

THE FOUNDER'S VAULT – FINDER'S EDITION

THE SEVENTH RUNE

A finder's-edition one-shot, set in the dark beneath Caer Brack.



A finder's one-shot for four characters · level 3 · 5e-compatible (SRD 5.1)

FOR THE FINDER

You found seven runes. Most people who visit the site never see one. You found all of them, in order, and they led you here.

So this one's yours. It's set under Brackenford — the village from the free starter setting, the one with the broken bridge and the standing stones and the ruined keep on the hill. The free version leaves the cellars of Caer Brack a mystery. It says the depths are best left undescribed. That was the polite lie. Here's the truth, written down once, for the people who went looking.

Run it for a table you trust. The win isn't a kill. The villain isn't wrong, exactly — that's the whole problem. Welcome to the vault. The Dungeon Master remembers his own.

AT A GLANCE

- **Party:** 4 characters, **level 3**. (Scaling for levels 1–10 and parties of 3–6 at the end.)
- **Length:** one 3–4 hour session.
- **Tone:** quiet, then wrong. A rescue that turns into a confession.
- **The pitch, in one line:** Seven old wards under the keep have kept a grieving man's dead family asleep for forty years. One ward just broke. He's been down there the whole time, holding the other six shut by hand, and he is so tired.

◆ THE HOOK

Lands in five minutes.

A girl from Brackenford went down into the cellars of Caer Brack on a dare and didn't come back up. That's the surface of it, and it's enough to move the party: the Broken Wheel posts a reward on the notice board, her mother is at the bar not drinking the ale in front of her, and the hole in the hill is right there above the village.

Here's what the party doesn't know, and the DM does. Under the keep are seven sealed wards. They've held something asleep for forty years. The girl wandered all the way down to the deepest one, read the rune on it aloud, and broke it. By the time the party arrives, **one ward is broken and six are still shut** — and the man keeping them shut is the reason any of this is sealed at all.

You can open the session at the notice board, at the bar, or at the mouth of the cellar stairs. Five minutes in, the party knows: a child is missing, the only way down is down, and the village is too scared to go themselves.

◆ THE VILLAIN — ALDER VENN, THE SEALER

Read this before the players go down. Everything turns on it.



Alder Venn, the Sealer — warden of Caer Brack, forty years alone in the dark.

THE WOUND

Forty years ago Alder Venn was the warden of Caer Brack, back when it was a keep and not a ruin. He had a wife, Maren, and two children. There was a sickness in the deep cellar — the old keep was built over something the first builders should have left alone, a slow rot that came up through the stone in bad years. The sickness took his family in nine days. It did not kill them clean. It changed them, hollowed them out, made them walk and want and hunger, and it would have spread to the whole valley.

THE WANT

Alder could not bury them. He could not burn them. So he did the third thing, the thing nobody should be able to do: he carried them down into the deepest cellar and he **sealed them in sleep**. Seven wards, seven names — his own, his wife's, his two children's, and three he took from the old keep's foundation stones. As long as the seven hold and the names stay spoken, his family sleeps and does not rot and does not hunger. He has held them like that for forty years.

He never aged past the night he made the wards. That was the price. He cannot leave; if he goes more than a few rooms from the wards, they slacken. So he stays. He keeps them. He has been alone in the dark for forty years, refusing the only thing that would end it: letting them go.

THE LOGIC YOU CAN ALMOST AGREE WITH

Alder is not trying to hurt anyone. He sealed his family precisely so they *wouldn't* hurt anyone. To him, the wards are mercy. Letting his family die fully — letting them rot, letting them rest — feels to him like murdering them a second time, on purpose, with his own hands. He would rather hold the dark shut forever than admit they are already gone.

THE LINE HE WILL CROSS

To keep the seventh ward, the one the girl broke, from spreading, he will trade. He needs a name spoken to re-seal it, and a living voice to speak it. He has begun, quietly, to consider whether the girl's voice would do. Or one of the party's.

THE LEVER

He is exhausted past reason and he wants, more than he can say, for someone to tell him it's allowed to stop.

