

ISSUE 177 | APRIL 2010

DUNGEON

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT



4 THE MAZE OF SHATTERED SOULS*By James Wyatt*

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Eberron adventure for characters of 15th level.

31 CHAOS SCAR: EYES IN THE FOREST*By Robert J. Schwalb*

A chance encounter in the Chaos Scar allows the characters the opportunity to avenge another group of fallen adventurers—unless the foes that claimed their lives prove too much for the heroes! A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 1st-level characters.

36 CHAOS SCAR: GLOWSTONE CAVERNS*By Jennifer Clarke Wilkes*

The Gnawstubble goblin tribe has stumbled upon a strange series of caverns filled with an unfamiliar metal—and a dark evil. Now the goblins have found new power in the Scar, as well as a new source of corruption. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 4th-level characters.

48 NIGHTMARES UNLEASHED*By Craig Campbell*

A family's tortured dreams have become reality, thanks to an ill-timed ritual used in desperation. Now a village is threatened, and the characters must act quickly to stop this nightmare from spreading. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Side Trek for 4th-level characters, with expansion possibilities for further play.

57 THE DECK OF MANY THINGS*By Rodney Thompson*

The legendary artifact is back, complete with a full-color deck of cards you can print for use in your campaign!

69 DEITIES & DEMIGODS: TOROG*By Brian R. James*

The minions of the King that Crawls are some of the most feared in the Underdark. Discover more of Torog's history, secrets, and ambitions for the world.

77 REALMSLORE: VAASA*By Brian R. James*

While the Warlock Knights rule Vaasa with fists of steel, the land is rife with adventure possibilities.

84 THE MIND'S EYE OPENED*By Robert J. Schwalb*

The psionic power source might appear to be a problematic addition to your campaign, but discover several options for psionic incorporation in your home campaign.

90 CAMPAIGN WORKBOOK: KAIUS DANTUS*By Peter Schaefer*

This powerful necromancer seeks mastery of the dead, and he's ready and waiting to torment the characters of your campaign.

95 EYE ON THE REALMS*By Ed Greenwood*

The Naerhand family is wealthier than the largest city guilds and weilds more power than many rulers.

98 RULING SKILL CHALLENGES*By Mike Mearls*

Mike continues to educate on the nature of skill challenges, with unique applications and examples.

102 DUNGEONCRAFT*By James Wyatt*

James launches a new campaign this month!



ON THE COVER
Illustration by Ralph Horsley

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READ THIS ALOUD

We have discussions around here that folks in other sorts of jobs might find odd. One day, we discussed what sort of sensory overload a beholder experiences, what with the eleven eyes and all. Another day, we might have a meeting about the best ways to evoke the feel of a sewer adventure. But the other day, as Bart, Steve, and I sat around avoiding real work, the topic of conversation turned to read-aloud text in adventures.

Steve had just read an adventure submission that featured an ambush encounter, which opened with some read-aloud text.

"You know what," Steve observed. "Read-aloud text basically tells the players that they're about to start an encounter. You might as well just drop the 5-foot-square grid down over the characters' heads. If you're reading text to your players, they should just roll initiative. Read-aloud text is one of the ultimate metagame tip-offs."

And he's right. Sure, there might be other ways to metagame an encounter. Most of the time, that doesn't matter much. Players are often already expecting the next encounter. But it can certainly wreck the mood if you're trying to lay an ambush or spring a trap on the characters. As soon as you break into read-aloud-text voice, the players know something is up.

That's a bummer.

Read-aloud text can be evocative, if done well. When executed perfectly, it sets the scene, gives the characters information relevant to the encounter, and evokes the proper mood. Good read-aloud text can help an encounter the same way a good soundtrack can help a scene in a movie.

In Organized Play events, especially competitive ones, it's a great way to level the playing field and ensure a fair experience is had by all the players. I remember playing in the D&D Open at Gen Con many years ago, and more experienced players in my group made everyone at the table listen closely to the read-aloud text. Sure enough, if we were paying attention, the read-aloud text almost inevitably revealed some clue that helped us in the ensuing encounter.

Bad read-aloud text, on the other hand, can be as destructive as good read-aloud text can be helpful. It might presume character action.

As you open the cupboard door and peer inside ...

And it might presume monster action.

... the goblin inside leaps out and bites your face!

Both of which are best left in the hands of players and DMs.

Bad read-aloud text is clunky and sounds like, well, text that's being read aloud. If I wanted to listen to a story, I'd bring my blankie and go find a grandpa.

All of which amounts to more reasons why we need to be discerning about read-aloud text. I'll be the first to admit that it's an element of an encounter I often pay the least attention to. I want to dig into the nitty gritty of the encounter, check the setup, make sure the tactics and terrain make sense. But DMs everywhere need to remember: When you're running a published adventure, the first contact a player will have with an environment or encounter is nearly always the read-aloud.

If you're running a game, always read the text quietly to yourself before reading aloud to your players. Try to sound natural. Even better is taking a highlighter to it and focusing on the key elements of the text so you can paraphrase and make it sound less stuffy, less story-timey. Maybe best of all, throw some evocative text into non-encounter areas or roleplaying encounters. Give the read-aloud text treatment to your area descriptions whether there's an encounter brewing or not. Not only will your adventures (published or home-brewed) feel more immersive with a greater focus on evocative descriptions, but your characters will likely be lulled into falling prey to more ambushes!

How do you feel about read-aloud text? When you run published adventures, do you use it as written? Do you paraphrase? Do you generate the equivalent of read-aloud text for your home-brew adventures? And tell us about a time when using evocative, descriptive language improved your game. You can send your feedback and answers to dndinsider@wizards.com or post them on the D&D Insider community page.



THE MAZE OF SHATTERED SOULS

AN ADVENTURE FOR 15TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

By James Wyatt

illustration by Patrick McEvoy ♦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

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The Demon Wastes: a blasted land cursed for countless ages by the taint of ancient evil. A land of ash and rock, harsh and unforgiving, and its few mortal residents are equally harsh. The Ghaash'kala guard the Labyrinth, preventing anyone from entering or leaving the Demon Wastes lest the taint of evil spread to the world beyond ...

PARAGON

11-20



The Maze of Shattered Souls is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure for five characters of 15th level. This adventure is set in the world of EBERRON. The *Eberron Campaign Guide* and the *Eberron Player's Guide* contain information that may enhance your experience, but neither book is required to play the adventure.

BACKGROUND

The Demon Wastes is a blasted and haunted land stretching across the northwestern coast of Khorvaire. It is infested with all manner of evil beings, from demons and night hags to gnolls and plague-tainted barbarians.

Two physical barriers stand between the Demon Wastes and the rest of Khorvaire. The first is a long mountain range, called the Icehorn Mountains in the north and the Shadowcrags in the south. The second is the Labyrinth, a twisting network of barren canyons full of deadly hazards.

The Ghaash'kala—four clans made up primarily of orcs but including members of other races who have joined their cause—are a third barrier protecting Khorvaire from the evils of the Demon Wastes. The holy warriors of the Ghaash'kala are sworn to keep the taint of the Wastes contained behind the Labyrinth, so they keep constant vigil to prevent anything from leaving the Wastes. They also watch to stop those adventurers foolhardy enough to venture into the Wastes, for any who enter that blasted land inevitably take on the taint of its evil.

Deep in the heart of the Labyrinth stands an ancient structure called the Maze of Shattered Souls. The demons that inhabit the Wastes view the Maze as a place of power, for they can tap magical energy from the mortal souls trapped in its halls. In particular, the fiendish schemers known as the Lords of Dust hold the place in high regard, for they believe they can learn more of the mysterious Draconic Prophecy by studying and communing with the souls trapped in this place.

Few of the demons who visit the place and draw on its power have any inkling that deep below the Maze of Shattered Souls lies the prison of one of the great fiendish overlords of the Age of Demons, a being known as the Stalker in Darkness. Most of the imprisoned overlords have exarchs to serve them. These agents do their overlords' will in the world and coordinate efforts to free them from their prisons. The Stalker in Darkness, though, has no exarch. The position fell vacant thousands of years ago, and the overlord has fallen into obscurity.

A rakshasa noble called Zathasram has taken up residence in the Maze of Shattered Souls, seeking to amass enough power and knowledge to become the exarch of the Stalker in Darkness. With lesser rakshasas and demons as guardians and allies, Zathasram holds the Maze against intruders, jealously guarding its knowledge and power for himself.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The heart of the adventure is the characters' exploration of the Maze of Shattered Souls and their ultimate confrontation with Zathasram. To get there, the characters must make their way through the Labyrinth. Then they must also deal with the Ghaash'kala in

order to leave the Labyrinth and return to the world beyond the Wastes.

The characters might seek out the Maze of Shattered Souls for any of a number of reasons. It's even possible for different characters to have different—possibly even conflicting—reasons, and different goals once they've found it. The quests at the end of this section describe various motivations and goals that might bring the characters into the Demon Wastes in search of the Maze of Shattered Souls.

The encounters in this adventure occur in three phases: getting through the Labyrinth to the Maze of Shattered Souls, exploring the Maze and overcoming its defenders, and leaving the Labyrinth again.

While traveling to the Maze, the characters might have an encounter in the village of Festering Holt: either members of the Children of Winter (if you use the Captive Savant quest) or agents of the Order of the Emerald Claw (if you use the Grasp of the Emerald Claw quest). These encounters help point the characters to the Maze if they're not already looking for it. The characters also encounter Carrion Tribe barbarians in the Labyrinth before they find the Maze.

Within the Maze, the characters face an array of demons in a bewildering environment. Lesser rakshasas guard the entrance, various demons haunt the inner passages, and Zathasram himself with his goristro bodyguard haunts the inner sanctum.

After leaving the Maze, the characters must face a party of Ghaash'kala trying to prevent them from carrying the taint of evil out from the Wastes. The characters are offered the choice to either join the Ghaash'kala or die, and if they wish to leave the Demon Wastes, they must contend somehow with these good-aligned and well-intentioned defenders.

CAPTIVE SAVANT

A wise druid named Daven d'Vadalis, a member of both the Wardens of the Wood and the dragon-marked House Vadalis, was kidnapped from his home in Merylsward in the northern Eldeen Reaches. His family, the people of the town, and the druids of the Reaches are eager to see him returned, for his wisdom has proven essential in guiding the town to prosperity.

Daven was captured by members of the Children of Winter, a druidic sect that seeks to hasten the transformation of the world through death. Witnesses saw him carried from his home wrapped in the webs of a giant spider that accompanied his gray-robed captors. The party traveled northwest from Merylsward, and trackers followed their trail all the way to the foothills of the Icehorn Mountains. It appears that they carried him into the Demon Wastes.

If characters are sent on this quest, be sure they encounter Karra and her undead spider in Festering Holt. Why Daven was kidnapped is left to the DM. One likely explanation is an alliance of convenience between the Children of Winter and Zathasram; the Children of Winter wanted a druid to sacrifice, and Zathasram wanted the knowledge in Daven's head.

Major Quest (level 15): Find Daven d'Vadalis and bring him back home, along with the knowledge of who kidnapped him and why.

Quest Reward: 6,000 XP, and his family promises a reward of 5,000 gp for his safe return.

GRASP OF THE EMERALD CLAW

The player characters learn that the Order of the Emerald Claw—the extremist militant sect of the religion known as the Blood of Vol—has sent a party of powerful agents into the Demon Wastes in search of a rumored doomsday device which they hope to use in pursuit of their nefarious schemes. (This may or may not be the Orb of Kevrik described below under “Mission for Morgrave.”)

This quest works best if the characters have had past run-ins with the Order of the Emerald Claw or if the characters work as agents for one of Khorvaire's other espionage-focused organizations such as the Royal Eyes of Aundair or the King's Citadel of Breland.

Major Quest (level 15): Find the device that the Order of the Emerald Claw seeks and bring it out of the Labyrinth. If it can't be moved, destroy it instead. In any eventuality, it must be kept out of the hands of the Order.

Quest Reward: 6,000 XP.

WHISPER OF PROPHECY

“Those who seek the shattered souls under the light of Storm's bright moon when the Twilight Forest is at its nearest shall turn barren lands into spring's first blossoming.”

At some point in their travels, the player characters have come across this fragment of the Draconic Prophecy. It's ideal if you can seed it into an earlier adventure or side trek.

