

## ABANDONED TEMPLE: AN ALTERNATE DUNGEON

---

The former home of a vile cult or a benign religion forced out of an area due to a calamity or political pressure, an abandoned temple still contains potent divine magic. Even located in the busiest of locales, an abandoned temple stands empty and unclaimed due to superstitions surrounding curses invoked by the departing priests or the wrath of vengeful deities. The untouched location invites insidious threats that tap into the ambient divine energies in the temple, or the negative emotions generated by the activities of vile cultists or the ouster of good, but politically inexpedient adherents to a legitimate religion.

Abandoned temples provide many opportunities for adventure and intrigue, and residents of a city with an abandoned temple might enlist the PCs to investigate strange occurrences originating from a temple. Designed foremost as buildings, temples have some dungeon features (especially those temples housing crypts and the like). This section provides GMs with advice for transforming a deserted temple, replete with remnants of divine power, into a memorable adventure site.

### DEFINING THE DUNGEON

An abandoned temple occupies a finite space, but the arrangement and size of the temple varies considerably. It could contain a couple of rooms, one of which holds a simple altar, or it could be an enormous complex featuring multiple storeys, either as part of a towering cathedral or as several levels of subterranean crypts. Location provides another type of variability. Once-popular temples stand empty in a bustling part of a city. Temples for less palatable gods exist in slums, sewers and other infrequently visited locations. Locations devoted to nature deities become mystic groves. Finally, religions requiring adherents to prove themselves or perform their sacred duties ascetically exist in inhospitable regions, such as lofty mountaintops or nearby oases in harsh deserts.

All abandoned temples have a measure of divine power, deriving from the deity to which the temple was devoted or a corruption of divine power as a side effect of destroying the temples. Long-abandoned temples should still inspire awe in those who explore (or loot) them.

### DESIGNING THE DUNGEON

One of the key difficulties of designing an abandoned temple as a dungeon is organizing the temple so the PCs want to explore every room. Most temples are organised so worshippers can easily find the main altar, but there are plenty of side areas containing items of interest to explorers. Below are some considerations a GM could give when designing an abandoned temple.

**Altars and Shrines:** Areas that focus worship to a deity possess inherent power that remains long after the temple has

ceased serving its purpose. Characters looting the temple subject themselves to this lingering divine might when they defile—incidentally or purposely—an altar and shrine. A GM could impose a *bane* effect on characters who are more than one alignment step removed from the deity or grant *bless* on characters who are within one alignment step. At higher levels, a GM could ramp this up to *bestow curse* or *divine favour* or have the location *dominate* a character to restore the temple.

**Crypts:** Many religious sites contain graveyards and crypts for their well-regarded clergy and worshippers, or at least those who donate their wealth to the temple, the idea being that the holy site will protect the body from necromancy. Outright evil religions inter their dead, so they can rise up as defenders. Either way, these burial sites most likely contain additional treasure.

**Flying Threats:** Flying creatures in cathedrals and other areas with tall ceilings may surprise PCs expecting a typical dungeon crawl experience. Surviving an attack may point the characters in the direction of these creatures' lairs, where they may find treasure or vital information.

**Hallowed/Unhallowed Areas:** Typically *hallow* and *unhallow* spells require recasting after a year's time. For recently abandoned temples, their effects may still linger. However, for temples that have stood empty for longer than a year, some force may refresh these spells. In a formerly benign temple, these areas might provide respite for characters assaulted by undead creatures that have invaded the temple. In a malign temple, an *unhallowed* location may indicate the presence of an important treasure or location.

**Hidden Areas:** Many temples, even for the most open and welcoming deities, hold inner sanctums known only to high-ranking priests and priestesses where private rituals take place. Players may locate secret sites through their knowledge of the religions and their iconographies. In addition to providing locales for sacred rites, these hidden areas could hold the temple's treasures and, in the case of evil cults, clues to the whereabouts of other groups.

**Unassuming Items:** Many religions hold to the belief that humility brings one closer to the divine. While temples may have ostentatious displays to show the prosperity and power of their deities, they also contain mundane items that possess power or hide secret locations. A modest wooden cup, capable of granting incredible abilities, may sit among silver and gold, gem-inlaid chalices, much more superficially attractive to looters. *Magic aura* often enchants such items to keep their natures hidden. A tiny closet might conceal the entrance to the temple's treasury or crypts where the honoured dead lie with their worldly possessions.

## RUNNING THE DUNGEON

Running an abandoned temple varies a little from a traditional dungeon. Below are some considerations GMs should keep in mind when using an abandoned temple as a dungeon.