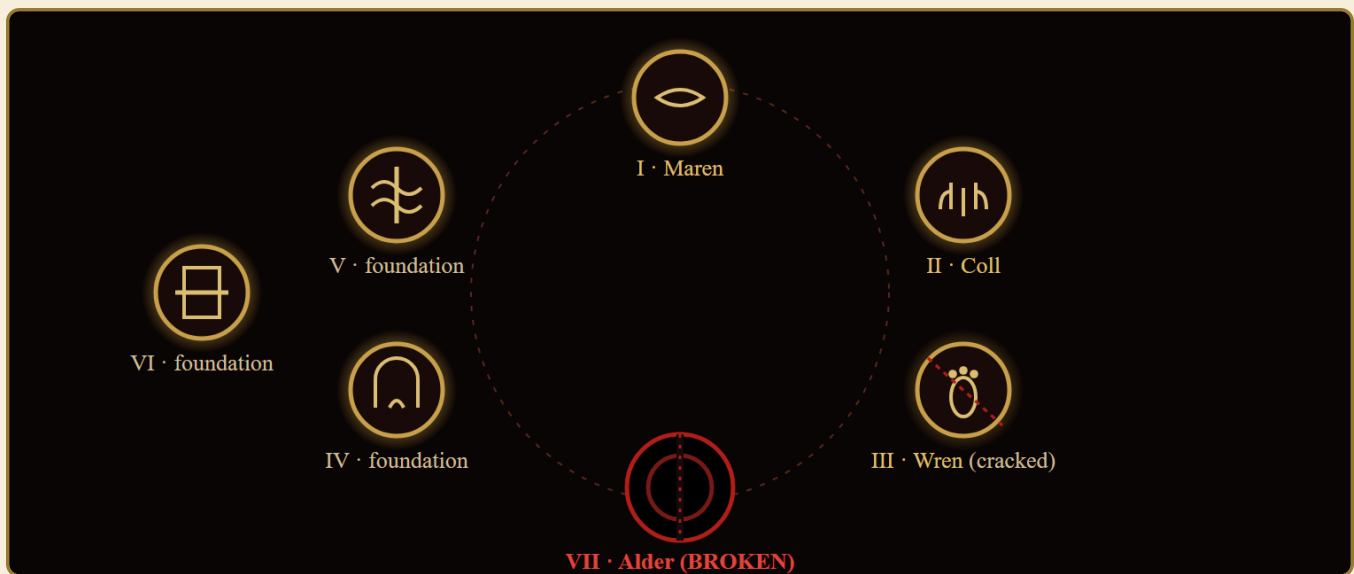
THE SEVEN RUNES

The spine — and the reason this one is the finder's reward.

This is the structural device, and the reason this one is the finder's reward. Beneath the keep are **seven sealing wards**, each a stone disc cut with one rune and bound to one spoken name. Six still hold. One is broken.

The party will encounter the wards as they descend — not all at once, but as a spine running through the whole dungeon. Each ward is a small scene: a thing held just barely shut, and the proof of what happens when one fails. The broken seventh is the dungeon's climax. The seven names are the puzzle, the threat, and the solution, all at once.

WARD	RUNE (WHAT'S CARVED)	THE NAME BOUND TO IT	STATE WHEN THE PARTY ARRIVES
I	A closed eye	Maren (the wife)	Holding. Hums faintly.
II	A hand, palm out	Coll (the son)	Holding.
III	A child's footprint	Wren (the daughter)	Holding, but the stone is cracked.
IV	A hearth, banked	(a foundation name)	Holding.
V	A river, dammed	(a foundation name)	Holding.
VI	A door, barred	(a foundation name)	Holding.
VII	A circle, unbroken — now split	Alder's own name	Broken. This is what the girl woke.



The seven sealing wards, set in the floor like the face of a great clock — six banked warm, the seventh split and dark.

THE TRICK OF THE SEVENTH — GM

Alder bound the last ward to *his own name*, so that as long as he lived and spoke, it would hold. The girl, lost and frightened, read the split rune aloud — and a name read by a stranger unbinds instead of binds. That’s what broke it. The same rule is the party’s way out (see resolution).

