

# Tahekamen's Caves

A pair of unremarkable cave-holes set in some of the typical low, rounded hills of the region provide the entrances to this cave complex. They are not especially obvious, mostly because of the Midnight Jungle which surrounds them across this region of the Doriant Peninsula. The hills lie between two of the numerous rivers in the area, The Rill and Silk Stream. The druidic hermit Tahekamen lives here, hence their name.

The map layout shows multiple levels on the one drawing, with passages and one main cavern underlying parts of the upper complex. Arrows indicate which cave and tunnel sections slope downwards, and the length of the arrowed line suggests the relative steepness of the slope - shorter arrows show steeper slopes. Passages within the layout are roughly cylindrical, as tall as they are wide, and many of these, with some of the smaller caves, show a large-scale reticulated patterning on walls, floors or ceilings in parts, with notably more areas suggesting the stone has been melted or reshaped magically, possibly more than once. The three largest caverns seem much more natural by contrast. The patterning and apparent melting results from the fact most of the complex has been constructed/remodelled over time by the Stonemelder Serpent that currently uses the northwestern corner caves as its lair. Everything that happens, or has happened, here is because Tahekamen has decided it should be so, however, for all his level of control over the events and creatures here is rather loose, in keeping with him being a druidic character. No part of the complex is off-limits for him. He appears as a vaguely Elvish humanoid of indeterminate age, albeit of roughly Halfling stature, and it is unclear whether he is a normal humanoid, a deity or demi-god, since his use of nature-based magics, and his interactions with the creatures, plants and fungi here, all seem very intuitive and effortless. While he may be found in any part of the complex, or sometimes on the surface in the jungle nearby, he is most frequently present in the Pit Shaft Cave or one of the areas immediately adjoining it.

Details on the contents here were inspired and adapted from notes in the Inkwell Ideas' book that accompanies the "Lairs" set of Dungeonmorph Dice used to design the layout randomly, "Dungeonmorph Delves & Descriptions: Crypts, Lairs, & Sewers Edition", with some names provided by random-table rolls in the "Nomicon" by Mythmere Games, while those for the fungi came from random card draws using the Duncrawl 2nd Edition "Encounter Deck" by Aaron A Reed.

## Layout Description

The **Vine Shaft** in the map's southeast is a natural cylindrical shaft leading down from the surface through the roof of the roughly 15 feet high (4.5 metres), also natural, **Pit Shaft Cave**. There is a floor opening directly below the Vine Shaft in the Cave's floor that continues down through the roof of the lower-level's Snowflower Cavern as the **Moss Pit**. The Vine Shaft is about 30 ft long (9 m), the Moss Pit 40 ft (12 m). Thick, ropy, Damonendra Vines grow right down the Vine Shaft from the surface, extending to within a foot or two of the Pit Shaft Cave's floor, and while they can provide a climbing accessway into the complex, the vines exude a mildly poisonous sap that causes a puffy, seeping rash on exposed skin, which can be cleaned-off fully only using alcohol (in RPG terms, assume this does a small amount of damage to bare skin for up to half an hour unless removed; say 1d4 damage per 10 minutes, up to three times). This does not seem to affect Tahekamen, who has a handy flask of alcohol always about his person to aid non-threatening visitors. Soft, springy, palely bioluminescent, yellow moss rings the floor Pit, extending up to several feet away (less than a metre), covering the walls of the Pit Shaft more or less completely. It gives off a light, fresh scent, most noticeable nearby, but detectable throughout the large Pit Shaft Cave. The Cave itself is where Tahekamen will entertain visitors, and which he uses as a living room and workshop, so there may be various natural substances strewn about here over parts of the uneven rock floor, away from the central access shaft.

Directly beneath much of the central Pit Shaft Cave's area is **Snowflower Cavern**, another large, natural cavern, with an approximately 20 ft high ceiling (6 m). It is elongated on a northwest-southeast axis, with a single entry tunnel leading west then northeast into the southwestern end of the Crystal Entrance Chute cavern. Much of the central floor of Snowflower Cavern below and surrounding the Moss Pit's ceiling entrance is covered with the same yellow moss as lines the Pit, from which grows a large, roughly 8 ft tall by 5 ft wide (2.5 by 1.5 m), delicate, palely glowing, white Snowflower. It is surrounded by rings of Human-knee-high air-clasts, pods able to fill with air quickly, and expel it in a jet-like, focused blast to protect the flower from creatures trying to approach too closely. The pods are motion-sensitive, and their air blasts can fling Human-sized creatures and smaller easily 60 ft away (18 m). If this happens in the Cavern, such affected creatures will forcibly strike the rock walls, taking harm as if they had fallen the distance left in such a blast. The Snowflower has magical properties, and can be much sought-after by certain kinds of magician. Tahekamen is unaffected by the air-clasts, which seem to ignore him.