If that's not possible, then the characters can be approached by someone else who uncovered the fragment and now seeks to transform some barren land by undoing a curse of winter, renewing infertile ground laid over part of Khorvaire, or even reversing the Mourning. This snippet of Prophecy seems to be the key to solving the problem they face. Research has led them to believe that the “shattered souls” mentioned in the Prophecy are contained in a structure within the Labyrinth known as the Maze of Shattered Souls.

Characters should be able to interpret part of the fragment on their own, using common knowledge. “Storm's bright moon” is a reference to Zarantyr, the moon associated with the Mark of Storm. It waxes full every month. The Twilight Forest refers to the plane of Lamannia, one of the angelic dominions of the Astral Sea, and its metaphysical proximity to Eberron.

If players arrive at their own interpretation of the fragment, so much the better. Otherwise, allow the characters to research its possible meaning. Scholars of the planes (or characters who succeed at a DC 30 Arcana check) can identify the time of Lamannia's closest approach, which lies a few weeks in the future—just enough time for the characters to travel to the Demon Wastes—and at the same time as Zarantyr is full. However, it's likely that other parties with an interest in the Draconic Prophecy are also seeking this Maze of Shattered Souls and the secrets it holds.

Major Quest (level 15): Find the Maze of Shattered Souls by the time Zarantyr waxes full and Lamannia draws near, and discover what secrets it holds for restoring barren lands.

Quest Reward: 6,000 XP.

MISSION FOR MORGRAVE

The characters' patron—who might be a professor at Sharn's Morgrave University, a member of the Aurum, an agent of the Library of Korranberg, or an ordinary scholar who's secretly an agent of the Chamber—offers them their most dangerous challenge yet: to venture into the Demon Wastes in search of the Orb of Kevrik the Crusader. This artifact is believed to have been created during the primordial war between dragons and fiends that shaped the face of Eberron. Its most recent owner disappeared in the Demon Wastes during the Last War.

This quest meshes well with the quest described previously under “Grasp of the Emerald Claw.”

Major Quest (level 15): Find the Orb of Kevrik the Crusader and return it to the patron.

Quest Reward: 6,000 XP and a payment of 5,000 gp.

WITH A TWIST

You can add a secret twist to any of the quests outlined above or combine them in such a way as to put different characters' goals in conflict. For example, any patron (from the druids of the Eldeen Reaches to a scholar at Morgrave University) could be an agent of the Chamber or the Lords of Dust, seeking to manipulate the Prophecy or disrupt Zathasram's plans to become the exarch to the Stalker in Darkness. Or the patron could be an agent of the Order of the Emerald Claw, making the characters the very agents of the Emerald Claw that they hope to stop.

Characters who spend at least a few days before setting out doing their own research on the Maze of Shattered Souls can learn fragmentary details about Zathasram, the Maze, the obelisk, and the Stalker in Darkness. How much is revealed should be determined by how much effort they put into the

research and how much you want them to know. Tantalize them with this information rather than giving away secrets.

TREASURE PARCELS

As presented here, the adventure includes seven of the ten treasure parcels characters should earn over the course of 15th level. Additional parcels might be earned as quest rewards, or you can add them to other encounters. The list below summarizes the treasure parcels found in the adventure:

- 1 +4 *icon of the Silver Flame*, found in the “Carrion Tribe Attack!” encounter
- 2 not included in the adventure
- 3 *bracers of defense*, found in the “Heart of the Maze” encounter
- 4 not included in the adventure
- 5 140 pp, found in the “Heart of the Maze” encounter
- 6 adamantine crown and 45 pp, found in the “Heart of the Maze” encounter
- 7 platinum ring (7,500 gp) and emerald (1,000 gp) found in the “Entrance” encounter.
- 8 jacinth (5,000 gp), gold necklace (2,500 gp), and sapphire (1,000 gp), found in the “Carrion Tribe Attack!” encounter
- 9 possible quest reward, for the “Captive Savant” or “Mission for Morgrave” quest
- 10 two diamonds (1,000 gp each), found in the “Mazeway” encounter

GETTING THERE

Characters can travel by lightning rail as far as Fairhaven in Aundair and then by road to Merylsward. Alternatively, they could take an airship to either Fairhaven or Varna and then ride to Merylsward. Beyond that town, however, they must make their way through the forests of the Eldeen Reaches and across the forbidding Icehorn Mountains, a journey of 200 miles (about 14 days on foot or half that on horseback). Feel free either to gloss over the bulk of their travel or to craft wilderness encounters for them to meet on the way (possibly filling out the remaining three 15th-level encounters).

The real danger lies in the Demon Wastes.

When the characters enter the Demon Wastes, read or paraphrase this welcome:

As you make your way down from the mountains, a bare and desolate valley comes into view. Not only trees but grass and even lichen have abandoned the dusty soil. Boulders litter the slopes of the valley, and shadows flit among them in the strange light of the ruddy sky. The sky churns with storm clouds, but an angry glow like magma suffuses the clouds as though they might rain down fire instead of water. With every step you take away from the freezing peaks of the Icehorns, the air around you grows warmer until it is stifling and foul with a sulfurous stench.

Far in the distance, you can just make out the dark shapes of what looks like a small village. A village in the Demon Wastes isn't likely to be very safe, but it's probably better than making camp in the wilderness. Probably.

Streetwise DC 25: *The village must be Festering Holt, a wretched settlement that is certainly dangerous, but at least offers some degree of refuge to people intent on exploring the Demon Wastes.*

The characters can either proceed to Festering Holt or venture directly into the Labyrinth beyond in search of the Maze of Shattered Souls (see “The Labyrinth” on page 9).

Festering Holt lies about 50 miles farther along the characters’ path. At that distance, it would be visible from mountain slopes and the tops of the foothills as a smudge of dirty smoke on the horizon, but it will disappear beyond the horizon when characters reach the desert floor.

With 50 miles to cross, the characters are looking at one night spent on the open, barren plain before they reach the village in any event. Make sure the players *feel* that camping out in the open is dangerous: roll dice as if checking for a random encounter, describe haunting sounds and indistinct movements at the edge of their vision, or actually present them with a random encounter if you feel that they’re not taking the danger seriously (choose one from the list at right or roll randomly).

The entrance to the Labyrinth is another 50 miles from Festering Holt. Bypassing the village can trim the journey to about three days rather than four, but the characters will miss some key information from the town.

FESTERING HOLT

When the characters arrive in Festering Holt, read or paraphrase the following description:

The ramshackle buildings of this tiny village seem huddled close to the ground as if to protect themselves from the deadly environment. A haze of black smoke hangs overhead and trails down to meet chimneys and a few piles of burning refuse. The stench of every kind of filth assaults your nostrils. The streets are not crowded, but in

just a glance you see representatives of a dozen races, from humans to one lumbering ogre and everything in between. Your arrival draws attention—some blank stares, some knowing smiles, and a few people who look like hungry predators pleased at the arrival of new prey.

Festering Holt is no more than a village, with a stable population of around 200.

The characters can secure lodging for 1 gp each (per night) in the village’s one inn—also a tavern, stable, and general store—called Dead Before Morning. Catering to both short-term and long-term visitors, the inn takes its name from the bugbear proprietor’s traditional evening toast: “Drink well, lads, because it’s a sure bet we’ll all be dead before morning!” The bugbear is Karbal, a fugitive from the goblin nation of Darguun. The people of the Holt don’t know why he fled Darguun, but they joke that he must have been running from something terrible if the Demon Wastes seem better by comparison.

Depending on the hooks you used to draw the characters to the Maze of Shattered Souls, they might have one or two encounters in Festering Holt before moving on to the Labyrinth. If you used the Captive Savant quest, see the encounter “Winter’s Grasp.” If you used the Grasp of the Emerald Claw quest, see the encounter “Emerald Agents.”

No matter what brought the characters here, they may devote some effort to gathering information about the Labyrinth, the Maze, and Festering Holt before pressing on. If so, see “On the Scent.”

Skill Challenge: F1. On the Scent (page 12)

Tactical Encounter: F2. Winter’s Grasp (page 14)

Tactical Encounter: F3. Emerald Agents (page 16)

Random Encounters in the Demon wastes

1 Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,200)
6 Carrion Tribe degenerates (ECG 120)
3 Carrion Tribe plaguebearers (ECG 121)
1 abyssal ghoul (MM 118)

2 Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,600)
2 guulvorgs (MM 265)
1 night hag (MM 151)

3 Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,300)
5 fire archon emberguards (MM 18)
1 fire archon ash disciple (MM 19)

4 Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,000)
1 pod demon (MM2 58)
5 podspawn (MM2 59)
2 red slaads (MM 238)

5 Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,400)
2 chillfire destroyers (MM2 98)
1 tempest wisp (MM2 102)
1 beholder eye of flame (MM 32)
4 salamander firetails (MM 226)

6 Level 16 Encounter (XP 7,000)
1 purple worm (MM 214)

THE LABYRINTH

If the corruption, the distilled acidic evil of the Demon Wastes had corroded the earth, burning away what it touched and leaving a blackened, twisting residue, that residue might have resembled the Labyrinth. Mile upon mile of winding canyons, scorched plateaus, and jagged outcroppings stretched from the feet of the Shadowcrag as far as Kauth could see. On the horizon, only tall fires licking at the blood-red sky marked the land beyond the Labyrinth.

—Dragon Forge, Book 2 of the Draconic Prophecies

The Labyrinth is aptly named. It is a maze of twisting canyons and barren gullies seemingly crafted for the sole purpose of trapping and torturing those brave or foolish enough to attempt crossing it. The land is in constant change—chasms plunging to Khyber open beneath travelers' feet, rivers of lava spill through the canyons along shifting courses, jets of flame spurt from the earth, landslides tumble down the cliffs, and flash floods area a deadly risk whenever rain falls in the barren Wastes.

Even with a clear idea of where they're going, the characters must succeed at a skill challenge to measure their success in passing through the Labyrinth to reach their destination. The journey requires at least four days, so the skill challenge is broken up into four phases, each reflecting the hazards of a day's travel. Three additional phases account for failed checks during the challenge and represent three days of additional travel time as the characters correct for their mistakes.

The first time the characters accrue a failure in the skill challenge, they're attacked by Carrion Tribe barbarians who interrupt the challenge with a combat encounter.

The characters cannot take an extended rest while traversing the Labyrinth. Conditions there are too harsh for the characters to rest well, even though the challenge stretches over several days. This means that healing surges lost during the challenge remain until the characters reach the Maze of Shattered Souls, and daily powers used to overcome the obstacles in the challenge remain expended when the characters reach their destination.

Skill Challenge: L1. The Labyrinth (page 18)

Tactical Encounter: L2. Carrion Tribe Attack (page 20)

THE MAZE OF SHATTERED SOULS

The Maze itself is a simple dungeon of halls and chambers carved into the walls of the Labyrinth, leading to an enclosed canyon area with no other entrance. Its name comes from the mortal souls imprisoned in a great black obelisk that stands in the inner canyon—souls that provide sustenance to the imprisoned Lurker in Darkness, far below.

What else the heroes find at the heart of the Maze depends on why they're here—which quest or quests launched them on this adventure. The druid Daven d'Vadalis can be rescued by reuniting his mortal remains with his soul. Any artifact that the characters seek is held in Zathasram's sanctum, as is whatever knowledge might unlock the secret of restoring barren lands to health.

Tactical Encounter: M1. Entrance (page 22)

Tactical Encounter: M2. The Mazeway (page 24)

Tactical Encounter: M3. Heart of the Maze (page 26)



LEAVING THE WASTES

The characters can find their way back out of the Labyrinth without undergoing another skill challenge. On their third day of travel back toward the mountains and the relative safety of the Eldeen Reaches, however, they are accosted by the Ghaash'kala.

The Ghaash'kala are spiritual warriors who believe it is their sacred trust to prevent the evil of the Demon Wastes from spilling out into the world beyond the Labyrinth. They also believe that anything that enters the wastes is inevitably contaminated by its evil, so nothing can be allowed to leave. Driven by this conviction, a party of Ghaash'kala warriors attempts to stop the characters from leaving the Demon Wastes.