THE SCENES

Five scenes, plus the off-the-rails section. Run them in order; the party sets the pace.

SCENE 1 — THE MOUTH OF THE CELLAR

The descent.

READ ALOUD

The keep is a broken tooth on the hill. The cellar door is gone — just a black square in the floor of a roofless room, and a stair going down into it, worn smooth in the middle the way stairs get when one person walks them for a very long time. The air coming up is cool and clean. That’s the first wrong thing. A cellar this old should smell like a cellar. This smells like nothing at all.

WHAT’S REALLY GOING ON — GM

The clean air is the wards working — they hold the rot down with the dead. The girl is the same age Wren was the night Alder sealed her — a detail he will fixate on. She came down two days ago.



The ruined keep on the hill — a broken tooth, and a stair going down into the dark.

The stair runs down past **Ward I (the closed eye)**. It hums. If a character touches it or listens, they hear, very faintly, a woman breathing in her sleep. Nothing attacks. The point of Scene 1 is to make the party feel that this place is *held*, by someone, on purpose.

The interesting beat: a child's chalk drawing on the wall halfway down — a house, four stick figures, done forty years ago and never weathered because nothing down here weathers. Beside it, fresh, in a different child's hand: an arrow pointing further down, and the word "HELLO?" The lost girl drew it. She went lower.

SCENE 2 — THE HALL OF SMALL ROOMS

Finding the girl.

READ ALOUD

The stair lets out into a long hall of doors, each shut, each with a name carved over it in a hand that pressed hard. A cup sits on the floor outside one door. Water in it. Set down recently, by someone who meant to come back.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

These are the rooms where Alder lived his forty years — one per door, because he sleeps in a different one each night so he can stay near a different ward. The cup is his. He set it down when he heard the party come in and went to watch them.

The girl — her name is **Sable**, eleven, stubborn — is here, locked in one of the rooms. **She is not hurt.** Alder put her there to keep her away from the broken ward. He has been feeding her. She is furious, frightened, and convinced the old man is a kidnapper.

READ ALOUD

***Sable, through the door:** "Are you here for me? There's a man. He talks to the walls. He keeps saying he's sorry but he won't let me go up. Please — he's coming back, I heard him."*

What the party can do. Free Sable (the lock is simple, DC 12 Thieves' Tools, or the key is on a hook three doors down). She'll tell them: the man, the locked doors, and that "the floor at the bottom is open and there's something in it that used to be people." She read words off a stone and the man screamed and the screaming hasn't really stopped since. This is where the party first hears Alder. Not a fight. A voice from down the hall: "*Don't read anything. Please. Whatever you do down here, don't read the stones out loud.*"

SCENE 3 — MEETING THE SEALER

READ ALOUD

He's old in the way of a man who stopped counting. Thin. A lantern with no flame in it, that he carries anyway out of habit. When he sees you he doesn't reach for a weapon. He reaches to fix his collar, like he's been caught not ready for company. "Forty years," he says, "and the company they finally send me is armed. Well. You'll do. You can speak, can't you? All of you can speak?"

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

Alder is measuring them for a job they don't know exists: he needs living voices to re-seal Ward VII, and he is doing the math on whether he can ask, trick, or take. **Run him as a confession, not a fight.** He is not hostile. He is desperate and tired and he has not had a conversation in four decades.

He'll tell them most of the truth if they let him talk — the sickness, his family, the wards, the price he paid (he doesn't age, he can't leave, he can't sleep more than a few rooms from the stones). He will lie about exactly one thing: that everyone is safe if they just leave now. They are not, because Ward VII is broken and what's behind it is waking.

WHAT HE WANTS FROM THEM, IN ORDER

1. That they leave Sable with him and go — he'll even pay, with forty-year-old keep silver.
2. Failing that, that one of them speaks the name to re-seal Ward VII, not understanding (or not admitting) it would bind that speaker to the dark the way it bound him.
3. Failing that, that they simply leave and let him manage, which he can't.

The tell a sharp player catches: he keeps almost-saying "we" — "we keep the lower hall swept," "we don't go past the seventh" — and there is no one else alive down here. He's been keeping house with the dead.