Two tunnels lead off the Pit Shaft Cave. That to the northeast leads into **Tahekamen's Bedchamber**, a more-or-less 10 ft high (3 m) cave, with a pile of moss and springy branches in its southern part that serves as his bed. Other items being tinkered with may be here too. The southwestern tunnel leads into the larger, irregular, **Bretcap Mushroom Cave**, with a ceiling that varies between about 8 and 12 ft high (2.5 and 3.5 m). The floor here and in the tunnel furthest from the Pit Shaft Cave is covered with deep, soft, loamy soil, from which grow innumerable Bretcap Mushrooms. These are robust and clearly carefully-tended, some up to a

foot tall (30 centimetres), and each has a little face on it somewhere. Their stems are thick and pale in any light, while their rounded, flattened caps vary from deep blue to a pale aquamarine. The Cave is normally dark, warm, and has a strong, though not unpleasant, fungal scent. Two alcoves in the southern part of the Cave have piles of rocky debris slowly being turned into loam by the fungal cilia threaded all through both. Fewer Mushrooms, mostly smaller ones, grow on these.

In the northeast corner of the map, the **Crystal Entrance Chute** cave is another large one, with a loosely triangular plan form, and two tunnels leading away from its narrowest, southwestern, apex. It is somewhat wedge-shaped in three-dimensions, highest near the Chute down from the surface, with an irregular 20-25 ft high ceiling here (6 to 7.5 m), descending to nearer 12-15 ft (3.5 to 4.5 m) towards the southwestern apex. The three great rock pillars attached to the floor in the northern corner form the base of a chimney extending up around 100 ft to the surface (30 m). On the surface, the rocks form a substantial outcrop that conceals the entrance hole there quite well. Great veins of crystal run through the rocks of the chimney, right down and into the cavern floor. When the Sun shines on the surface rocks, light is conducted down these veins, illuminating both the whole chimney and this cavern. Parts of the chimney walls and much of this cave's floor are covered with bright green, springy, beds of moss, which thrives in the light from the crystal veins here. The cavern has a strong, fresh, mossy scent to it, very "outdoorsy" despite being so deep underground.

The more easterly tunnel out of here bifurcates soon after leaving the Crystal Entrance Chute cave, and begins a slow descent that continues along both of the irregular passageways from here. The eastern tunnel eventually leads to a dead-end, **Tahekamen's Library**. This is a grandiose name for where Tahekamen stores an old, rather tattered book, made of rich materials, a bestiary of somewhat variable accuracy, created ages before by a long-vanished Dwarfen culture.

While the southerly tunnel eventually dead-ends too, it does so in a small cave, around 15 ft high (4.5 m). Here, from time to time, lurk a number of **Honey Imps**, which, although Tahekamen keeps chasing them off (not with any especial seriousness, it must be said), persist in returning. When the Imps are in residence, the later part of the tunnel before the small cave (from about where the second arrow down along this passageway ends) into the cave, is up to ankle-deep in a sticky, honey-scented goo. The swarm of fist-sized Honey Imps exude this substance continually, coating all surfaces they touch, as well as those beneath and near where they have passed. Annoying and playful, rather than particularly harmful, they do have a knack for relieving those they come in contact with of items carried, and storing them on ceilings using their honey-goo to stick them there. If any Imps are present, on the small cave's ceiling here may be found: a single large gemstone, a nondescript sack able to contain a backpack's-weight of gear without encumbering its owner (this currently contains three quivers with 20 arrows each), a staff, a dagger, a wizard's spellbook and a pouch of assorted, small, magical components.