**Cover:** Temples provide plenty of sources of cover for clever combatants. Altars have a place of prominence in worship halls and grant cover. Statues representing deities stand in alcoves that allow smaller creatures some protection.

**Glyphs and Symbols:** Mixed in with writing of religious significance on walls and various other surfaces, inscribed *glyphs* and *symbols* present challenges for the PCs. Depending on the overall nature of the religion or cult, the engraved sigils inflict a varying degree of harm on their victims. Good-aligned temples feature *symbols of sleep* or *stunning*, which would have allowed the clergy to escape or hide from invaders or to remove intruders harmlessly. Of course, in abandoned temples, such symbols may prove just as deadly as the *symbols of death* and *pain* featured in darker temples. *Glyphs of warding* may also be set to protect valuable relics contained within chests and hollowed out altars.

**Illumination:** Depending on the deity to whom a temple is dedicated, the illumination level varies considerably. For temples with warm and open worship services, windows allow natural light to shine into the worship area. These temples also feature torches or other devices that shed *continual flame* or activate with *daylight*. For religions or cults following less acceptable deities, darkness shrouds the temples, oftentimes using magic.

**Sounds:** Often, temple construction considers acoustics. When a cleric gives a sermon, he or she desires to have her words reverberate through the hall and reach everyone in the congregation. Additionally, instruments, such as massive organs, or other loud devices like huge bells provide means to drown out spellcasting (potentially imposing a DC 10 + spell level concentration check).

**Temple Hazards:** For temples housing a number of statues, incidental falling statues pose threats to the unwary. Additionally, the temples' builders may have incorporated mundane traps to protect treasures and secret locations and to supplement magical warding and damaging symbols. Finally, depending on the cause for temples' abandonment, haunts could remain to torment explorers.

**Tight Spaces and Difficult Terrain:** Large temples hold a number of cloisters and private sanctuaries, which make for small encounter spaces. GMs may want to place encounters in these cramped areas sparingly, as players grow frustrated by having little room to display their prowess. Additionally, the location of altars, pews and shrines confound movement through even the largest areas. A GM can treat these areas as difficult terrain or require players to squeeze to pass through them. Finally, in a temple's main hall where the altar usually has the most prominence, stairs leading to the altar slow movement.

## SACKING THE DUNGEON

Like any adventuring site, an abandoned temple contains valuable treasure and powerful religious artefacts. Listed below are inspirational ideas for unique, thematic treasures to award characters adventuring in an abandoned temple.

**Alchemical Ingredients:** While temples do not house alchemical laboratories, they may have supplies necessary for carrying out their duties. This is especially true for temples serving nefarious deities. In addition, incense is a vital part of many religions for meditative purposes, and wealthier temples may hold sticks of incense worth upwards of 1 gp per stick.

**Artwork:** Temples hold valuable paintings of saints and martyrs, often commissioned by famous artists. However, even relatively unknown monks may show incredible talent for which an appraiser will pay a considerable amount.

**Holy Symbols:** The most common items in abandoned temples, holy symbols are usually utilitarian affairs. However, prominent members of the faith might have left behind silver and gold holy symbols worth considerably more than their wooden counterparts.

**Magical Arms and Armour:** Many deities have favoured weapons, and the devout would certainly have carried enchanted versions of these weapons. Additionally, since even the most pacifistic priests wear armour, PCs can find magical breastplates, suits of chain and full plate armour in temples.

**Offerings:** Contrary to what many divine worshippers would have people believe, the day-to-day operation of temples cannot persist on faith alone. The offerings provided by the devout wind up in protected storage, so the clergy can use it to feed themselves and maintain the temple. Avaricious priests and priestesses, or those who take a particular liking to gems or jewels may have squirreled them away in hidden places they could not access when they fled the temple's fall.

**Relics:** Nearly all religions possess relics sacred to their beliefs, usually objects with which their deities have interacted. The devout claim these relics have power, and, in some cases, they do, possibly allowing the bearer to cast a domain spell or use domain abilities once or more per day. More often than not, these objects are of interest only as curios to collectors, who may pay large sums for particularly rare items.

**Sacrificial Implements:** Dark cults and religions certainly feature sacrificial rites, but even benign religions may sacrifice animals sacred to their deities. The knives and other tools consecrated for sacrifices are typically of high quality (masterwork or fashioned from precious metals) and fetch decent prices from those who overlook, or are unaware of, their original purposes.