Determined roleplayers might be able to talk their way out of this situation, but the Ghaash'kala are resolute in their duty and not easily swayed from it. They can't be tricked, bribed, or intimidated into letting intruders slip through their net. Characters must come up with a truly convincing argument or evidence that they haven't been tainted by the Labyrinth in order for the Ghaash'kala to let them pass. Examples of things that *might* work would be asking just the right questions during a Consult Oracle ritual or an impressively high result in a Discern Lies ritual cast by the Ghaash'kala leader.

More likely is that the characters will need to fight their way past. Be sure to impress on them the fact that these are Lawful Good NPCs performing a vital function for the good of the world. Fighting them should be a last (but possibly inevitable) resort. Killing them is an act that should haunt the characters for a long time. (See *Player's Handbook*, 295 for rules on knocking foes unconscious rather than killing them.)

Read or paraphrase the following text when the two groups meet:

"Travelers in the Labyrinth!" You hear a low voice resound in the canyon as night descends over the Labyrinth. "You stand on cursed ground. You may proceed no farther into this place of evil, and you may not leave to spread its taint. I offer you a choice: commit your lives to the service of Kalok Shash and the holy calling of the Ghaash'kala, or die where you stand."

Perception DC 22: *You see four tall, broad humanoid figures perched on a ledge above you—clearly one of these figures was the speaker. They look like orcs.*

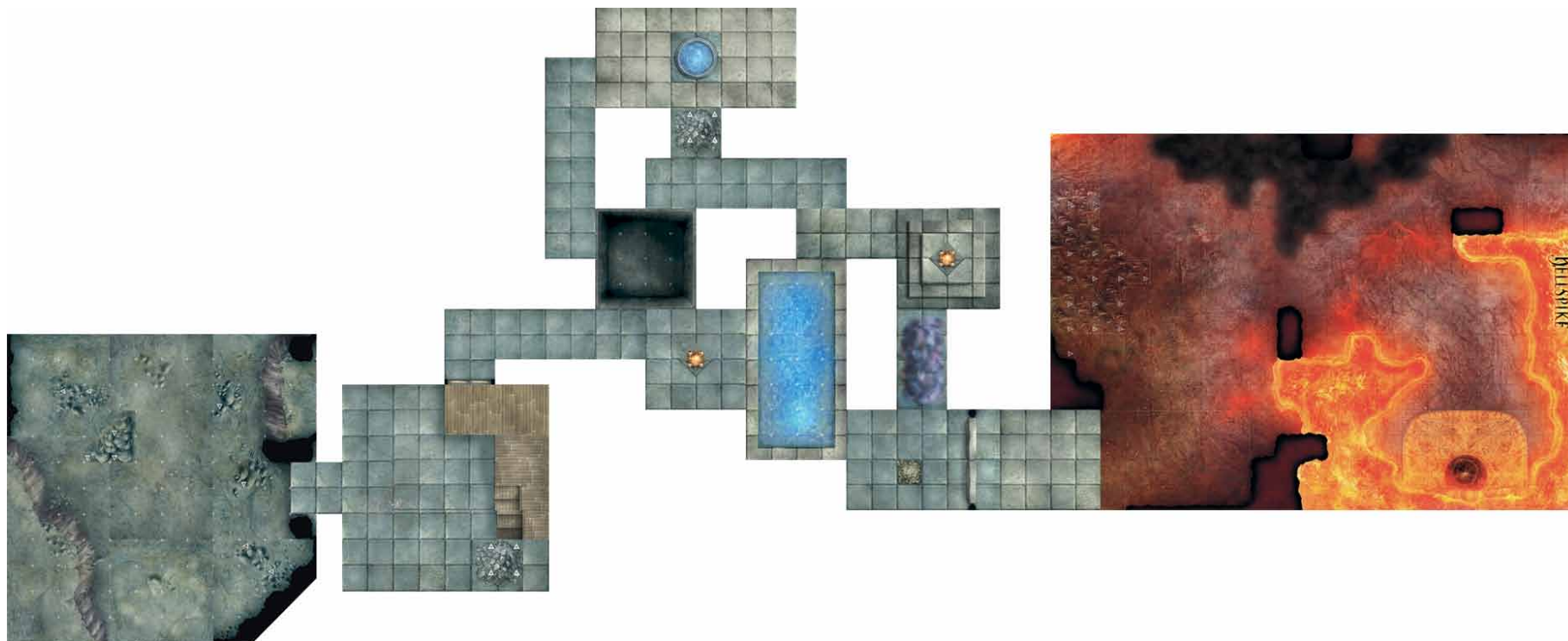
If the characters choose to join the Ghaash'kala instead of fighting, the orcs welcome them. The characters will be escorted to Ghaash Dar and inducted into the ranks of the Ghaash'kala, where they can fight alongside orcs, barbarians, and other converts against the evil of the Demon Wastes.

It's possible that characters will agree to join the Ghaash'kala to forestall this fight, then try to sneak away to freedom during the night or at some later time. The specifics of whether that plan works are left to the DM. It could be handled as a skill challenge or as an adventure in its own right. In either case, it shouldn't be easy. Vigilance is what the Ghaash'kala are all about.

As soon as the characters make their intention to fight clear, the Ghaash'kala mystic lifts his hands to the sky, and two angels of battle swoop down, bathed in silvery light, in response to his summons, and the tactical encounter begins.

Tactical Encounter: L3. Ghaash'kala (page 29)





MAZE OF SHATTERED SOULS
OVERVIEW MAP

FI. ON THE SCENT

This skill challenge involves using various approaches to determine what's going on in Festering Holt. It can tip off characters to the presence of the Children of Winter and the Emerald Claw, along with the Claw's purpose in Festering Holt and the location they seek in the Labyrinth.

Before proceeding with the skill challenge, the party must make a group Streetwise check (DC 18). Each character that succeeds on this check opens up a different lead that the party can follow using other skills. This group check also counts as the first skill check of the challenge. If at least as many characters succeed on the check as fail, they begin the skill challenge with one success; otherwise, they accrue one failure.

Rather than simply asking everyone for Streetwise checks and rattling back the results, dole out this information as snippets of conversation overheard at Dead Before Morning or in the form of questions from NPCs ("Have you seen that hideous, undead spider stomping about the village? No? Let me tell you about it ...") Festering Holt is only a village, however, so gathering information doesn't involve long treks across town or searching sprawling neighborhoods for elusive contacts. Things can happen quickly here.

- ◆ **One or more successful checks:** The characters learn that two unsavory groups of strangers are in town. One appropriated a vacant house near the center of town and dragooned a half-orc vagrant into acting as their household servant. The other is accompanied by a horrid, undead spider that everyone is frightened of.

- ◆ **Two or more successful checks:** The group staying in the vacant house are agents of the Emerald Claw. They have been asking questions about a place called the Maze of Shattered Souls, and asking them none too gently. The spider belongs to a woman clad all in black. She appeared in town briefly quite some time ago, disappeared for days, and then returned. She's been here since, acting haughty and terrifying everyone with her spider.
- ◆ **Three or more successful checks:** At least one person, and maybe more, have died under "questioning" by the Emerald Claw agents. They spent a long time talking to a night hag named Jagda the Cruel, who lives in a hut at the edge of town. When the woman in black arrived in town, a man-sized bundle wrapped in spider silk was webbed to the spider's back.
- ◆ **Four or more successful checks:** One of the Emerald Claw agents spent a lot of time in the company of a young woman named Diri, the daughter of a notorious ruffian called Grim Kane. The bundle carried by the woman in black's spider when she first appeared in town hasn't been seen since.

SKILL CHALLENGE: ON THE SCENT

Level: 15 (XP 2,400)

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: The characters can use any appropriate skills to follow the leads they opened with the initial Streetwise check. All skill checks have a DC of 22. This increases to 30 when the same character tries using the same skill in the same situation.

For example, if a character makes a Diplomacy check (DC 22) while interacting with Jagda, a second Diplomacy check by that character while dealing with the night hag is DC 30. A different character could attempt Diplomacy at DC 22. If the same character attempts a Diplomacy check later when interacting with Diri, the DC is again 22.

Rather than listing outcomes by skills, this challenge indicates what can be learned by following specific leads. The time involved is left up to the DM, based on how the characters approach their tasks.

Each lead can produce a maximum of 2 successes.

The Emerald Claw House: Characters might use Stealth to sneak in and Perception to look around, Diplomacy to talk to the half-orc vagrant who acts as the "butler," Athletics to climb in a high window, or any other skill you deem appropriate. With successful checks, the characters might learn that the agents believe the artifact they seek lies in the Labyrinth in a place called the Maze of Shattered Souls.

The Maze of Shattered Souls: Characters can use Arcana or Religion to dredge up lore about this site. A successful check indicates that they found a local sage or who has heard tales of such a place in the Labyrinth. Nature or Diplomacy checks might locate a ranger or traveler who claims to have seen the Maze and can offer directions to it, or even turn up an alleged map in someone's travel log or a curio shop.

Jagda the Cruel: Characters can use Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Bluff to convince Jagda to tell them what she told the Emerald Claw agents: the location of the Maze of Shattered Souls and the fact that a rakshasa now lairs there.

Diri: Characters can use Diplomacy or Bluff to persuade the reluctant Diri to pass on some of the information her Emerald Claw lover let slip to her:

that they were seeking a powerful artifact in the Maze of Shattered Souls, that he feared for his life because a rakshasa was said to live there, and that he believed the artifact would enable the Order of the Emerald Claw to seize control of Karnath and win control of all Khorvaire in a new war (adjust the level of catastrophe to correspond with what the characters were told when they accepted the quest).

The Undead Spider: Streetwise skill can locate any number of villagers who have seen the undead spider and the woman in black stalking the streets. Their descriptions are on page 14. They can also warn characters about the two, very dangerous-looking warriors accompanying the woman. The spider has attracted the most attention and everyone is frightened by it, although no one can be found who has seen it actually harm anyone. The woman, on the other hand, has turned her razor-sharp sickle against several people who got in her way. History or Religion checks could reveal that unnatural creatures are frequently used by the Children of Winter as muscle and transportation.

The Woman in Black: Karra keeps her secrets well, so no one in Festering Holt knows why she's really here. A Religion check can determine that she appears to be connected to the Children of Winter. Nature checks can piece together the dates of her first and second arrivals to realize that, once travel times are taken into account, they coincide with the disappearance of Daven d'Vadalis and allow for a trip to the Maze of Shattered Souls and back.

Success: If the characters get 6 successes, they have all the information they need to navigate the Labyrinth and locate the Maze of Shattered Souls. Their other options depend on how many failures they accumulated on the way to success.

0 Failures: Neither Karra nor Kurk suspect the characters of posing any threat to their plans. If the characters don't stir up trouble, they won't be confronted in Festering Holt. Give the characters a minor quest reward—1,200 XP—for avoiding two unnecessary fights. Furthermore, the characters can trail the Emerald Claw agents into the Labyrinth and either follow them all the way to the Maze or ambush them at any point. If the characters shadow the Emerald Claw, consider having Kurk's group trigger (and be wiped out by) the Carrion Tribe ambush. If that happens, award the characters half the XP they would have earned from the Carrion Tribe encounter (3,100 XP) for so cleverly eliminating two threats at one stroke.

1 Failure: Either Kurk or Karra hears about the characters' investigation and seeks them out. Run either the "Winter's Grasp" or "Emerald Agents" encounter, depending on who was being investigated when the failure occurred.

2 Failures: Both Kurk and Karra seek out the characters to put an end to their unwelcome questioning.

Failed checks can also have immediate consequences during the skill challenge. For example, if the characters break into the house where the Emerald Claw agents are staying and fail a Stealth check, they might have a quick combat encounter with a few of the agents. If they fail two checks while dealing with Jagda, they might find an angry night hag on their hands.

Failure: If the characters get 3 failures, they still manage to scrape together the bare minimum of information that they need to find the Maze, but they begin skill challenge L1, "The Labyrinth," with 1 failure against them. The Emerald Claw agents are fully warned that enemies are on their trail. Kurk avoids the characters in Festering Holt and precedes them

into the Labyrinth. He and his men attack the characters near the entrance to the Maze (use the "Carrion Tribe Attack" map or one of your own devising), so that the characters enter the Maze weaker than they otherwise would.

