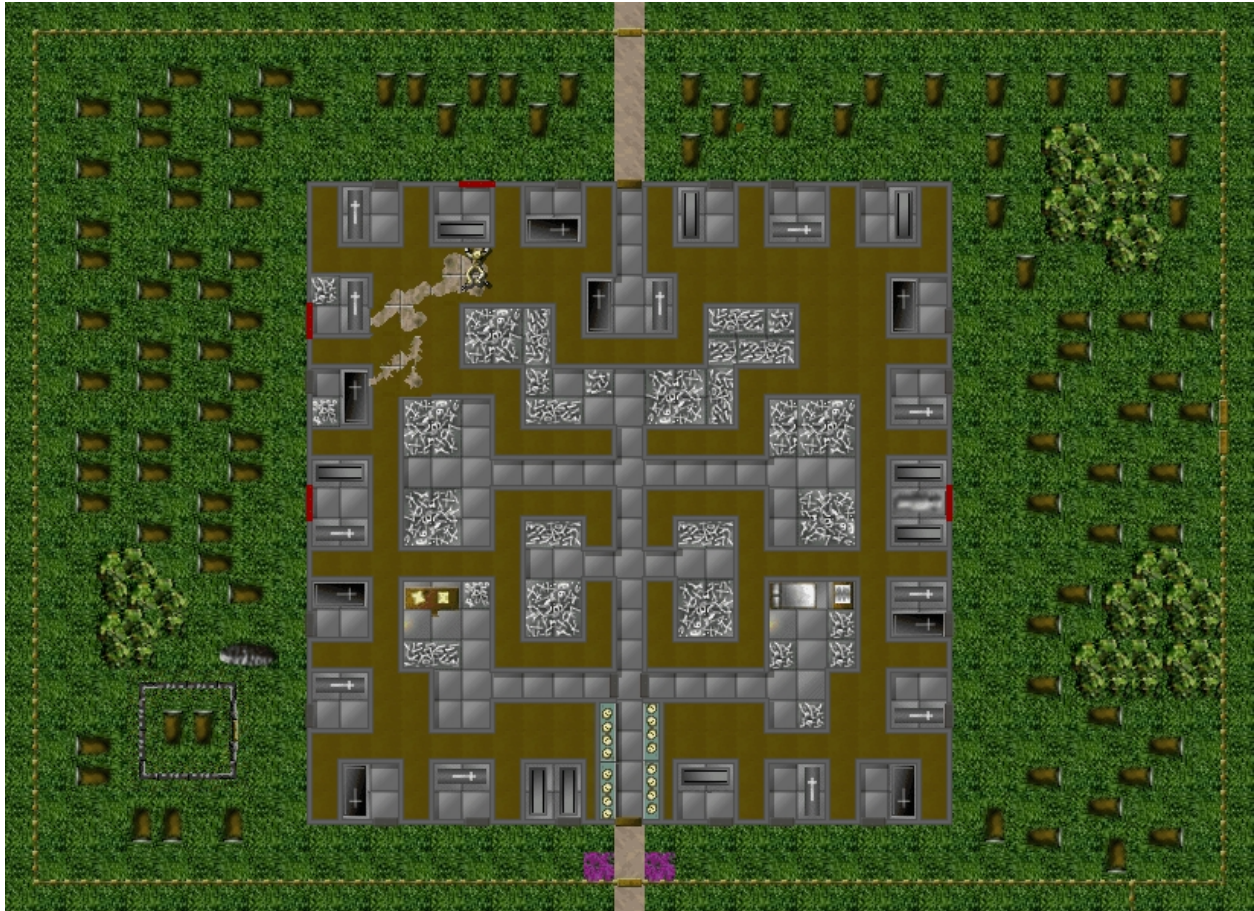


# Aldlyke Cemetery

## Lower Grounds



**The Approach:** A faint charnel odor hangs in the breeze, tainting the cool air. A few small beds of flowers lie near the gates, perhaps to mask the smell, if so they fail in the attempt. The gates, rusted iron, painted and reinforced with wooden bars, groan protest as they are opened. A mass of corrosion marks where the locks once rested, now fallen useless from long neglect.

