

# *The Eight Great Cemeteries*

*By*

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## *What?*

Legend has it that there are eight great cemeteries, located at the edges of the known world, marking the most sacred and auspicious of sites for interment of bodies after death. Over the aeons knowledge of these places has been lost and today they stand surrounded by myth and ancient rumour. Some maintain that the cemeteries relate to the major races (one human, one elven, one dwarven, one giant and so on), others claim that no such places ever existed physically, and that the legends refer to an inner process of transformation once embraced by initiates of long lost deities. However, reports from recently returned adventurers to the far eastern reaches of the last continent, have once again stoked discussion among the learned, the curious and the devout. *Possible reasons to visit such a place, or to seek the other cemeteries, if they exist, are:*

## *Roll d8*

- 1. to locate a legendary artefact believed buried there*
- 2. to fulfil a vow to a specific patron deity*
- 3. to seek contact with the ancient ways and discover lost knowledge*
- 4. to be buried in an auspicious place for entering the afterlife*
- 5. for the kudos and reputation – to prove utter fearlessness*
- 6. to eliminate any evil sects or demonic activities associated with the place*
- 7. to seek the last resting place of a legendary hero or lost prophet*
- 8. for the thrill of adventure and discovery*

## *Know way!*

News reaching civilization notes the following impressions reported by adventurers:

1. That the human cemetery is huge and circular and certainly exists – it can be found beyond the Pale Mountain, where ‘the black sound’ echoes
2. That a great red statue dominates the central part of the cemetery – and the cemetery is called, in the ancient tongue, Grahula (the Frightful)
3. That the trees flanking the place are skeletal and from them hang many bodies

4. That there are living communities who dwell in around the cemetery and maintain its integrity, serving as sextons, flesh-cutters and crematory attendants
5. There are many crypts and ancient buildings, ossaries, barrows, charnel houses and deity mounds
6. A great whirl of blades and cutting edges circles the cemetery and confronts all who approach

The rumours are largely true and reflect genuine experience. The cemetery does indeed exist and function, and there are many who dwell there to serve, to maintain their traditions, and to further their practice of divine arts long forgotten elsewhere. Among them are the following:

### **Chöd**

Chod is a ragged man, apparently in his forties, often to be found at dusk or dawn near the cemetery gate. He carries a circular stemmed-drum in his right hand, played by twisting the handle and swinging two leather thongs to create a rattling rhythmic sound (the effect of which is as a *Fear* spell cast at fifth level). Those who approach Chod will find him entranced and swaying in some transcendent dance, black eyes focused in the far distance, maroon robes whirling; if he is spoken to there is a chance (a roll of 1 on a d4) that he will come out of his trance and focus on the questioner. In this case Chod will be able to answer one question with full knowledge and accuracy, and one question with an utterly convincing lie before he returns to his trance. If a 4 is rolled, Chod produces a large curved flaying knife in his left hand and proceeds to decapitate himself before the group, remaining upright and drumming/dancing – he will stoop to collect his severed head and offer it to the group, rather like a begging bowl.

**Chod:** Chaotic Neutral, geased 10th level human Monk: HP 71, AC 17, MV 30 ft, primary attributes: intelligence 18, wisdom 16, dexterity 14. He uses a *+3 robe of protection*, a *+3 Drigu flaying knife (1d6 +3)*. He speaks in an ancient tongue but understands questions asked in Common when focused upon the questioner – otherwise communication is telepathic and uses simple symbolic form. Chod will not leave the cemetery under any circumstances and functions as a kind of guardian. He can sever his head once per day and it reattaches, leaving no wound, each sunset. Once he has conducted this operation one hundred thousand times, Chod is free to ascend to his deity.

**Itzakh The Toe:** Chaotic Evil, 8<sup>th</sup> level insane human mendicant-mystic: HP48, AC15, MV25ft, primary attributes: dexterity 15, wisdom 14, charisma 16. He uses a thigh-bone trumpet which functions as a *horn of blasting*, and carries a

scimitar +2 (1d8+2). Itzakh wears a necklace made of toes, some fresh, others skeletal or in various states of decay. Occasionally he will eat a toe (gaining +3 to all attribute checks for 24 hours), as a great delicacy – and will exchange information for an offering of a toe or two. He is also able to ‘milk’ the toes to create a sort of juice which will function as a potion of healing (CLW). Itzakh sleeps rough on the edges of the cemetery and belongs to none of the communities found there – a loner, he is elusive, but magnetically charismatic and unnaturally youthful looking, even attractive (successful Wisdom save required by anyone engaging with him, CL8, to avoid becoming entranced). Itzakh aims to collect toes and one day, to establish his own shrine within the cemetery. Sometimes he raids parts of the cemetery (the flesh-cutter’s camp or the ossary) to steal toes or to kill (usually at the dark of the moon, to appease his evil deity). Itzakh often croons to himself and will happily bestow his ‘toe milk’ in exchange for more toes.

