

# The Vault of the Pole



by Roland "AlHazred" Volz, with apologies to Daniel "Toxoplasma" Gorringe, David J Prokopetz, neutrondecay, and the other contributors to FrivYeti's "[Ten Foot Poles: How Do They Work?](#)" thread on RPG.net. **IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!**

Occupying an odd place among the trades' guilds of the city is the **Most Ancient and Worshipful Order of Roodsmen and Pole-Tenders** (called by some wags the **Ten-Foot Guild**). While other guilds focus on economic and mercantile concerns, the Ten-Foot Guild focuses on the concerns of adventurers. While the guild's monopoly is on the sale and distribution of 10' poles, it has developed into an organization of expert hirelings, skilled in a wide variety of abilities useful to delvers.

The Ten-Foot Guild recruits some children from among the poor and middle classes, but many are the orphaned or forgotten children of adventurers. Apprentices (termed "Pole-Tenders" or simply *tenders* in Guild parlance) serve for many years in Guild workshops making and measuring 10' poles, or accompanying journeymen (termed *roodsmen*) as they travel the marketplaces measuring and certifying the lengths of poles for sale. Spare time is spent training in a variety of skills considered essential to the trade – they develop keen hearing and sense of touch, train for arm and leg strength, spar with poles against other tenders in the practice yard, and otherwise fulfill the regimen of the Guild.

After years of training, many tenders attempt the difficult task of becoming a roodsmen. While most tenders eventually achieve the rank, many fail several attempts. The key element of elevation to journeyman status is the completion of an obstacle course – the Vault of the Pole.

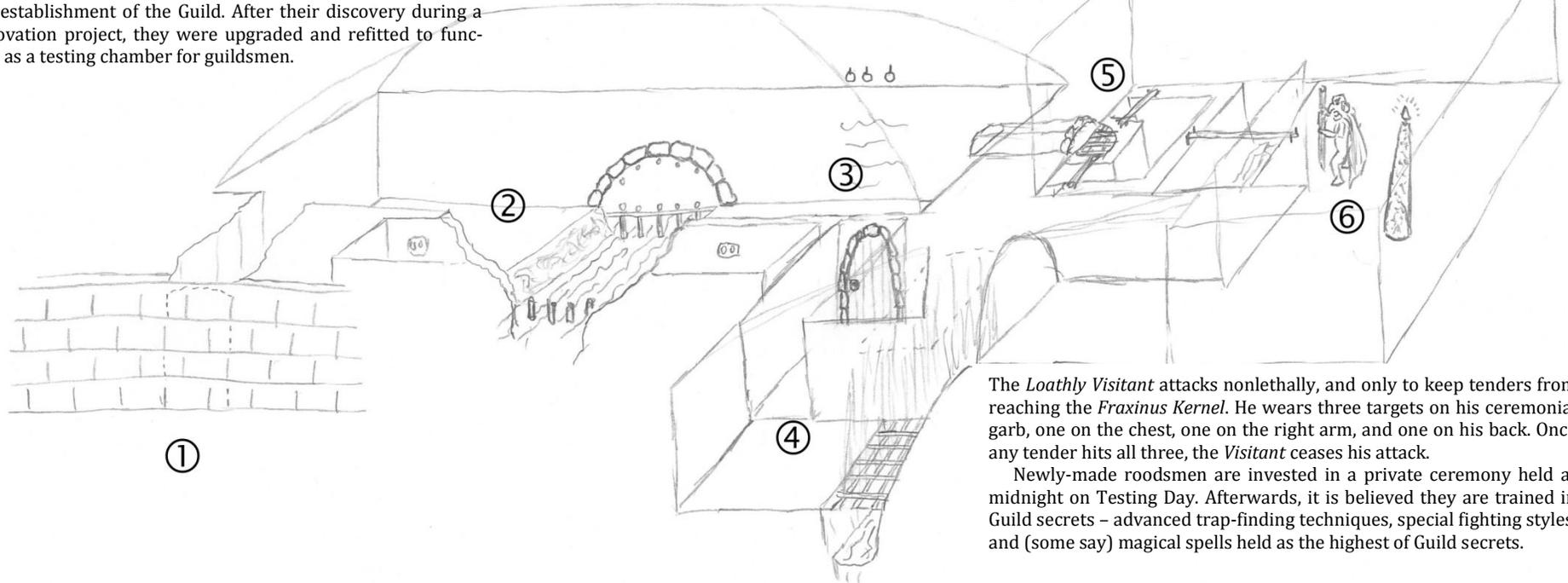
Located deep beneath the cellars of the Order's headquarters, the Vault is a series of chambers which actually predate the establishment of the Guild. After their discovery during a renovation project, they were upgraded and refitted to function as a testing chamber for guildsmen.