SCENE 4 — WARD VII AND WHAT THE GIRL WOKE

READ ALOUD

The lowest cellar is a round room, and the floor is a ring of seven stone discs set flush like the face of a great clock. Six of them glow a steady warm color, the color of a banked fire. The seventh is split clean down the middle, dark, and the crack is breathing — widening a hair, narrowing, widening — and out of it comes the only smell in this whole clean place: turned earth, and under it, sweet, the smell of something that should have been buried a long time ago.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON — GM

Behind Ward VII is **the Unrested** — what's left of Alder himself, in a sense. (See stat block.) When the girl read the split rune, she didn't free a monster; she unbound the ward holding back the *spread*. The rot is climbing. If left, it reaches Ward VI within the hour, then V, and so on up — and if all seven fall, it comes up the stairs into Brackenford and the Hollow Marches, exactly the thing Alder spent forty years preventing.



The seal chamber — seven discs set in the floor, the seventh split and breathing.

What emerges from the crack is **one Hollow Sleeper** — a sleepwalking dead thing, slow, wrong, wearing a face. Crucially: if Alder is present, **it goes to him**. It does not attack. It reaches for him the way a sleeping child reaches for a parent, and he holds it, and he weeps, and *that* is the scene. The party watches a man embrace the thing that used to be his son.

READ ALOUD

Alder, holding it: *“There. There. It’s only a dream. Go back to sleep. I’ll keep the door. I always keep the door.”*

The interesting choice arrives here (full treatment below). The crack is widening. Something has to be done about Ward VII in the next several minutes of game time, and the only people who can do it are standing in the room.

SCENE 5 — THE TURN, AND THE CHOICE

THE TURN — THE BLACK MIRROR TWIST

The “monsters” the party came down to fight are a man’s sleeping family, and the “kidnapper” who took the girl took her to *protect* her from the only real danger. The threat isn’t Alder. The threat is that Alder will *never let go*, and his refusal is what’s going to spill the rot up into the world. He is the seal and the leak at once.

The choice. Ward VII can be closed three ways. The party will likely discover one or two; a clever party may find all three.



The climax — a man, the thing that used to be his family, and a door that has to close.

- 1. Speak Alder's name to re-seal it — with a living voice.** This works. It also binds the speaker the way it bound Alder: ageless, unable to leave, keeping the door forever. Alder will *let* a party member do this if they offer (he'll tell himself it's their choice). It's a trap dressed as a solution. The deathless prison passes to a new warden.
- 2. Let it all go — unbind all seven.** Speak each of the six holding names *as a stranger* (the same rule that broke VII), releasing the family into true death. The rot, with nothing left to climb toward and no living anchor, dissipates as the dead finally rest. This is the moral win and the hard one: it requires convincing Alder to stop, or doing it over his grief. **It frees him — he ages forty years in a breath and dies, finally, an old man, at peace.** The cost is making him watch his family die the death he spent forty years refusing.
- 3. Re-seal VII with Alder's own voice, freely given.** The cleanest. If the party can bring Alder to *choose* to re-bind the seventh ward himself — knowing it means dying with it, because his name read by his own mouth one last time closes the circle and ends him along with it — he can shut the door from the inside. He has to want to stop. That's the whole adventure: getting a man to put down a weight he's carried so long he's forgotten he's allowed to.

THE WIN THAT ISN'T A KILL

Options 2 and 3 both end with Alder dead and his family at rest, but the *good* ending is the one where the party gives Alder permission — talks him down, lets him grieve, lets him choose. The lever from his villain profile pays off here: he wants someone to tell him it's allowed to stop. A party that figures that out wins by being kind to a monster, which is the most LIDM thing there is.



RESOLUTION BRANCHES

They talk Alder into letting go (best). He re-seals VII with his own voice (option 3) or lets the party unbind all seven (option 2). His family rests. He dies old and grateful. Sable goes home. Brackenford is safe and never quite learns how close it came. *Quiet callback for long-term readers: the ring of standing stones on the moor — the Wend Stones — were the foundation stones of Caer Brack, dragged out there when the keep fell. Three of them are the three "foundation*

names” bound into Wards IV, V, and VI. A returning party who counted the stones might wonder what else got moved, and why the count never quite holds still.