Bronze doors, gone brown from the moist air so near the river, secure the crypts and the vault from trespass, the lock upon the main vault kept in good repair despite the neglect obvious elsewhere.

**The Grounds:** Despite the obvious age of the walls and the few stone monuments that dot the grounds many of the graves seem recent, in some cases sunken where the coffins beneath the ground have collapsed. The mounds of the freshest graves are dotted with chips of bone and rotting wood, a darkened hinge, perhaps from a casket, protrudes from the ground, a likewise blackened handle resting near it.

The grass shows signs of infrequent but thorough trimming, while high it seems all of the same length, and none has gone weedy and to seed.

Most of the grave markers are carved from wood, denying any long term permanence for the graves they guard. The few stone markers rest on the highest ground on these the lower grounds, hemmed in by crumbling stone walls.

The main vaults have been secured by bronze doors gone brown with age and the moist air so near the river, though the lock gleams new and well oiled in the light. The well traveled path shows frequent use.

Most of the private crypts, built into the walls of the higher grounds, are closed with bronze as ancient as that which seals the main vaults. Some few, the families they once guarded now extinct, have been sealed with brick, clashing with the weathered stone of the retaining wall.

### The Main Vaults:

A Quick Glance: A waxy scent fills the air of these dusty corridors, and a line of skulls gaze pensively from the shelves nearest the door. Along the ceiling the smoky traces of torches guide the way deeper into the recesses that bones come to their last, true final resting place. Strangely, no dust has gathered on these grinning relics of past lives, and a few trinkets, perhaps left by mourning loved ones, glitter here and there among the skulls.

Further from the entrance a pair of newer wooden doors, with iron barred windows inset close off side passages, well oiled locks holding them fast. Only the handles of the doors show that frequent use has fallen on these portals.

A Longer Look: Deeper into the ossuary lie the piles of bone, sorted only by size. An occasional barrier of long bones supplemented by scraps of wood create walls to retain the smaller remains. Here, where the curious seldom go the signs of neglect become more noticeable, none of the careful polishing that the skulls receive are bestowed on the more humble relics in these back reaches. Nearly all of these bones are darkened by the earthy stains of internment, here and there clumps of dirt still cling within the crevasses and cracks.

The Closed Areas: Beyond the wooden doors it becomes obvious that someone has been making their abode among the bones of the dead.

Behind the right hand door a simple bed rests nestled among the bones, a ledger, containing long lists of names and dates, lies open upon a podium, its cover marred by fire, the hasp that once sealed it broken. A quill pen and a stoppered bottle of ink sit upon a shelf built into the podium, accompanied by a bowl of sand for blotting.

To the left the door opens into a makeshift office, the lid of a casket resting upon columns made of blackened brick. Beneath this desk lies a crate filled with charred books, while the top is covered by someone's attempts to copy those books in a more readable fashion. The impedimenta of a scribe's trade clutter the surface that remains. Piles of bone are stacked neatly against the walls. .

Note: It is here that Amos 'John' Sexton has made his home since the caretaker's house he occupied has burned down. Funds to replace his dwelling are unlikely to be volunteered by the city, but at least his new home has plenty of friendly company...

Private Vaults: Most of these vaults contain sealed caskets resting upon long shelves built along the walls, only a few require further description.

Aldlyke's Horror: The vaults within the North-West quarter of the cemetery hide a terror that none who visit the grounds yet know. For thirty years the ghost named Neb Longnose has been continuing the crimes that he practiced as a living man, luring young boys into the confines of his crypt, binding them and devouring their flesh. Often he brings them in in pairs, taking control of one of the boys while binding the other. When his crime is finished he hides the bones in two of the bricked off private crypts. Only recently has he grown careless enough to leave the bones in his own vault, after 30 years he deems it unlikely that any will ever come to search, and with his own family deceased it is equally unthinkable that any will come to visit his bones. The recent body of one of his young victims is still chained within the burrows he has created to link the three crypts. Soon he will tunnel into a fourth crypt.

## Upper Grounds



**The Approach:** No easy means of access exists to reach the upper grounds of the cemetery, either temporary ramps and stairs are assembled for any funerals on those higher grounds, or whatever stairs there were have been removed and never replaced. To gain those upper reaches it is necessary to climb the wall and crawl beneath the thick chain that completely encircles the grounds.