On Testing Day (held a week after the first thaw every year), guild members arrive at dawn to honor and comment on the tenders preparing to test themselves. Tenders spar with the Warden, who wears a fright mask depicting the *Loathly Visitant* representing Death; each tender is given the traditional "Three Good Whacks" before the match is called and the Warden moves on to the next. Speeches are given by the Warden, the Guardian, and the Master of the Guild, with the past Masters provided seats of honor on a dais elevated slightly above the practice yard. Members of affiliated guilds (such as the Unfailing Brethren of the Eternal Link and the Porters' Guild) are also invited to the public portions of Testing Day, and something of a festive atmosphere suffuses the guildhall.

At dusk, guests are ceremonially expelled (traditionally with gifts of wine and sweetmeats for their support) and the Guild members enter the guildhall. The journeymen don ceremonial robes and masks, while the tenders are escorted to a normally-restricted part of the cellar. One-by-one, each enters the Vault of the Pole and is given "Ten Bells" to complete the obstacle course. Journeymen monitor tenders' progress through peepholes on either side of the Vault. Apprentices who do not complete the course suffer no further indignity, and are encouraged to try again in a year or two.

1. Tenders are escorted to a 20' x 20' chamber by two roodsmen wearing the masks of the *Baleful Brute* and the *Recreant Rogue*, given a standard 10' pole and a backpack with 40 lbs. of stones. A secret door in one wall leads to ②.

2. A 20' landing is separated from the rest of the room by a 10'-wide culvert with swiftly-flowing water. A grill at either end prevents people from being swept away. The sloped sides of the culvert are cushioned by growths of soft moss and fungus.
3. A 20' landing bears a riddle inscribed opposite a stout and locked wooden door. Twelve feet above the floor, three rings are attached to three different keys embedded in the wall. The gold key ring has a charm in the shape of a flame, the silver key a heart, and the lead key an eye. The riddle changes every year, but a typical one is, "Always hungry, must be fed; fingers licked soon turn red." If the wrong key is removed from its place, the door seals and metal panels close the downstream side of the culvert; the room fills with water in four minutes, draining through a chute to ⑤.
4. A steady rain of water drains through a grate at the bottom of a steep 10' slope to ⑥.
5. A 5' x 5' landing is connected to a 3' wide walkway by 1' wide planks. The walkway connects to ⑥ by a 10' pole, kept from rolling via two pegs at each end. The Warden waits here, still as the *Loathly Visitant*, and uses a 10' pole to try to knock tenders into the water 10' below. The mask makes it difficult to hear anyone climb the slope from ④.
6. The object of the course, the sacred *Fraxinus Kernel*, rests on a 10' plinth carved with ancient runes.



The *Loathly Visitant* attacks nonlethally, and only to keep tenders from reaching the *Fraxinus Kernel*. He wears three targets on his ceremonial garb, one on the chest, one on the right arm, and one on his back. Once any tender hits all three, the *Visitant* ceases his attack.

Newly-made roodsmen are invested in a private ceremony held at midnight on Testing Day. Afterwards, it is believed they are trained in Guild secrets – advanced trap-finding techniques, special fighting styles, and (some say) magical spells held as the highest of Guild secrets.