A party member takes the seal (the tragic trade). Ward VII holds. The valley is safe. But the party leaves one of their own in the dark, ageless, keeping a door. A campaign-shaped wound if you want one. Alder, freed of the duty, dies within the day — he was only living to hold it.

They fight Alder and “win.” If the party insists on violence, Alder won’t fight back hard — he can’t risk leaving the wards. Ordinary harm can’t kill a man bound to the wards, but it can break him: drop him to 0 and he doesn’t die, he *gives up*, and a warden who stops holding the door is the loudest unbinding there is. Ward VII fails the moment his will does, and then all seven fail in sequence and the rot climbs. The party has to slam the remaining six shut as strangers (option 2, on a clock, under pressure) or it reaches Brackenford. The “kill the villain” path is the hardest version of the night, and the adventure tells them so through what happens, not through a lecture.

They leave with the girl and abandon the wards. Ward VII spreads. Over the following weeks the Hollow Marches go quiet, then the village. A slow, off-screen consequence the DM can let ripen. Few endings are darker.



WHEN YOUR PLAYERS GO OFF THE RAILS

They want to fight everything immediately. Let them try the Hollow Sleeper. It’s slow and it doesn’t fight back unless cornered, and the first time they “kill” one, Alder’s reaction (grief, not anger) should reframe the whole encounter. Violence is available; it’s just never the clean answer, and the wards punish it.

They never talk to Alder, just loot and run. Fine. He follows at a distance, narrating, pleading. The clock (Ward VII spreading) forces an encounter eventually. If they truly escape with Sable and abandon it, see the dark resolution branch — that’s a real ending, not a failure state.

A player wants to take the seal heroically, early. Let them, but make Alder *warn* them first (he’s not cruel) — he’ll describe forty years of it in one flat sentence: “You won’t age. You won’t leave. You’ll talk to walls. Pick someone else for the world to need.” If they still do it, honor it.

They try to free the family without killing Alder. That’s option 2 and it’s the kind thing. Require them to find or deduce all six names (the runes are pictograms — eye/hand/footprint map to wife/son/daughter; the three foundation names are carved over the doors in Scene 2). Speaking a name *wrong* wakes that ward instead of resting it — a real cost for sloppy work.

They want to know if the rot can be cured, not just sealed. It can’t, not down here, not in a session. The sickness is older than the keep. The honest GM answer: the only mercy is rest. That’s the adventure’s thesis; don’t undercut it with a magic fix.

They sympathize so hard they want to help Alder keep the wards forever. Beautiful, and doomed — the wards are failing because Alder is failing, and no amount of help fixes a man who won’t let go. Helping him “keep it up” just delays the spill. Let them learn that the hard way.



THE INTERESTING CHOICE — THE HEART OF IT

Stated plainly so you can hold it at the table: **Do you save the man by ending his family, or save his family's sleep by chaining someone — him, or one of you — to the dark forever?** There is no option where everyone gets to leave and everyone gets to rest. The kindest path costs Alder his life and his denial both. Make sure the players feel that the *easy* fix (let a teammate take the seal) is the wrong one, and the *right* fix (give a grieving man permission to die) is the hard one. That tension is the whole reward.

ADVENTURE MINI TOOLKIT

What the dead are dreaming.

Roll when the party touches a holding ward, listens at a door, or a Hollow Sleeper reaches for them. It's what the sleeping dead murmur — a window into who they were, and a slow gut-punch for the table. (d8.)

WHAT THE DEAD ARE DREAMING

D8 THE SLEEPER MURMURS...

- 1 "Father, you're letting the soup go cold." (Coll, the son, every night for forty years.)
- 2 A lullaby with the words worn off, just the shape of the tune left.
- 3 "Is it morning? You said you'd wake me when it was morning."
- 4 The party's own names — wrong, in a child's voice, as if expecting different people.
- 5 "Don't let go of my hand in the market. You promised." (Wren, the daughter.)
- 6 Counting. Slow, patient, never reaching a number that means anything.
- 7 "Maren, the children are downstairs, I heard them—" (Alder's own voice, leaking through the stone.)
- 8 Nothing. The worst one. A held breath that never finishes.