How Karra reacts is up to the DM. She may simply dismiss the characters as bunglers and ignore them. This is an attractive option if the characters are in enough other trouble already. Or, she may follow them into the Labyrinth so that the heroes have the Emerald Claw in front, the Carrion Tribe setting an ambush, and the Children of Winter closing in from behind.

DEVELOPMENTS

Events in Festering Holt don't need to be determined entirely by the skill challenge. It's a small place, and word will spread quickly once strangers start asking questions about other strangers. The characters may run into the Emerald Claw, Karra, or both as simply a random meeting in the street, or they might seek out their perceived enemies for a showdown. There's no reason to prevent that from happening.

Regardless of the result of their investigations or encounters, the players might decide to track the agents to the Maze of Shattered Souls, to shadow them around town and learn what they're after, or something else entirely. If they fight the Emerald Claw agents and capture a prisoner, they can use Diplomacy or Intimidate to extract information.

Facing two enemy factions in a place as small as Festering Holt is an explosive situation. The skill challenge presented here is only one possible way to deal with it. Players who think creatively about unusual problems should be encouraged.

F2. WINTER'S GRASP

Encounter Level 15 (XP 6,700)

SETUP

Karra, Child of Winter Doomspeaker (K)

2 human gladiators (G)

1 husk spider (S)

Walking through the village toward Dead Before Morning, the characters see a Child of Winter. Read the following text to the players:

In this village of outcasts and monsters, it's hard to stand out, but even here, the sight of a huge spider lurching through the village catches your attention. Walking beside it is a person shrouded in a gray robe—the typical garb of the Children of Winter!

Insight DC 22: *Two armored humans trailing behind the gray-robed figure may be escorts. Their eyes scan the street for trouble, and it looks like they've noticed you already.*

Perception DC 22: *The spider is desiccated and moves awkwardly. You think it might actually be an undead husk of a spider!*

The Child of Winter is a female shifter named Karra. She is the one who kidnapped Daven d'Vadalis from Merylsward. Karra has no interest in conversing with strangers. If the characters speak to her, she beckons her gladiator bodyguards to step forward. At first, the bodyguards just ask the characters to move along, but if the heroes refuse, the gladiators draw their swords and the husk spider behind them chitters threateningly. If the characters persist, Karra won't hesitate to order an attack out in the open street in such a lawless town. The only way to defuse a fight at this point is by offering something significant to Karra,

such as information she isn't aware of, a potent magic item, a particularly obscure fragment of the draconic prophecy, or something else that would intrigue an ambitious member of the Children of Winter.

If the situation comes to a fight, Karra chuckles with anticipation. "Fools," she says. "The druid you seek is long gone, his life poured into oblivion and his wisdom incorporated into the Maze of Shattered Souls by now."

Karra, Child of Winter Doomspeaker (K)		Level 12 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid (shifter)		XP 700
Initiative +16	Senses Perception +15; low-light vision	
HP 96; Bloodied 48		
AC 26; Fortitude 24, Reflex 25, Will 24		
Speed 6		
⚔ Sickle (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+17 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the doomspeaker's next turn.		
⚡ Hasten Doom (standard; requires a sickle, at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Targets a creature affected by <i>doom revealed</i> ; +17 vs. AC; 4d6 + 7 damage, and the target is no longer affected by <i>doom revealed</i> .		
☞ Doom Revealed (standard; at-will)		
Ranged 5; +15 vs. Will; until the end of the doomspeaker's next turn, whenever the doomspeaker takes damage, the target of this power takes half that much damage. The doomspeaker can designate only one target with its <i>doom revealed</i> power at a time.		
⚔ Razorclaw Shifting (minor; usable only while bloodied; encounter)		
Until the end of the encounter, the doomspeaker's speed increases by 2 and it gains a +1 bonus to AC and Reflex.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	
Skills Acrobatics +17, Stealth +17		
Str 11 (+6)	Dex 22 (+12)	Wis 18 (+10)
Con 18 (+10)	Int 14 (+8)	Cha 12 (+7)
Equipment leather armor, sickle		

2 Human Gladiators (G)	Level 14 Elite Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 2,000 each
Initiative +12	Senses Perception +9
Fighting Focus aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura is marked until the start of its next turn.	
HP 276; Bloodied 138	
AC 30; Fortitude 26, Reflex 26, Will 24	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
⚔ Gladius (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage.	
⚡ Knock to the Dirt (minor; encounter)	
+19 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.	
⚡ Well-Placed Kick (minor; recharge ☞ ☞)	
+19 vs. Reflex; the target is dazed and slowed (save ends both).	
⚡ Sand in the Eyes (minor; encounter)	
+19 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded (save ends).	
⚔ Gladius Display (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +19 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Common
Skills Acrobatics +15, Athletics +18	
Str 22 (+13)	Dex 16 (+10)
Con 18 (+11)	Int 12 (+8)
	Cha 17 (+10)
Equipment gladius (short sword), light shield, scale armor	

TACTICS

Karra alternates between using *doom revealed* and reaping its benefits with *hasten doom*. She shifts out of range of opportunity attacks before using *doom revealed* but will consider provoking an opportunity attack from a character who's marked by one of her bodyguards if she can't shift far enough away. Entirely confident in victory, she taunts the characters with bits of information about the Maze of Shattered Souls (and the doom their druid "friend" has suffered there) interspersed with aphorisms of the Children of Winter, which grow gloomier and more fatalistic as her allies and hit points are whittled away:

- ◆ “Poor dears, you’ve come all this way for nothing ... unless you care to join your Vadalis friend in the Maze.”
- ◆ “They don’t call it the Maze of Shattered Souls for nothing. But if that doesn’t sound bad enough, I’m sure his body was fairly well shattered as well.”
- ◆ “I think you should go and present yourself to the lord of the Maze. I’m sure he’d be delighted to meet you.”
- ◆ *When the husk spider is destroyed:* “You destroyed my pet! No matter, I’ll animate your lifeless husk next.”
- ◆ “Death comes to all, just as winter ends every year. Soon all of Khorvaire will be draped in death!”

Husk Spider (S)		Level 14 Elite Brute	
Large natural animate (undead)		XP 2,000	
Initiative +13	Senses Perception +13; tremorsense 10		
HP 344; Bloodied 172			
AC 26; Fortitude 29, Reflex 26, Will 21			
Saving Throws +2			
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)			
Action Points 1			
⊕ Horrific Bite (standard; at-will)			
+17 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 necrotic (save ends).			
⊕ Flurry of Bites (standard; at-will)			
The husk spider makes two <i>horrific bite</i> attacks, each against a different target.			
↩ Rotting Webs (standard; recharge [1])			
Close blast 5; +15 vs. Reflex; target is slowed, and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends both).			
↩ Web of Souls (minor; encounter) ◆ Fear			
Close burst 3; enemies only; +15 vs. Will; push 3 and immobilize target until the end of the husk spider’s next turn.			
Alignment Chaotic evil		Languages –	
Skills Stealth +18			
Str 28 (+16)	Dex 21 (+12)	Wis 12 (+8)	
Con 22 (+13)	Int 1 (+2)	Cha 1 (+2)	

- ◆ “The Mourning was just the first of nature’s attempts to cleanse the land. Far worse is coming, even if I don’t live to see it.”

Karra’s gladiator bodyguards try to keep as many characters adjacent to them as possible, but spread out to avoid putting any characters in both of their auras. They use *gladius display* on their turn as long as at least two characters are adjacent and use one minor-action attack every round if possible.

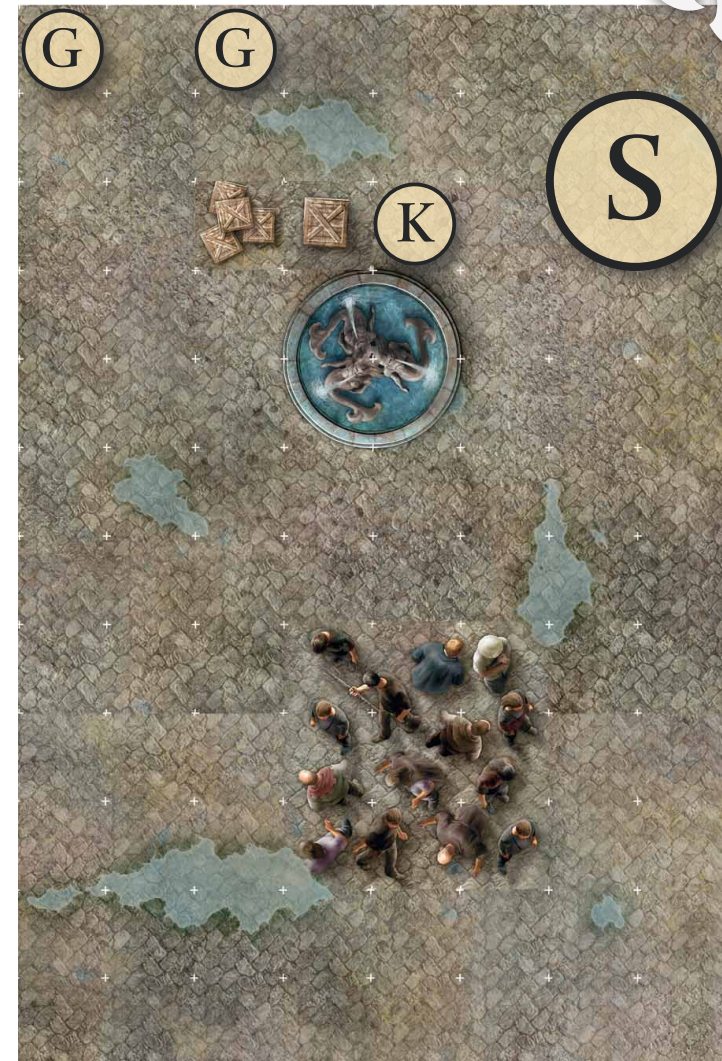
The husk spider leads off with a *rotting webs* attack if it can affect only enemies in the large blast. If not, it uses *web of souls* first to push enemies away from Karra and her bodyguards, then spends its action point to use *rotting webs*. On its later turns, it uses *flurry of bites* against targets taking ongoing damage from its *rotting webs*.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Light: Daylight filtered through smoke and clouds provides sufficient illumination for characters to see clearly without penalty.

Spectators: Whenever a fight breaks out in Festering Holt, it draws a crowd to watch. The spectators cluster in a 3x3 area as soon as the characters confront Karra and remain there to watch the fight. The squares occupied by the crowd are difficult terrain.

Characters can move the crowd or ease their own movement through the crowd using skills. A character within 3 squares of a crowd can attempt a Diplomacy or Intimidate check (DC 22) as a minor action. With a successful check, the character can slide the crowd 1 square or make the crowd’s space regular terrain for that character only until the end of the character’s next turn. If the character beats the DC by 5 or more (DC 27), he or she can slide the crowd up to 3 squares.



Fountain: A dry fountain provides cover and hinders movement. The fountain’s space counts as difficult terrain, and entering the fountain’s space requires a DC 15 Acrobatics check. Failure means the character falls prone in the fountain space.

Crates: Crates piled near the fountain block movement and line of sight.

F3. EMERALD AGENTS

Encounter Level 15 (XP 6,400)

SETUP

Kurk, Emerald Claw elite marshal (K)

8 Emerald Claw agents (A)

2 abyssal ghouls (G)

Walking through the village toward Dead Before Morning, the characters see a group of Emerald Claw agents. Read the following text to the players:

A flash of green catches your eye, and you see a party of soldiers wearing the distinctive tabards of the Order of the Emerald Claw, white with their green claw symbol. Two monstrous undead creatures, eyes burning with red light, lope along behind them, making passersby recoil with distaste and fear.

The leader of the Emerald Claw party is a high-ranking soldier named Kurk. He commands eight of the order's most skilled and talented agents as well as two Abyssal ghouls. They are in Festering Holt seeking information that can lead them to the Maze of Shattered Souls and the artifact they seek. They believe they're the toughest folk around, and they swagger through town as if they're eager to prove it.

Unlike Karra, Kurk and his agents don't reveal their mission or destination in the course of combat.

