight, the lich's carcass seems to be trying to escape the lair, and only fights back when the PC's try to attack it. It's very likely the fight will continue into other parts of the lair leading to the entrance.

If the PC's defeat the lich, they can remove from its finger a **Ring of Life Drain**, a magic item that grants the user the ability to cast **Life Drain** once per long rest (*requires attunement*), and a +1 magic weapon of choice.

## EPILOGUE

If the party defeats the lich carcass:

*"You disable the carcass portion of the lich who once ruled this lair, and determine what to do with its remains before they resurrect. When you are satisfied that you've found everything of interest in this dreadful place, you leave to find adventure with your new experiences and new powers at hand."*

If the lich's arm manages to escape:

*"You watch as the lich's arm enters the bright sunlight, and seems to instantly vanish in a trail of sparkling purple mist flying towards the ground above. Who knows what terrible being has been wrought upon the world by your deeds, and what may happen in the coming era..."*

If you'd like to continue this adventure, this serves as a great leaping-off point to hunt down other parts of the lich in future scenarios. If the arm escaped, it may have gone to reassemble with other parts of the lich's body that were severed and stored in different places around the world, or may simply be trying to regain power on its own.

The party could certainly investigate to find out where other parts of the long-dead lich are being contained, hopefully with the intent of defeating it completely.

# The Lich's Lair of Marsiclaw Gorge [map]

*Ages ago, a powerful cohort of Liches made base within the walls of Marsiclaw Gorge. Artifacts of untold power are just ripe for the taking.*



A heavy key-ring with about a dozen different keys can be found in the **Guardroom, Lich's Prison**, or somewhere else. Details on unlocking the vault are available in this dungeon's guide.

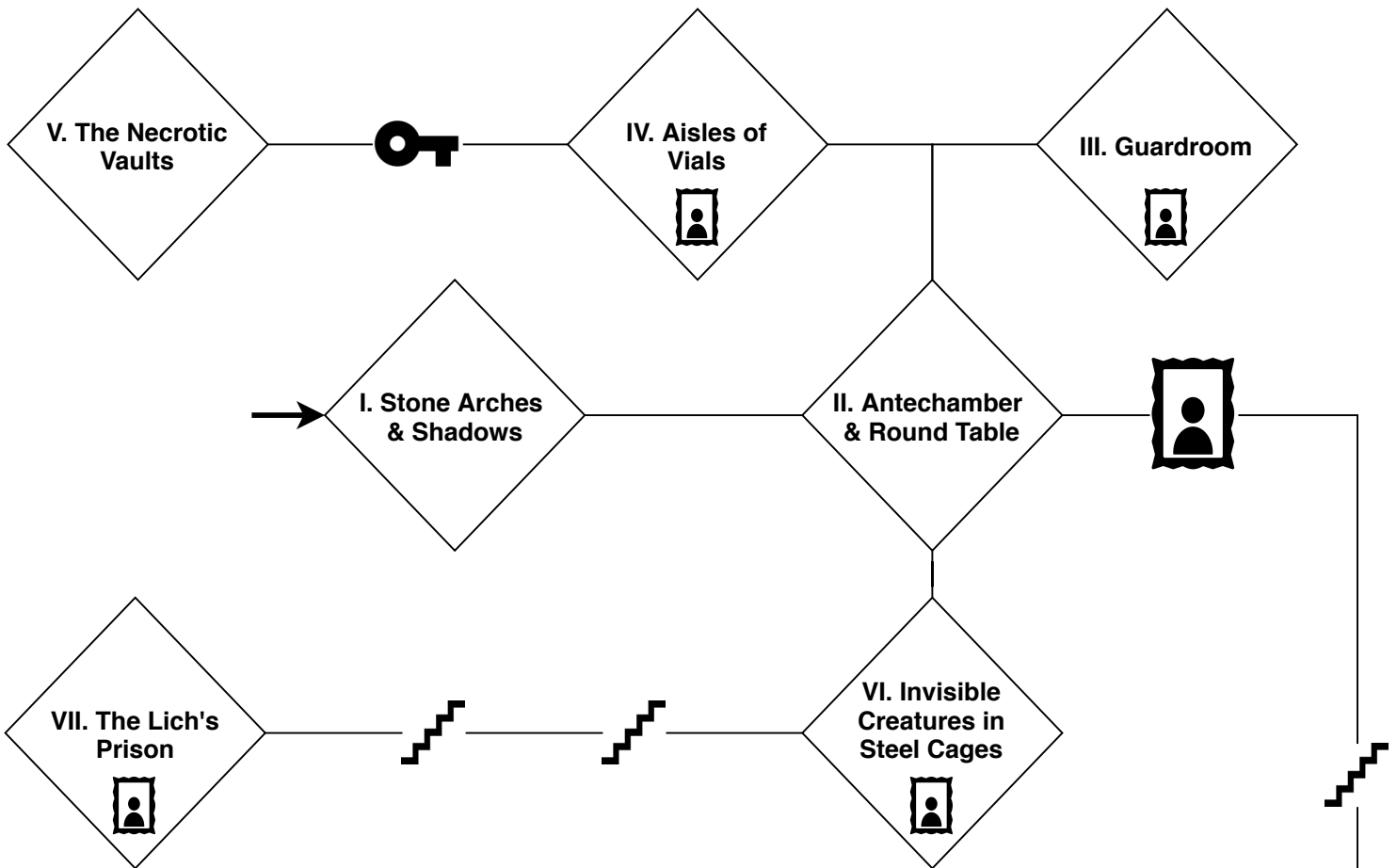
## Drawing This Map

The Lich's lair is lovingly well-crafted with squared-off edges of white stone walls, along with intricate candles, figurines, and artwork honoring a long lineage of Liches. Years of abandonment have left much of the lair in disrepair, though, as drifts of sand and debris have been blown in from the gorge for centuries.

Rooms are connected by corridors with tattered purple robes lining the walls, along with drifts of sand.



The four smaller paintings don't need to be drawn on your map, but should be noted since they are required to open the passage behind the painting in the **Antechamber**.



Both corridors that contain stairs in this dungeon should be noticeably long and drop in elevation by about 80ft. They both feature multiple flat landings, red velvet carpets (*covered in sand*), and feature purple drapes along the walls.



VIII. A Lich Interred