The westerly tunnel off the southwestern end of the Crystal Entrance Chute cave also bifurcates some way along into two narrower tunnels. The northwestern one leads into the **Breathless Fungus Cave**, an irregular cave up to 12 ft high in places (3.5 m), whose only exit, in the northeastern corner, is almost completely blocked with rubble. Shifting this would take several hours of hard work. However, the Cave is coated over parts of its floor, walls and ceiling with a type of pale grey fungus that releases choking spores when disturbed, spores that affect air-breathing creatures active in here for more than a few minutes (except, naturally, Tahekamen). A very narrow extension off the northwestern cave corner dead-ends in a tubular-cone fashion (so ceiling and floor also draw closer to one another along it), and shows signs of something reticulated having affected the stone here. The Stonemelder Serpent passed this way, as the unconnected tunnel off its Lair further to the northwest suggests, leaving solid rock here now.

Northwest beyond the **Rubble-Blocked Passage** is the southeast-northwest-elongated, **Carven-Eyes Cavern**. This Cavern has only one exit as well, although an open one this time, leading-off northeast, and descending through a smaller cave in a right-angle bend southeast to the Wizard Statue cave. The longest, southwestern, wall in the Carven Eyes Cavern is covered with an array of realistic, low-relief, eyes cut into the rock, ranging in size from tiny ones to some the size of a large shield. While very unnerving in any light here, as the eyes seem to move and change, as if watching anyone passing through here, this is merely an optical illusion due to the excellence of the stone-carving. This Cavern has a loosely 15 ft high ceiling (4.5 m), highest towards the Eyes wall.

The **Wizard Statue** cave appears to be a dead-end cavern. Its floor slopes down, and its ceiling rises towards its rounded eastern end, where the Statue stands, to a separation of around 25 ft (7.5 m) above the Statue itself, which is of a powerful-looking Wizard with one hand outstretched towards the entrance, around 15 ft tall (4.5 m). The Statue projects a permanent **Illusory Wall** that seems to block the southeastern exit tunnel, as indicated on the map. Even passing through the fake wall does not dispel this illusion.

Beyond the Illusory Wall out of the Wizard Statue cave, the tunnel descends further for some way, before rising more steeply towards its end in the Holy Armoury cave. Its lowest point is marked on the map as the **Slime Tunnel**, because here, the passage floor becomes up to knee-deep in what seems to be unusually viscous water, which conceals a Tubercular Slime. This is a living, semi-intelligent slime that will flow up the legs and torso of any air-breathing creature passing through its lair, trying to enter the nose and mouth to

drown the individual. The viscous water takes twice the usual amount of time and effort to pass through as ordinary water. The Slime can be prevented from attacking by whistling Tahekamen's special tune - he will produce a small flute to play this on when passing this way, should anyone accompany him. The Slime is susceptible to fire, and will not pursue much beyond the flooded stretch of its Tunnel.

At the top of the steep slope up from the Slime Tunnel, the passage ends in a small, 10 ft high (3 m) cave, the **Holy Armoury**. A wooden stand in the middle of the cave holds a series of magical items. The most obvious is a suit of holy scale armour, most effective for druidical wearers. Its scales are made from wood set on a plant-textile backing, but the armour has the defensive power of the strongest, magical, metal, and is equally lightweight. Wearing it, the owner can trigger healing for themselves as if having just fully rested, up to thrice per day. With this is a pair of beautifully-crafted, silver, lower-arm bracers, each of which has a flattened, palm-sized, white, Stone of Light fitted to its outer side. These magical stones can be individually commanded to shed light like a torch for up to one hour daily, or like sunlight for five minutes (the magic resets at noon). Hanging from the back of the stand is a marvellously-crafted, perfectly weighted wooden mace. This too is a magical weapon, with the weight and effectiveness of the same magical metal as the wooden armour. Finally, a small pouch contains a sacred animal fang that brings its owner good luck once a day, when required. Tahekamen will retrieve and make use of these items only at great need, possibly gifting them to someone deserving, and of a suitable druidical persuasion.

The southwesterly branch by the turning to the Breathless Fungus Cave southwest from the Crystal Entrance Chute cavern, also splits into two passages a little further along, of which the southerly route turns sharply east, reaching the fast-flowing stream northeast out of Razorfin Pool. While the tunnel then continues beyond the stream, eventually opening-out into Snowflower Cavern (where it ends), there is no bridge across the stream, which is up to four feet deep here (1.2 m). If swept away by the current, the stream plunges down near-vertically at its northeastern mapped end to unknown depths, in a completely water-filled tunnel. The water emits a pale light that softly illuminates its tunnel and the crossing here.