Kurk, Emerald Claw Elite Marshal (K)		Level 15 Soldier (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 1,200
Initiative +11		Senses Perception +10
HP 147; Bloodied 73		
AC 31; Fortitude 29, Reflex 27, Will 27		
Speed 5		
⊕ Heavy Flail (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+22 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the Emerald Claw elite marshal's next turn.		
⊕ Crushing Strike (standard; requires a heavy flail, at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Targets a creature marked by the Emerald Claw elite marshal; +22 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage, the marshal slides the target 2 squares, and the target is immobilized (save ends).		
↩ Claw Maneuver (minor; recharges when first bloodied)		
Close burst 5; each ally within the burst shifts 2 squares and gains a +5 bonus to the damage roll of its next attack made before the end of its next turn.		
Merciless Commander (minor 1/round; at-will)		
Targets an ally within 10 squares; the target immediately provokes an opportunity attack from an adjacent enemy. If that opportunity attack hits, the Emerald Claw elite marshal or an ally makes a melee basic attack against the attacker as a free action.		
Fanatic (when reduced to 0 hit points; requires heavy flail)		
The Emerald Claw elite marshal makes a melee basic attack against each adjacent enemy.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	
Skills Intimidate +16, Streetwise +16		
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 15 (+9)	Wis 17 (+10)
Con 19 (+11)	Int 20 (+12)	Cha 19 (+11)
Equipment surcoat, heavy flail, plate armor		

8 Emerald Claw Agents (A)		Level 15 Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 300 each
Initiative +12		Senses Perception +11
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 31; Fortitude 29, Reflex 26, Will 27		
Speed 5		
⊕ Heavy Flail (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+23 vs. AC; 7 damage and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls for any attack that does not target at least one Emerald Claw agent before the end of its next turn.		
Scatter Tactic (immediate interrupt, when a close or area attack hits or misses the agent; encounter)		
The Emerald Claw agent shifts 1 square.		
Fanatic (when reduced to 0 hit points; requires heavy flail)		
The Emerald Claw agent makes a melee basic attack against an adjacent enemy.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	
Str 22 (+13)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 18 (+11)
Con 18 (+11)	Int 16 (+10)	Cha 16 (+10)
Equipment chainmail, heavy shield, flail		

2 Abyssal Ghouls (G)		Level 16 Skirmisher
Medium elemental humanoid (undead)		XP 1,400 each
Initiative +16		Senses Perception +10; darkvision
Sepulchral Stench aura 3; enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to all defenses.		
HP 156; Bloodied 78		
AC 30; Fortitude 30, Reflex 29, Will 25		
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic;		
Vulnerable 5 radiant		
Speed 8, climb 4		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)		
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). If the target is a living creature that is already immobilized, stunned, or unconscious, the bite deals an extra 2d6 damage.		
↩ Dead Blood (when reduced to 0 hit points) ♦ Necrotic		
Close burst 1; all enemies in the burst take 10 necrotic damage.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Abyssal	
Skills Stealth +19		
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 22 (+14)	Wis 15 (+10)
Con 20 (+13)	Int 16 (+11)	Cha 10 (+8)

TACTICS

Kurk's primary concern is his mission to find the Maze of Shattered Souls and the artifact it holds. At the same time, he is eager to prove himself as the toughest warrior in Festering Holt. When combat begins, he wades into the fray, using *claw maneuver* to arrange the battlefield to his liking, getting agents into position to attack as many characters as possible and spreading them out enough to avoid them all being caught in a single burst or blast attack. He then alternates between marking opponents with his *heavy flail* attack and pounding them with *crushing strike*. Kurk spreads his attacks among the player characters. He uses *merciless commander* in concert with the Abyssal ghouls but never with a bloodied ally.

As soon as he's bloodied, Kurk's concern shifts back to his mission and he tries to flee. He uses *claw maneuver* to interpose any surviving agents between himself and the characters while he sets off at a run to get away from them. Surviving allies cover his retreat, with the ghouls using their immobilizing *bite* attacks to prevent characters from pursuing Kurk.

The minion agents fight fanatically, using *scatter tactic* to avoid the area of effect of character powers. They maneuver to flank characters whenever possible.

The Abyssal ghouls use their *bite* attacks to lock down mobile characters until the Emerald Claw agents can surround them. They attack immobilized characters in preference to any others.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

This encounter and "F2. Winter's Grasp" use the same map. Feel free to shift or add features for variety.

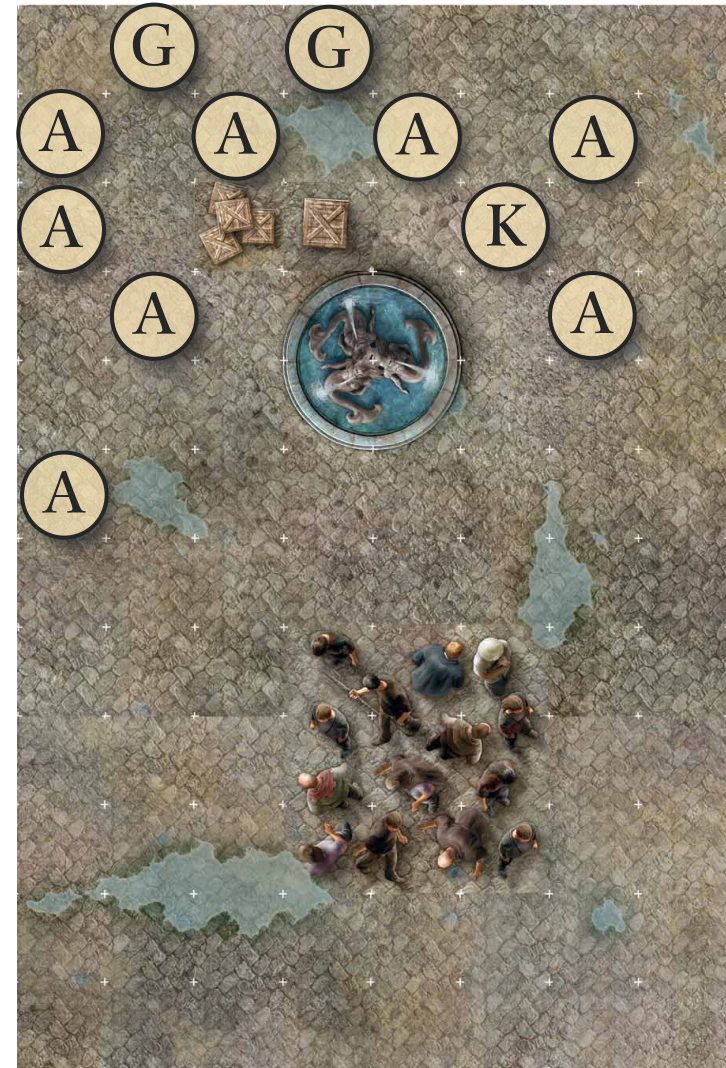
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Fountain: A dry fountain provides cover and hinders movement. The fountain's space counts as difficult terrain, and entering the fountain's space requires a DC 15 Acrobatics check. Failure means the character falls prone in the fountain space.

Crates: Crates piled near the fountain block movement and line of sight.



L1. THE LABYRINTH

The journey through the Labyrinth takes at least four days, so the skill challenge is broken into four phases, each reflecting the hazards of a day's travel. Three additional phases representing three more days of travel time allow for failed checks during the challenge.

If the characters bungled their investigation in Festering Holt, they enter the Labyrinth with only a vague idea of where they're headed. They begin this skill challenge with one failure already, meaning that they have a five-day journey ahead of them, at least. This doesn't count as a failed skill roll for triggering the Carrion Tribe ambush.

The first time the characters fail a skill check in the challenge, they're attacked later that day by Carrion Tribe barbarians. Interrupt the challenge with tactical encounter L2, "Carrion Tribe Attack!" on page 20.

The characters cannot take an extended rest during the skill challenge, as explained on page 9.

Level: 15 (XP 3,600)

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures)

Daily Routine: Each day involves two rounds of skill checks. The first is a group skill check (DC 15) to choose and follow the right path. Characters can use either Nature or Dungeoneering. If at least as many characters succeed on the check as fail it, they earn one success in the challenge; otherwise, they accrue one failure and must spend one additional day in the Labyrinth (and in the challenge). The second round of skill checks is to deal with the main obstacle described below in that day's entry.

Give players a lot of leeway when planning how they will overcome these obstacles. A haphazard or foolish plan can make things more difficult, while a creative or clever approach should be rewarded with bonuses. For example, if players figure out a way to get a rope across the chasm on day one, that could give a bonus to everyone who crosses afterward. Every character doesn't need to use the same skill against a particular obstacle, but they must be able to explain how each skill contributes to the solution.

Finally, if players come up with a solution that bypasses the need for skill checks, they should get an automatic success in that situation. Using day one again as an example, a wizard could span the chasm with the level 10 utility power *arcane gate*, allowing everyone to step across at no risk.

Day One: The characters must cross a gaping chasm yawning into the depths of Khyber. The chasm is 50 feet wide at its narrowest, and it plunges an unknown distance into the world's subterranean reaches. Fortunately, a jutting ledge about 70 feet down on both sides will catch a character who falls in.

The characters can use any means at their disposal to cross the chasm. Flying is an obvious choice. Climbing down to the bottom and back up the other side is not, because there's no bottom in sight. Climbing around is possible but calls for a certain amount of faith, because the "ends" of the chasm can't be seen from where the characters stand; it winds around beyond their sight. Such a climb requires two Athletics checks (DC 30). If the lead character places pitons and rope, it reduces the DC to 15 for everyone who follows after. Whatever means they use, getting the entire party across the chasm without mishap earns the party one success. If anyone is bloodied in the attempt, the crossing takes more than 2 hours, or the

characters decide to backtrack and find another way around, then they accrue one failure and must complete one additional day of the challenge.

Day Two: The party's path takes them alongside a lava flow. The party must attempt a group Endurance check (DC 15) to keep going through the infernal heat. If at least as many characters succeed on the check as fail it, they earn one success in the challenge; otherwise, they accrue one failure and must complete one additional day of the challenge. Whether the group succeeds or fails, each character who fails the check loses one healing surge.

Day Three: The characters must traverse a section of canyon where jets of flame erupt from the ground, apparently at random. If any character has a passive Perception of 30 or better, that character smells an acrid odor like methane gas moments before the jet of flame attacks everyone in the party: +18 vs. Reflex, with a hit dealing 2d8 + 8 fire damage.

After the initial attack, the characters can use their skills to navigate the hazardous field. A single character can attempt a Perception check (DC 30) to smell the telltale odor that signals the jets' imminent eruption, or the group can make a group Acrobatics check (DC 22) to avoid the blasts when they come. Whichever tactic the characters adopt, a successful check earns the characters a success. Otherwise, they accrue one failure, must complete one additional day of the challenge, and each character loses one healing surge.

Day Four: The characters are threatened by a landslide that sends tons of gravel and loose boulders tumbling around them. Call for a group skill check (DC 15), with each character using either Dungeoneering or Nature skill, for characters to find safe shelter from the cascade of rock. Characters with

passive Perception of 22 or better sense the landslide coming moments before it hits; they get a +2 situation bonus on the skill check. Success on the group check doesn't count toward the party's success in the challenge, but if the group fails the check, each character who failed loses one healing surge.

Once the immediate threat of the landslide is over, the characters must find a way through the changed terrain by making a group Athletics check (DC 15). If at least as many characters succeed on the check as fail it, they earn one success in the challenge; otherwise, they accrue one failure and must complete one additional day of the challenge.

Day Five: A sprinkling of rain falls on the characters, and soon tiny rivulets of water are trickling down the walls of the canyons. Any character who succeeds on a Nature check (DC 22) realizes that a flash flood could be imminent, and the characters should make their way to safe ground. If no character succeeds on this check, the party accrues one failure and must complete one additional day of the challenge, and each character loses one healing surge from being washed down the canyon by a wall of water.

If forewarned by at least one successful Nature check, the party must succeed on a group Athletics check (DC 15) to climb the canyon walls and wait out the flood on higher ground. If at least as many characters succeed on the check as fail it, they earn one success in the challenge; if not, they accrue one failure and must complete one additional day of the challenge, and each character loses one healing surge.