**Venn The Reddleman:** Neutral Good, 6<sup>th</sup> level human merchant/tinker, HP:29, AC16, MV20ft, primary attributes: strength 17, intelligence 14, dexterity 12. He carries a hand-axe +1 and a dagger of burning +2, both of which he is adept at using to defend himself. Venn is a middle aged man covered in ochre dye, and pushes a handcart upon which are his bindle, tinkering kit, and various trinkets for sale or barter (bone wear jewellery, copperware, a few parchments). Venn is a traveller, a purveyor of dyes and one of the few regular visitors to the cemetery. An outsider, he is often viewed with suspicion back in the civilized world, though here he is respected as a force of neutrality and the dissemination of information.

**The Wheel Of Sharp Weapons:** This Lawful Neutral semi-sentient automaton consists of a double ring of adamantite metal, the outer ring about eight feet across, the inner, about five feet, upon which are mounted eight supernaturally sharp swords, blades radiating outwards. Moves 30ft, HD:12, HP:96, AC:20 The Wheel will attack one target each round (either the strongest opponent, or any chaotic character – CKs choice). Each sword can deal 1d8+3 damage and on a successful hit, roll 1d4 to check how many blades inflict damage that round. The Wheel can be deterred by PCs prostrating before it and pledging to abide by the law of the cemetery (Chod, Itzakh or Venn could potentially impart this knowledge, in whole or in part).

**The Red Statue:** This vast (90ft tall) statue of a naked red woman, stands in a warrior posture, holding aloft a great skull and wielding a mighty flaying knife. Her face bears three eyes, and her open mouth shows four fangs. Around the base of the statue various ‘altars’ stand, some clearly disused, others stained with blood or adorned with flowers and gracefully arranged bright foliage. The statue is of Dakini Varahi, an ancient goddess of nature, Neutral in aspect,

shown here in her protector form. Over time her cult has splintered and degenerated so that now, some view her as a vampiric devourer, a blood-drinker rooted in evil – such followers now offer blood sacrifice, and seek to animate the statue itself (should they ever succeed, the statue would function as a Fire Giant). Others still relate to Dakini Varahi as a nature goddess, a sublime being promising continuity beyond physical death, and for them the statue is a symbolic ideal.

As the centre of the cemetery, this area is overwhelming to the senses and dominated by the statue. Around and about are humans engaged in the disposal of bodies through cremation on pyres, interment in graves or charnel houses, and sky burials (where bodies are sliced apart by the flesh-cutters and offered to the carrion eaters and birds). There are skeletal trees, actual animated skeletons walking near the southern edge of the place, and zombies abroad during the hours of darkness. There are also sundry fortune tellers, seers, beggars, feral children and ecstatic mystics of all alignments, together with shabby stalls selling food, alcohol and religious accoutrements. There are also, for those with eyes to see, accomplished teachers and masters of a variety of mystical techniques, disciplines and traditions – a monk or cleric, even a paladin, could well discover a new mentor in such a place.

Around the cemetery are fields of graves marked with stone symbols and carved markers. The various mounds and buildings contain (as well as crypts and bone houses) temples, places of rest for grieving relatives and pilgrims, and areas for stabling animals. Observant PCs will notice that things are highly organised within the cemetery itself, and specific areas are cared for and regulated by certain sects (eg the flesh cutters, the cremators, the operators of burials, and also by broad alignment) – though closer to the cemetery's circumference, things are more chaotic and wild (even the vegetation is tangled and enmeshing, and wild animals can be heard and glimpsed). The mood of the place varies between terrifying and strange to peaceful and contemplative by time of day and location within the place. There is also a lake, around the shores of which visitors set up their camp (many come from the surrounding tribal areas to conduct funerals for their relatives and peers), and also piles of bodies (some fresh, some mutilated, some skeletal), fires (kept burning at all times) and the surrounding distant mountains.