STAT BLOCKS

SRD 5.1, original creatures.



ALDER VENN, THE SEALER

Medium humanoid (deathless) · not meant to be fought

STR 8 (-1)

DEX 11 (+0)

CON 14 (+2)

INT 13 (+1)

WIS 16 (+3)

CHA 15 (+2)

DEFENSES

AC 11 · HP 38 (his life is bound into the wards, so ordinary harm can't end him; reducing him to 0 leaves him conscious and pleading — see *Bound to the Wards*) · **Speed** 30 ft (but never more than 60 ft from a ward, or they slacken).

SAVES, SKILLS & SENSES

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +4 · Skills Insight +5, Persuasion +4 · Senses darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 13.

BOUND TO THE WARDS

Alder's own name is the anchor of Ward VII, and his life is bound into it. He doesn't age, sleep, or starve, and ordinary harm can't kill him, for as long as that binding holds. Only three things end it, and each one lets him finally die: he re-seals Ward VII with his own voice (and goes into the dark with it); all seven wards are unbound; or the binding passes to a new living anchor who speaks his name (then he dies within the day, his duty spent). He has advantage on saves against fear and against being charmed — forty years alone burned those out of him.

THE KEEPER'S PLEA (1/TURN, NO ACTION)

When Alder speaks to a creature that can hear him, he may ask it to *stay, or speak, or leave* — a DC 13 Wisdom save to shake a creature that's wavering. Used not to harm but to keep the party near the wards. This is roleplay first; only call for the save if a player asks "can he make me?"

RUN HIM AS A CONFESSION, NOT A FIGHT

He has no attack action worth the name. His weapons are grief, exhaustion, and the truth.



HOLLOW SLEEPER

Medium undead · the sleeping dead of Caer Brack

STR 14 (+2)

DEX 6 (-2)

CON 13 (+1)

INT 3 (-4)

WIS 8 (-1)

CHA 5 (-3)

DEFENSES

AC 9 · **HP** 22 (4d8+4) · **Speed** 20 ft (shuffling, asleep on its feet) · Damage Resistances necrotic · Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, exhaustion · Senses blindsight 30 ft, passive Perception 9.

STILL DREAMING

A Hollow Sleeper does not attack unless attacked, cornered, or kept from the thing it's reaching toward (usually Alder). On its turn it moves toward the nearest familiar voice. If Alder is present and free, it goes to him and takes no hostile action.

GRASP OF THE DROWSY

Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4+2) bludgeoning, and the target makes a DC 12 Constitution save or has its speed halved until the end of its next turn (the heavy pull of sleep).

REST RELEASES IT

A Hollow Sleeper reduced to 0 HP doesn't "die" — it lies down and is still. Speaking its true ward-name over it ends it gently and permanently. Killing it the loud way only stops it for the scene; the rot it carries seeps back toward Ward VII.



THE UNRESTED

Large undead · the rot given a shape · behind Ward VII, only if the seal fully fails

STR 18 (+4)

DEX 8 (-1)

CON 16 (+3)

INT 6 (-2)

WIS 10 (+0)

CHA 8 (-1)

USE ONLY IN THE DARK BRANCH

Use only in the dark “all seven fail” branch.

DEFENSES

AC 13 · HP 76 (9d10+27) · **Speed** 30 ft · Damage Resistances necrotic, bludgeoning/piercing/slashing from nonmagical attacks · Condition Immunities charmed, frightened.

SPREADING ROT

At the start of each of its turns, if it is within 10 ft of a holding ward, that ward must succeed on a DC 14 saving throw (DM rolls, +0) or crack and begin to fail next round. This is the clock made physical.

TWO SLAMS

Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) bludgeoning each.

THE ONLY TRUE STOP

Sealing it back behind Ward VII (a name, freely spoken) — not its HP. It will reform from the rot within a day otherwise. Reaching 0 HP just buys the party a round to do the real work.



BATTLE MAP — THE LOWEST CELLAR

Ward VII chamber.