Day Six: The ground beneath the characters' feet opens up, threatening to plunge them down into Khyber's depths. The sinkhole attacks each character: +18 vs. Reflex, with a hit indicating that the character falls 40 feet down into the earth, taking 4d10 damage. If

the sinkhole's attack misses all the characters, they earn one success in the challenge and can continue their journey. Otherwise, the characters must extract fallen characters from the sinkhole. Options include climbing the stone (Athletics, DC 22), climbing or hauling characters up with rope, flying, or other strategies concocted by the players. Once all the characters are out, the group takes a failure in the challenge but can continue the journey.

Day Seven: Another rain begins to fall, but these large, sticky droplets burn the characters' exposed skin and corrode holes in their equipment. The canyon offers no overhanging ledges to serve as shelter, so there's little choice but to soldier through. The party must attempt a group Endurance check (DC 15) to keep going through the acidic rain. Each character who fails loses one healing surge.

At this stage, the characters have been in the Labyrinth for a full week and finally stumble upon the Maze, regardless of success or failure.

Removing Failures: During the challenge, each character can attempt one Heal check (DC 30). Success allows every character to recover one lost healing surge *or* allows one character to get the benefit of an extended rest.

Success or Failure: When the characters have accumulated 8 successes or have journeyed for seven days, they find the Maze of Shattered Souls and can continue with the next encounter. They do not have the opportunity to take an extended rest at the entrance to the Maze.

L2. CARRION TRIBE ATTACK!

Encounter Level 15 (XP 6,200)

SETUP

- 1 Carrion Tribe Sakah hunter (S)
- 3 Carrion Tribe plaguebearers (P)
- 8 Carrion Tribe degenerates (D)

This encounter occurs on the same day as the characters earn their first skill challenge failure while navigating the Labyrinth. Read or paraphrase the following text to the players to set the scene for the encounter:

The barren canyon here is littered with corpses. Their blood seeps slowly into the dry ground. Most of the bodies are orcs, but a few humans lie among them. A wide ledge traverses the cliff to your right. Tall spires of rock jut upward like shattered bones reaching toward the ash-clouded sky.

Perception DC 22: *You hear sounds of movement on the ledge above. It's an ambush!*

If no character hears the Carrion Tribe barbarians (with a passive Perception check of 22 or better), the characters are surprised and the encounter begins

with the characters near the center of the map, where they're easily surrounded by the barbarians. If at least one character hears the barbarians, or the characters took special precautions such as sending a flying scout ahead, then the characters begin near the edge of the map (farthest from the bodies) and are not surprised.

3 Carrion Tribe Plaguebearers (P) Level 14 Brute		
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 1,000 each		
Initiative +12 Senses Perception +12		
Stench (Disease) aura 1; each enemy within the aura takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls.		
HP 167; Bloodied 83		
AC 26; Fortitude 27, Reflex 26, Will 26		
Immune disease		
Speed 6		
⊕ Bone Sword (standard; at-will) ♦ Disease, Weapon		
+17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target is exposed to filth plague.		
⊕ Filthy Splash (standard; requires a bone sword, encounter) ♦ Disease, Weapon		
+17 vs. AC; 4d8 + 9 damage, the target is exposed to filth plague, and the plaguebearer makes a secondary attack.		
Secondary Attack: Close burst 2; targets enemies; +15 vs. Reflex; the target is blinded until the start of its next turn, and is exposed to filth plague.		
Alignment Chaotic evil		Languages Common
Skills Endurance +15, Stealth +17		
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 20 (+12)	Wis 20 (+12)
Con 17 (+10)	Int 8 (+6)	Cha 9 (+6)
Equipment hide armor, bone sword		

Carrion Tribe Sakah Hunter (S) Level 13 Artillery	
Medium natural humanoid, tiefling XP 800	
Initiative +12 Senses Perception +15; low-light vision	
HP 96; Bloodied 48	
AC 25; Fortitude 24, Reflex 26, Will 24	
Resist 11 fire	
Speed 6	
⊕ Spear (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 3 damage.	
⊕ Longbow (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 20/40; +20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 3 damage.	
✂ Infernal Summons (minor; encounter) ♦ Conjuration	
Ranged 10; the sakah hunter conjures a Medium beast of smoke and flame in a space adjacent to an enemy in range. Any enemies adjacent to the conjured beast grant combat advantage to the sakah hunter. As a move action, the sakah hunter can move the fiendish beast 5 squares. The fiendish beast cannot be attacked, but it is vulnerable to <i>dispel magic</i> and similar effects. Sustain Minor: The fiendish beast persists.	
✂ Longbow Volley (standard; requires longbow, recharge ☞☞☞☞) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 20/40; targets one or two creatures; +20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 3 damage.	
Combat Advantage	
The sakah hunter's melee and ranged attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.	
Infernal Wrath (minor; encounter)	
The sakah hunter gains a +1 power bonus to its next attack roll against an enemy that hit it since the hunter's last turn. If the attack hits and deals damage, the hunter deals 3 extra damage.	
Alignment Evil Languages Common	
Skills Stealth +17	
Str 19 (+10)	Dex 22 (+12) Wis 19 (+10)
Con 12 (+7)	Int 15 (+8) Cha 16 (+9)
Equipment leather armor, spear, longbow with 20 arrows	

Filth Plague	Level 14 Disease
<i>Infused with the toxic filth of the Demon Wastes, this disease turns the target's internal organs to a bloody froth.</i>	Attack: +17 vs. Fortitude Endurance improve DC 29, maintain DC 24, worsen DC 23 or lower

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| <p>The target is cured.</p> | <p>❖ Initial Effect: The target loses one healing surge.</p> | <p>❖❖ The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and a -2 penalty to its speed.</p> | <p>❖ Final State: The target takes a -4 penalty to attack rolls, is slowed, and takes 5 extra damage from all damage-dealing attacks. The target loses all healing surges and cannot regain hit points. If subsequently reduced to 0 hit points, the target is dead and bursts, with all creatures within 5 squares of the target contracting filth plague (no attack roll)</p> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|

8 Carrion Tribe	Level 15 Minion Skirmisher
Degenerates (D)	
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 300 each
Initiative +14	Senses Perception +12
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 29; Fortitude 28, Reflex 27, Will 27	
Speed 7	
⚔ Greatclub (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+20 vs. AC; 8 damage (10 damage against bloodied targets).	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Common
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 20 (+12) Wis 20 (+12)
Con 17 (+10)	Int 8 (+6) Cha 6 (+5)
Equipment hide armor, greatclub	

TACTICS

If they manage to surprise the characters, the plague-bearers and degenerates slide down the sharp slope to the canyon floor in front of and behind the characters, preventing their escape and forcing them to fight. If they don't achieve surprise, the barbarians drop down in front of the characters.

The Sakah hunter stays up on the cliff, positioning the creature conjured by its *infernal summons* adjacent to its chosen targets and using its bow. Its preference is to position the infernal creature next to two characters and use *longbow volley* to target both of them.

The degenerates fight simply, but they avoid gathering into too small an area and they maneuver into flanking positions whenever possible. The plague-bearers are almost equally straightforward, saving their *filthy splash* attacks for a time when they have at least three enemies within 2 squares to be hit with the secondary attack.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Light: Daylight.

Canyon Walls: The cliffs on the north side of the canyon (the characters' left as they enter) are 50 feet high. The ledge on the south side is 10 feet above the

canyon floor, and the cliffs on the far side of the ledge rise another 40 feet. Climbing the cliffs requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

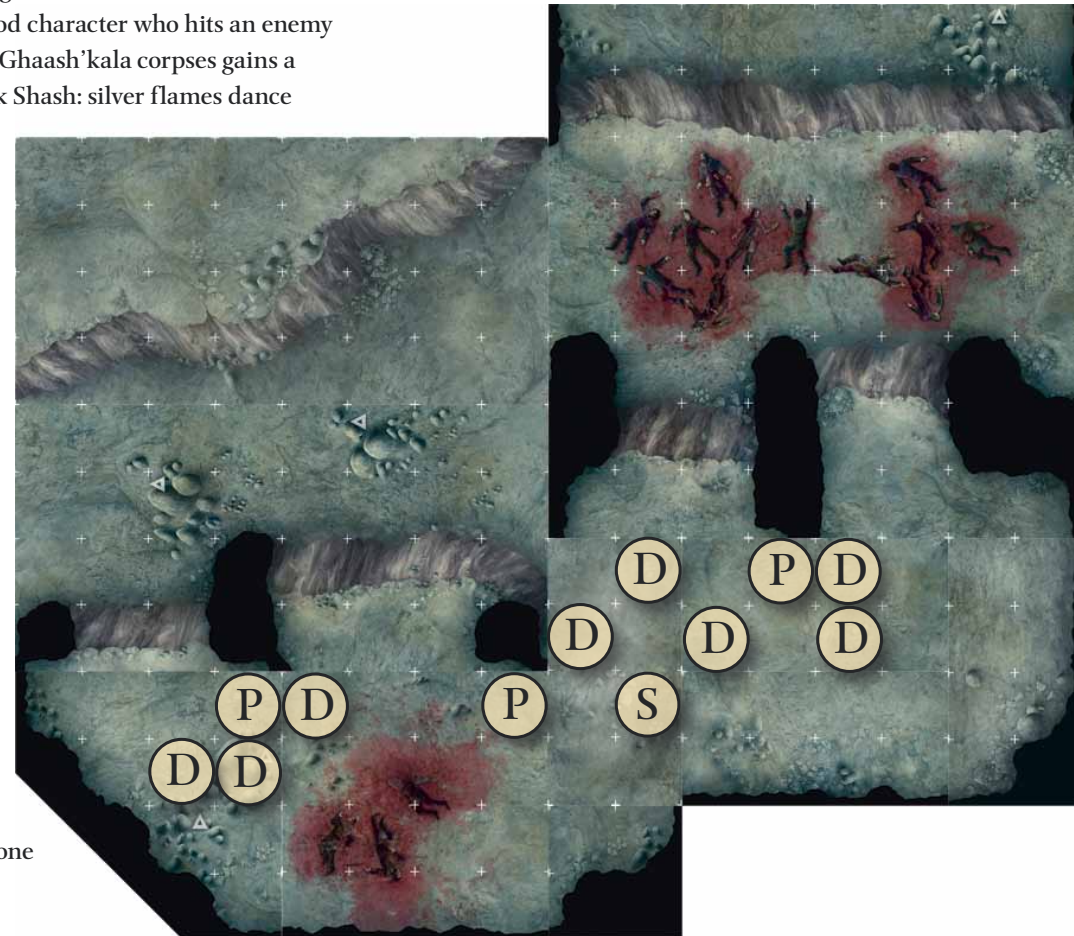
Ghaash'kala Corpses: The bodies littering the ground are those of a Ghaash'kala patrol ambushed and killed 24 hours ago by the Carrion Tribe barbarians. The spirits of the dead warriors linger in the area before joining Kalok Shash, the Binding Flame, which is the spiritual force revered by the Ghaash'kala. They offer blessings to good or lawful good characters who fight near their bodies.

A good or lawful good character who hits an enemy while in a square with Ghaash'kala corpses gains a minor blessing of Kalok Shash: silver flames dance over the character's armor, giving a +1 bonus to all defenses until the end of the character's next turn.

A good or lawful good character who scores a critical hit while in a corpse square gains a major blessing of Kalok Shash: once before the character's next extended rest, when the character hits with an attack, the character can invoke the blessing as a free action to deal ongoing 10 fire and radiant damage (save ends) to one target of the attack.

DEVELOPMENT

Treasure: One of the Ghaash'kala corpses wears a magic holy symbol equivalent to a +4 *icon of the Silver Flame* (*Eberron Player's Guide*, page 106), but it functions for a character who worships Kalok Shash or the Silver Flame. Another corpse holds a jacinth worth 5,000 gp clutched in its fist. A third wears a gold necklace decorated with amber, worth 2,500 gp, and a fourth corpse has a sapphire (worth 1,000 gp) in a pouch at its belt.



MI. ENTRANCE

Encounter Level 16 (XP 7,600)

SETUP

- 3 rakshasa warriors (W)
- 2 rakshasa archers (A)
- 1 rakshasa assassin (S)

Read or paraphrase the following text to the players when they reach the Maze of Shattered Souls (upon completing skill challenge L1, “The Labyrinth”):

A doorway yawns in the canyon wall ahead of you, flanked by twin pillars covered with grotesque decorations of human faces with their mouths gaping in silent screams. Three proud orc warriors, presumably members of the Ghaash’kala, stand guard outside the entrance.