**Quick Glance:** Oddly these more secure and privileged grounds show less care in their upkeep than the common grounds below, only a cluster of four grave to the South-East having any sign that the weeds and grass have been cut back in recent months.

The very finest resting places are sequestered in the North-Western quarter, girded by their own stone wall. Iron gates are shut against the common visitor and 2 small tombs, crafted from white marble, flank the graves of younger members of the family, and perhaps a few old retainers of proven loyalty.

A tiny shrine, of no permanent denomination, lies near the center of the grounds, well crafted, but strangely nondescript with its complete lack of any one religion's mark. Inside there is barely enough room for a priest and a very small gathering of mourners.

The burned ruins of what was likely the former residence of the caretaker of these grounds lies sunken into the soil. Few possessions remain among the rubble, even the bricks of the chimney show signs of having been scavenged. Given the lack of stairs to these upper grounds you wonder how the former occupant made his way daily to his residence.

Longer Look: The Eastern side of these grounds show the least use, relatively few graves dot the once well kept landscaping. The only well maintained plots are resting in this quarter, the graves bearing dried flowers, and the markers labeled 'Sexton'

The floor of the shrine bears stones labeled with names, withered flowers rest upon one that rests off to one side, the marker bears only one name, that of 'Sexton', perhaps the resting place of past caretakers of these grounds.

## Residents of Aldlyke

Amos 'John' Sexton: The current, and most likely last, caretaker of these grounds. Amos has lived inside of the main vaults, since the night his dwelling on the upper grounds burned down,

Despite this setback, and the unwillingness of the city council to make good his losses Amos (known to all as 'John', a nickname given to nearly all sextons and gravediggers) is a cheerful man, willing to pass the time with any who would speak to him, living or dead. Indeed he will publicly claim acquaintance with many of those interred in his domain. Of the ghosts he claims haunt this park only two have existence outside of the lonesome mazes of his mind. And of those two ghosts Amos has in fact only met Squarefoot Thom. Of Neb Longnose Amos knows nothing, and if the atrocities that Neb has been committing ever come to light it is likely that Amos will bear the burden and punishment.. Many have seen Amos in his one-sided conversations with the dead.

Amos takes care of these grounds as best he can, but since the wooden stairway that allowed access to the upper cemetery burned down the same night as his house (and indeed the stairs caught fire first, as several indigents lit a fire beneath their shelter) he has allowed the maintenance of those more privileged lots fall behind, only taking time to freshen those of his own family, and pass the whiles with them in pleasant conversation. The bodies of his father, mother, brother, and an uncle rest in the four well maintained graves, the rest of his ancestors (who have cared for these grounds since their opening) lie in a coffer beneath a marked flagstone in the burial shrine near the center of the graveyard.

Squarefoot Thom: A former soldier in the King's army Thom gained his name after losing the toes of his right foot to frost bite during a winter campaign. It was also during this campaign that Thom committed the sin that he is still serving penance for - facing starvation in the ill equipped waystation his patrol took shelter in during that long campaign Thom and the other two survivors of his unit were forced to resort to cannibalism - the same crime that Neb Longnose had undertaken so willingly. Thom's god knows that Thom undertook no sin for which he requires punishment, rather it is his own conscience, wracked by survivor's guilt, that binds him to his grave.

Thom spends long hours conversing with Amos, and pretends acquaintance with the many nonexistent spirits that Amos also claims friendship with. Like Amos Thom knows nothing of the existence of Neb Longnose, he is however the only one who might seek justice for Amos should the crimes of Longnose come to light.

Neb Longnose: In life Neb was a vicious pedophile who routinely murdered and cannibalized his victims, secreting the cracked bones in a forgotten basement that opens into the city's sewers. Since his death of a ripe old age Neb has continued his slayings, luring young boys into the darkness of his crypt with the sparkle of coins, or a quiet whisper. When he can he brings the children to his lair in pairs, restraining one with chains while taking control of the other to enact the crime.

Neb hides the bones in several walled off private crypts, but has grown bolder with time and the recent death of his last remaining kin, lately taking to leaving the bones of his victims within his own crypt as grisly trophies, and even allowing his most recent prey to starve and die of thirst while chained within his tunnels. Neb is a truly vile entity.