Along the west-branching tunnel, the passageway splits again. Northwestwards, the tunnel winds along to end in a more or less circular cavern with a 15 ft ceiling (4.5 m), the **Grey Ooze Cave**. This had been the Stonemelder Serpent's preferred main lair at one time, but cracks in the ceiling rock have allowed a Grey Ooze to take up residence here now, so the Serpent generally avoids this area. The Ooze lurks in the ceiling cracks for preference, ready to drop-in on any visitors (Tahekamen excepted), although the lack of prey here means it is often absent, hunting elsewhere in the nearby rocks, sometimes far from this complex.

West along the other branch tunnel leads to a 10 ft high (3m) crossroads cave. Straight ahead is a small, dead-end cave around 12 ft high (3.5 m), while to the right (northwards), a remarkably straight tunnel leads up to a small group of caves where the passage ends, which collectively comprise the current **Stonemelder Serpent Lair**. The Serpent is around 60 ft long (18 m) and up to 4 ft in diameter (1.2 m), and often lies in a semi-hibernating state, coiled in either of the two larger caves here, each of which is about 15 ft high (4.5 m). In this form, it might be mistaken for a concrete hut. The creature is magical, and can stone-shape its way through solid rock at will, when it chooses. It appears to commune with Tahekamen at times when both are present near one another, and Tahekamen seems to treat it as an equal, in a friendly manner.

South from the crossway tunnel, the passage quickly opens out into an irregular, roughly 12 ft high cave (3.5 m), with narrow exits to the southeast and southwest (from which comes a pale light). To the southeast, the tunnel curls sharply around to a dead end, at which is a vertical **Gas Seep Chute** in the floor. This is an irregular, half-blocked chimney opening that delves far below, and up which a gas seeps that makes air-breathers light-headed, giddy and unable to concentrate or take anything seriously. This state can persist for several minutes even after leaving the Seep's vicinity. Some of the rare, soporific, lormshell Mushrooms grow near this Chute, which emit a pale blue glow. They grow from a bed of soft moss all around the Chute, and can reach 18 inches tall (45 cm). When inhaled, their spores induce sleep in air-breathing creatures, and the moss makes an ideally soft bed. The fungi then drip deadly poison onto any sleeping beneath them.

Southwest from the Gas Seep Chute cave, the passage soon opens out into the large **Oracular Tendrillia Pool Cavern**. Above the **Razorfin Pool**, the Cavern ceiling reaches around 35 ft (11 m) in places, while the Pool is anything up to 20 ft deep (6 m) with similar irregularity. A soft, pale, magical light emanates from the waters, gently illuminating much of the Cavern. On the ceiling towards the southern side of the Pool is attached the Oracular Tendrillia, a great fleshy columnar creature covered in stony plating, with a single, large eye and numerous strong, flexible tendrils. With these, it may dip down into the Pool to catch a Razorfin fish or two, that it then feeds into its large, strongly-fanged, maw. Highly intelligent, it speaks a broad range of humanoid languages, yet it has a detached, alien, malicious nature. Sharing an embarrassing tale or fact with it allows the sharer to ask a question of the Tendrillia in return. It has magically-impressive oracular powers, and the truer and more embarrassing the story, the more useful and informative will be the Tendrillia's answer. Should anyone try to attack it, it simply retreats into deep crevices within the Cavern's ceiling. The Razorfins are Human-forearm-length silvery fish with very sharp fins and horns, liable to attack anything fleshy in or near their Pool. Circling to build speed, they can launch themselves at a target up to 15 ft from the pool (4.5 m), wriggling, slashing and stabbing, before wriggling free and back to the Pool. Also in the Pool, or

resting on the northern Cavern floor Ledge, are numbers of **Bouldercrabs**. They closely resemble golden-brown boulders, with rock-hard carapaces that are immune to the sharp fins and horns of the Razorfins (and even metal weapons). They are docile grazers that feed on algae and plankton in the Pool for several hours a day, before returning to their immobile, meditative, "landscape rock" appearances. Water feeds the Pool over a **Low Waterfall** by the Cavern's western wall from a subterranean river that completely fills the connecting tunnel beyond. Magical energies from upstream collect in the Pool, which sometimes result in the spontaneous formation of **Mud Golems**. These will try to befriend visitors, to get them to come and stay with them in the Pool - dragging them down to drown, if the visitors are not careful. The stream out passes over a rock lip that speeds-up the flow, which continues northeastwards, cutting the passage to and from the Snowflower Cavern, before descending to great depths down a water-filled chute, as noted earlier.