Insight DC 24: *Those orcs don’t seem like Ghaash’kala—in fact, you’re not sure they’re orcs at all. Something’s not right about them.*

Perception DC 28: *Someone or something is hiding behind some rocks across from the entrance.*

The three “orcs” are the rakshasa warriors, cloaked by their *deceptive veil* power. The rakshasa assassin hides behind the rocks, while the archers are in position inside the entry.

3 Rakshasa Warriors (W)	Level 15 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid	XP 1,200 each
Initiative +13	Senses Perception +16; low-light vision
HP 142; Bloodied 71	
AC 31; Fortitude 29, Reflex 28, Will 28	
Speed 6	
⬇ Longsword (standard; at-will) ⬆ Weapon	
The rakshasa warrior makes two attack rolls and keeps the better result; +21 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the rakshasa’s next turn.	
⬇ Claw (standard; at-will)	
+21 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.	
⬇ Tiger Pounce (immediate reaction, when a marked enemy within 5 squares of the rakshasa warrior shifts, at-will) ⬆ Weapon	
The rakshasa shifts to the nearest square adjacent to the enemy and makes a basic attack against it.	
Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ⬆ Illusion	
The rakshasa warrior can disguise itself to appear as any Medium humanoid. A successful Insight check (opposed by the rakshasa’s Bluff check) pierces the disguise.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common
Skills Athletics +15, Bluff +14, Intimidate +14	
Str 20 (+12)	Dex 18 (+11) Wis 18 (+11)
Con 14 (+9)	Int 12 (+8) Cha 14 (+9)
Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword	

TACTICS

The rakshasa warriors disguised as Ghaash’kala orcs engage the characters in conversation just long enough for the assassin to get the jump on them from behind. If the characters talk to the warriors and none of them equals or exceeds the rakshasas’ Stealth check result with their passive Perception, the attack surprises the characters.

As soon as combat begins, the rakshasas revert to their natural forms. The warriors retreat into the entry, trying to lure the characters in to where the archers can get clear lines of fire to them. They bar access to the stairs leading up to the platform inside.

The assassin’s starting location is only a suggestion. He may need to move before combat begins in

2 Rakshasa Archers (A)	Level 15 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid	XP 1,200 each
Initiative +13	Senses Perception +16; low-light vision
HP 110; Bloodied 55	
AC 28; Fortitude 24, Reflex 26, Will 25	
Speed 6	
⬇ Claw (standard; at-will)	
+19 vs. AC; 1d8+3 damage.	
⬇ Longbow (standard; at-will) ⬆ Weapon	
Ranged 20/40; +20 vs. AC; 1d10+5 damage.	
⬇ Double Attack (standard; at-will) ⬆ Weapon	
The rakshasa archer makes two longbow attacks against a single target or against two targets within 3 squares of one another.	
⬇ Ghost Arrow (standard; recharge ☞ ☞) ⬆ Necrotic, Weapon	
Requires longbow; ranged 20/40; +20 vs. Reflex; 1d10+5 necrotic damage, and the target cannot spend healing surges (save ends).	
Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ⬆ Illusion	
The rakshasa archer can disguise itself to appear as any Medium humanoid. A successful Insight check (opposed by the rakshasa’s Bluff check) pierces the disguise.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common
Skills Bluff +14, Intimidate +14	
Str 17 (+10)	Dex 20 (+12) Wis 18 (+11)
Con 14 (+9)	Int 12 (+8) Cha 14 (+9)
Equipment longbow, 20 arrows	

order to avoid being spotted by inquisitive characters and to get into flanking position. During the fight, it uses *shadow form* to move into the best flanking positions. It uses *phantom distraction* as often as necessary to gain combat advantage without flanking and keep opponents from outmaneuvering it.

The archers start on the ground inside the Maze and loose arrows through the doorway. As the warriors retreat through the door, the archers move up the stairs to the platform. They use *ghost arrow* on bloodied characters as much as possible.

Rakshasa Assassin (S)	Level 17 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 1,600
Initiative +16	Senses Perception +16; low-light vision
HP 160; Bloodied 80	
AC 31; Fortitude 29, Reflex 31, Will 29	
Speed 6	
⊕ Short Sword (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+22 vs. AC; 1d6+6 damage.	
⊕ Double Attack (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
The rakshasa assassin makes two melee basic attacks.	
⬅ Phantom Distraction (minor; recharge 2/3)	
Close burst 1; +20 vs. Will; the target is dazed until the end of the rakshasa assassin's next turn.	
Combat Advantage	
The rakshasa assassin deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ♦ Illusion	
The rakshasa assassin can disguise itself to appear as any Medium humanoid. A successful Insight check (opposed by the rakshasa's Bluff check) pierces the disguise.	
Shadow Form	
If the rakshasa assassin moves at least 2 squares, it gains the phasing quality until the end of its turn.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common
Skills Acrobatics +18, Athletics +16, Bluff +17, Stealth +18	
Str 18 (+12)	Dex 22 (+14) Wis 16 (+11)
Con 16 (+11)	Int 12 (+9) Cha 18 (+12)
Equipment 2 short swords	

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Light: The canyon outside the entrance is lit by daylight. Enough light filters in through the entrance to illuminate the interior.

Ledges: Two ledges in the canyon offer good vantage points to ranged attackers. The cliffs leading up to them are 10 feet high and require a DC 22 Athletics check to climb.

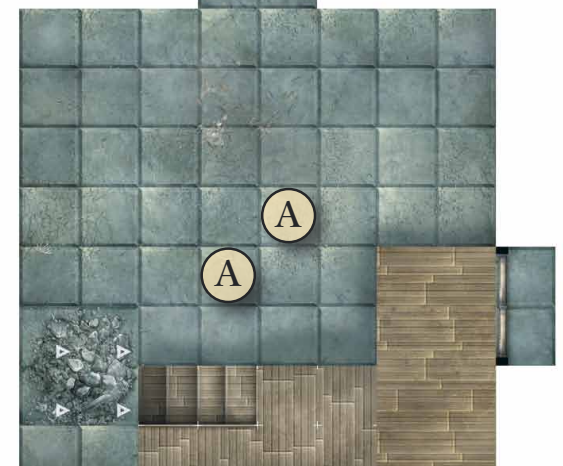
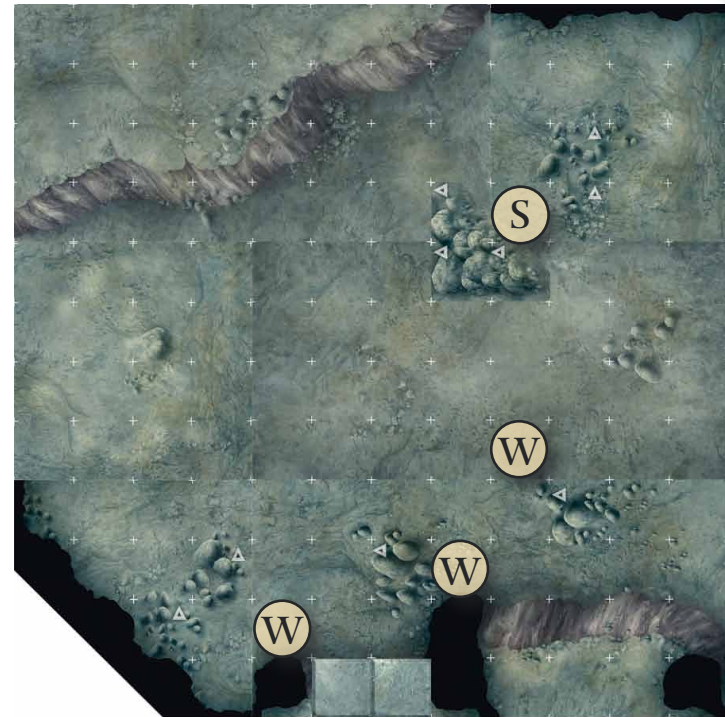
Rocks and Rubble: Heaps of rocks dot the cavern floor outside the entrance. The pile by the rakshasa assassin's starting position is high enough to provide total cover to a creature crouching behind it. The rocks marked with a triangle are difficult terrain.

A heap of rubble inside the entrance partially blocks access to the stairs that lead to the raised platform. This rubble is also difficult terrain.

Platform: A 10-foot-high wooden platform runs along two walls of the entrance chamber. The stairs leading up the platform are difficult terrain for characters traveling up. Characters can also move underneath the platforms (they're supported by heavy wooden beams). The door leading further into the Maze is atop the platform.

DEVELOPMENT

Treasure: The rakshasa assassin wears a platinum ring set with a diamond worth 7,500 gp and carries an emerald worth 1,000 gp.



M2. THE MAZEWAY

Encounter Level 15 (XP 6,600)

SETUP

1 immolith (I)

3 abyssal eviscerators (E)

Abyssal miasma

Acidic pools

Read or paraphrase the following text as the characters enter this area:

Flickering light dances on the stone walls of a long hallway leading deeper into the canyon wall. You can see the source of the light, a brazier on an ornate iron stand, in a chamber at the end of the hall. The light reflects on a pool of water behind the brazier, sending fragments of firelight scintillating around the chamber.

Perception DC 22: *You hear a scrabbling sound, like claws scratching on stone as some creature moves through the hallways, out of sight.*

3 Abyssal Eviscerators (E)		Level 14 Brute
Medium elemental humanoid (demon)		XP 1,000 each
Initiative +10	Senses Perception +9	
HP 173; Bloodied 86		
AC 26; Fortitude 28, Reflex 25, Will 24		
Resist 15 variable (2/encounter)		
Speed 6		
⊕ Claw (standard; at-will)		
+17 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage.		
⊕ Grab (standard; at-will)		
+15 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is grabbed.		
⊕ Eviscerating Talons (minor 1/round, 3/round while bloodied, at-will)		
Targets a creature grabbed by the abyssal eviscerator; no attack roll; 6 damage.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Abyssal	
Skills Athletics +18		
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 15 (+9)
Con 23 (+13)	Int 7 (+5)	Cha 11 (+7)

The demons don't come looking for the characters until combat breaks out, so the characters can explore some of this area before the fight begins.

Immolith (I)		Level 15 Controller
Large elemental magical beast (demon, fire, undead) XP 1,200		
Initiative +10	Senses Perception +9	
Flaming Aura (Fire) aura 1; any creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.		
HP 153; Bloodied 76		
AC 27; Fortitude 28, Reflex 24, Will 25		
Immune disease, fire, poison; Resist 15 variable (2/encounter); Vulnerable 10 radiant		
Speed 6		
⊕ Claw (standard; at-will) ⊕ Fire		
Reach 4; +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).		
⊕ Fiery Grab (standard; at-will) ⊕ Fire		
The immolith makes a <i>claw</i> attack (see above) against a Large or smaller target. On a hit, the target slides into a square adjacent to the immolith and is grabbed (until escape). While grabbed, the target loses any resistance it has to fire. An immolith can hold up to five grabbed creatures using this power.		
⊕ Deathfire Curse (minor; at-will) ⊕ Fire		
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). <i>Afterspell:</i> The target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).		
Vigor of the Grave (minor 1/round; at-will) ⊕ Healing		
Close burst 5; undead in the burst (including the immolith) regain 10 hit points.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Abyssal	
Str 22 (+13)	Dex 16 (+10)	Wis 15 (+9)
Con 25 (+14)	Int 9 (+6)	Cha 18 (+11)

TACTICS

The demons don't make use of sophisticated tactics. The Abyssal eviscerators try to grab a character and rip the character open with their claws, while the immolith is slightly more subtle, using *deathfire curse* to keep characters from running away from it. All of these creatures will, however, use the winding pathways of the Maze to their advantage by maneuvering around and behind the intruders.

The demons are willing to use the acidic pools to teleport from room to room, using their *variable resistance* to reduce the damage from the acid, if they can gain an advantage by doing so.

Abyssal Miasma	Level 15 Obstacle
Hazard	XP 1,200

A cloud of mist swirls with a range of nauseating colors, blocking line of sight and assaulting nostrils with its foul odor.

Hazard: Noxious mist from the depths of the Abyss chokes one corridor in the Maze, strengthening but bewildering nondemons that enter or pass through it. The squares of the miasma are heavily obscured.