Ward VII chamber — 1 square = 5 ft. A round chamber 40 ft across, seven 6-ft discs in a clock ring, Ward VII split and dark at 6 o'clock, the north stair landing, and four broken corner pillars.

A **round chamber, 40 ft across** (8 squares diameter), reached by a single stone stair entering from the **north** — the stair lands on a **10 ft × 10 ft flat landing** before the floor opens, so nobody arrives standing on a ward. The floor is the clock: **seven stone discs, each 6 ft wide (about one square plus edges), set flush in a ring** around the chamber's center, evenly spaced like the numbers 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11 on a clock face. The center of the ring is open floor, **12 ft across**, the only fully safe footing.

- **Ward VII** sits at the **6 o'clock** position (far/south from the stair) — the split, breathing disc. The crack vents a 5 ft square of difficult terrain (turned, soft earth) directly south of it.
- **Wards I–VI** glow warm at the other six positions. Standing on a *holding* ward is safe; standing on the *broken* one (VII) when a Sleeper emerges puts you adjacent to it.
- **Cover:** four **broken pillars** at the chamber's edge (NE, NW, SE, SW), each a 5 ft square of half-cover, the last of the keep's structure.
- **The stair landing (north)** is the natural retreat; the **center ring** is where the talk-down scene plays out (Alder kneels here with the Sleeper). Keep them visually distinct — fight at the edges, the human moment in the middle.

- **Lighting:** dim throughout (the warm ward-glow), no torches needed; the broken Ward VII is the only dark spot on the floor. A nice detail: the chamber gets *darker* as wards fail, not lighter.

SCALING NOTES

By level (adjust the Hollow Sleepers and the optional Unrested; Alder never changes — he’s a conversation, not a CR):

PARTY LEVEL	HOLLOW SLEEPERS IN THE CLIMAX	THE UNRESTED (DARK BRANCH ONLY)	NOTES
1–2	1, and it never wakes hostile unless attacked	Skip it; the spread is the threat	Lean hard on the talk-down; combat is lethal here
3 (default)	1 active, 1–2 more if they fight	as written (HP 76)	The baseline experience
4–5	2–3	HP ~110, slams 13 (2d8+4)	Add a second cracked ward (VI) to raise the clock
6–7	3–4	HP ~140, +1 slam, DC 16 Spreading Rot	Wards fail two-at-a-time on the clock
8–10	4–6, coordinate toward the loudest PC	HP ~170, multiattack 3 slams, DC 17	The Unrested can split into two lesser forms when bloodied

BY PARTY SIZE

- **3 PCs:** drop one Hollow Sleeper from each beat; give the party a friendly NPC anchor (Sable knows one true ward-name she overheard — a clue, not a combatant).
- **5–6 PCs:** add one Hollow Sleeper per two extra PCs and a second emergence point (a cracked spot at Ward III as well as VII) so the larger party has to split attention. The moral choice doesn’t scale — it’s the same weight at any size.

RUNNING IT IN OTHER SYSTEMS

The mechanics here are SRD 5.1, but the bones are system-agnostic — it’s a social/horror adventure where the real engine is a conversation under a ticking clock. To convert:

- **Generic / any d20 fantasy:** the DCs (12–14) map directly to most “moderate” difficulty bands. The Sleepers are slow, low-threat melee with a speed-sap on hit; build to your system’s equivalent of a weak undead.
- **Draw Steel (MCDM):** make the wards a **negotiation / montage test** with Alder as the central NPC — the “win” is a successful talk-down, not damage. Treat the clock as a built escalation. (Nominative reference only; no stat conversions reproduced.)
- **Daggerheart:** the seven wards are a perfect **countdown / progress mechanic**; run Alder as a roleplay-forward adversary whose “attacks” are Fear-spends to keep the party near the wards. (Community-license terms permitting; confirm before publishing a conversion.)
- **Any narrative/PbtA system:** drop the stat blocks entirely. The whole adventure is “a grieving man, seven failing locks, and a clock.” That premise needs no math to run.

The one thing not to change in any system: Alder is never the boss fight. He’s the boss *conversation*.

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