Trigger

The mist attacks any nondemon that enters its space or starts its turn in the mist.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee**

Target: The triggering creature

Attack: +18 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target is dazed and gains a +5 bonus to damage rolls (save ends both). While it remains dazed, its actions are determined by rolling 1d6 at the start of each of its turns:

- 1 The target makes a melee basic attack against the nearest creature it can see, charging if possible. If it can't see anyone, it attacks the nearest creature. If multiple creatures are the same distance away, randomly determine which creature it attacks.
- 2 The target moves its speed in a random direction.
- 3 The target makes a ranged basic attack against the nearest creature it can see. If multiple creatures are the same distance away, randomly determine which creature it attacks. If it can't see anyone, it moves in a random direction.
- 4 The target babbles incoherently.
- 5 The target moves its speed toward the Abyssal miasma. If it's already in the miasma, it babbles incoherently.
- 6 The target can choose its own action.

Acidic Pools **Level 15 Obstacle**
 Hazard XP 1,200

The clear water in this pool ripples gently.

Hazard: The acid in these two pools burns any creature that enters them, but also allows teleportation between them.

Trigger

The acid attacks any creature that enters either pool or starts its turn in a pool.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee**

Target: The triggering creature

Attack: +18 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 3d6 + 13 acid damage.

Special: A creature in either pool can see a misty impression of the room containing the other pool (but does not have line of effect to that room). This doesn't interfere with its vision or concentration, but allows the creature to be aware of what's going on in both rooms. As a move action, the creature can teleport to the other pool without provoking another attack from the acid.

DEVELOPMENTS

The skulls in front of the massive doors are key to retrieving souls that have been trapped in the Maze. If the characters seek Daven d'Vadalis (the Captive Savant quest), careful examination (Perception DC 30) reveals one human skull that is considerably "fresher" than the others. Characters might conclude on their own that this is the skull of d'Vadalis, but if not, his spirit can direct them to it—once they locate his spirit. They then can use the skull to free d'Vadalis's soul from the rakshasa's claws.

Characters who search the pile of skulls (Perception DC 15) also find two fire opals, each worth 1,000 gp, embedded in the eye sockets of one of the skulls.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Light: The two burning braziers each shed bright light in a 10-square radius. The immoloth sheds bright light in a 20-square radius. Otherwise, the area is dark.

Braziers: Two braziers provide light and can also be used to make attacks. A brazier can be tipped only once, and this does not extinguish its light.

Brazier **Single-Use Terrain**

This brazier burns brightly and hot. Tipping its iron stand sends blazing coals over nearby foes.

Standard Action

Requirement: You must be adjacent to a brazier.

Check: Strength check (DC 20) to overturn the brazier.

Success: The brazier is overturned, making an attack in a close blast 3.

Target: Each creature in blast

Attack: +18 vs. Reflex

Hit: Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Pit: A huge pit near the entrance blocks easy passage around the upper part of the Maze. The pit is 40 feet deep. Climbing the walls requires a DC 22 Athletics check. The Abyssal eviscerators won't hesitate to leap across the pit in order to attack or surround intruders.

Rubble: The rubble near the smaller acid pool is difficult terrain.

Pile of Skulls: This pile near the door to the heart of the Maze contains skulls of nearly every imaginable humanoid species. The pile is difficult terrain.



M3. HEART OF THE MAZE

Encounter Level 18 (XP 10,800)

SETUP

Zathasram (Z)

1 goristro (G)

12 shattered souls (S)

Read or paraphrase the following text when the characters emerge through the double doors in the Mazeway:

The doors lead back outdoors, but it's hard to shake the feeling that it leads into an entirely different world. A scene out of nightmare fills the canyon before you, lit by the infernal glow of bubbling lava. Smoke chokes the air, particularly to your left. Even through the smoke, you can see a hulking figure, like a giant minotaur, crouched some 60 feet away. It snorts and bellows, pawing the ground like an enraged bull.

Perception DC 22: You can barely make out a humanoid figure draped in a luxurious robe near the center of the lava.

Perception DC 30: Swirling in and around the smoky air, you glimpse humanoid faces that hurtle through the canyon, mouths stretched wide as if to scream.

Zathasram (Z)	Level 19 Controller
Medium natural humanoid	XP 2,400
Initiative +14	Senses Perception +19; low-light vision
HP 182; Bloodied 91; Regeneration 10 while within 2 squares of the soul obelisk	
AC 34; Fortitude 32, Reflex 33, Will 34	
Speed 7	
⊕ Claw (standard; at-will)	+22 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target is blinded until the end of Zathasram's next turn.
↘ Mind Twist (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic	Ranged 20; +22 vs. Will; 3d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
↘ Phantom Lure (standard; at-will) ♦ Charm	Ranged 10; +22 vs. Will; Zathasram slides the target 5 squares.
↘ Curse of the Lurker in Darkness (standard; recharge ☹️)	♦ Fear Ranged 5; +22 vs. Will; 3d8 + 7 psychic damage, the target is pushed 5 squares, and the target is stunned and gains vulnerable psychic 10 (save ends both). <i>Aftereffect:</i> The target gains vulnerable psychic 10 (save ends).
Feast of Shattered Souls (standard; at-will)	One shattered soul minion within 10 squares is destroyed. Zathasram gains 10 temporary hit points and recharges <i>curse of the Lurker in Darkness</i> .
Bracers of Defense (immediate interrupt, when hit by a melee attack; daily)	Zathasram reduces the damage from the triggering attack by 20.
Alignment Evil	Languages Common
Skills Arcana +20, Athletics +17, Bluff +21, Diplomacy +21, History +20, Insight +19, Intimidate +21	
Str 16 (+12)	Dex 20 (+14) Wis 20 (+14)
Con 22 (+15)	Int 23 (+15) Cha 24 (+16)
Equipment bracers of defense (paragon tier)	

Goristro (G)	Level 19 Elite Brute
Huge elemental humanoid (demon)	XP 4,800
Initiative +10	Senses Perception +17; darkvision
HP 450; Bloodied 225	
AC 31; Fortitude 34, Reflex 27, Will 29	
Resist 20 variable (2/encounter)	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)	Reach 3; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage.
⊕ Double Attack (standard; at-will)	The goristro makes two <i>slam</i> attacks.
⊕ Goristro Stomp (immediate interrupt, when a nonadjacent enemy moves adjacent to the goristro, recharge ☹️ ☹️ ☹️)	The goristro makes an attack against the enemy; +22 vs. AC; 4d8 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone.
⊕ Goring Charge (standard; at-will)	The goristro makes a charge attack; +23 vs. AC; 3d10 + 8 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and knocked prone.
⊕ Raging Frenzy (immediate reaction, when attacked by an adjacent enemy while bloodied, at-will)	The goristro makes an attack against the enemy; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 damage.
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Abyssal
Str 27 (+17)	Dex 12 (+10) Wis 17 (+12)
Con 25 (+16)	Int 6 (+7) Cha 12 (+10)

12 Shattered Souls (S)	Level 15 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 300 each
Initiative +14	Senses Perception +12
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 29; Fortitude 26, Reflex 28, Will 27	
Speed fly 7, phasing	
⊕ Screaming Dive (standard; at-will)	The shattered soul flies its speed, moving through one enemy's space without provoking opportunity actions from that enemy, and makes an attack against that enemy; +18 vs. Fortitude; 11 psychic damage.
⚡ Scream Unleashed (when reduced to 0 hit points, encounter)	Close burst 2 (all creatures in burst); the shattered soul pushes the target 1 square.
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Str 12 (+8)	Dex 23 (+13) Wis 20 (+12)
Con 20 (+12)	Int 2 (+3) Cha 6 (+5)

TACTICS

Zathasram relies on the goristro to engage in melee with the characters, while the rakshasa uses *mind twist* to hamstring the characters and *phantom lure* to keep them from closing to melee range with him. He uses his *claw* attack to blind characters who move adjacent to him, then *phantom lure* to get them away from him. He uses *curse of the Lurker in Darkness* as often as possible, following that attack with *mind twist* to pile on psychic damage while the character is vulnerable. He retreats to the area near the soul obelisk once the goristro is defeated or he is bloodied, so he can benefit from the regeneration he gains while within 2 squares of it.

The goristro wades into melee (leading with *goring charge*), attacking two enemies with *double attack* as often as possible. It breaks off from melee to use *goring charge* against an enemy threatening Zathasram if the rakshasa commands it, then charges back when the threat to its master has been removed.

The shattered souls swoop in and out of the battle, mouths gaping in silent screams as they plunge their ethereal substance through their targets' bodies. They fight more or less mindlessly at the rakshasa's command, and Zathasram sacrifices them freely (triggering their *scream unleashed* power) to regain hit points and recharge *curse of the Lurker in Darkness*.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Note that the map for this encounter is half of a poster map included with the *Fantastic Locations: Hellspike Prison* product published in 2005. If you have that product, you can use the map, folded in half, for this encounter. If not, you can transfer the encounter map to another battle grid surface as you normally would.

Light: The lava casts a bright red light over the entire area.

Spike Stones: To the left of the entrance, the canyon floor is strewn with sharp, stalagmite-like rock formations. These are difficult terrain, and a character who enters a square of these stones also takes 5 damage.

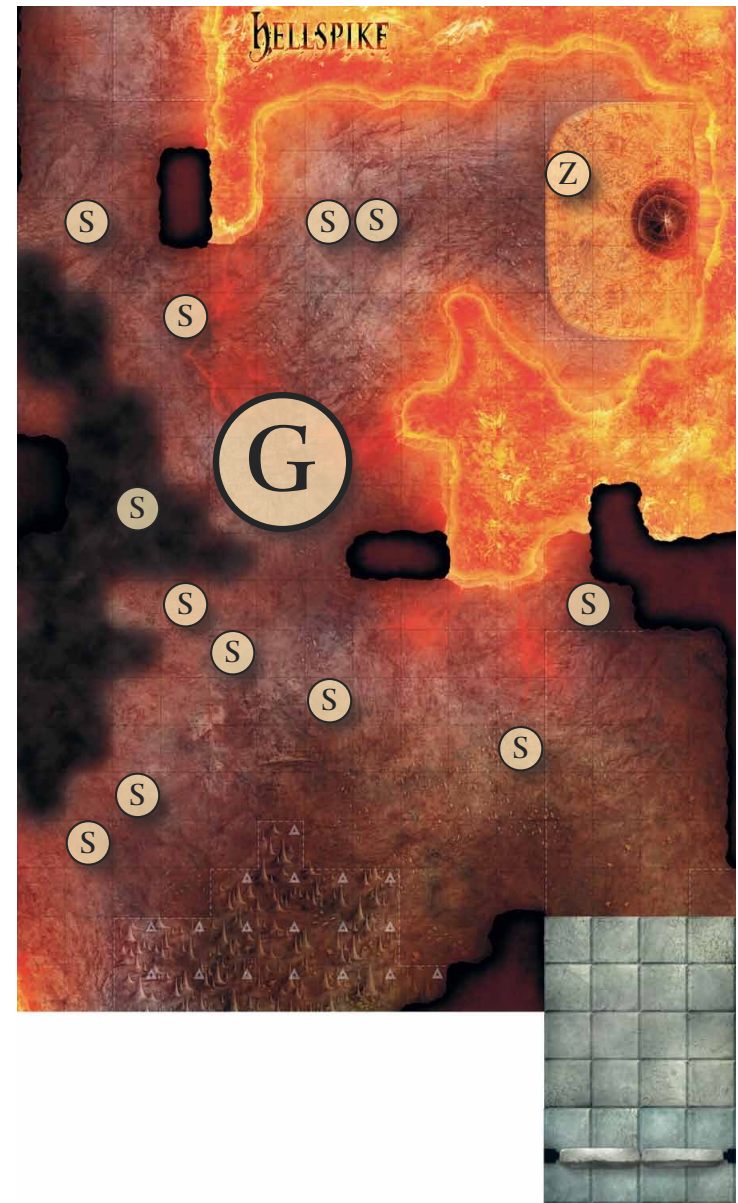
Lava: Though it glows brightly, the lava around the soul obelisk is cool enough that it is not instantly deadly. A creature that enters or starts its turn in the lava takes 20 fire damage.

Soul Obelisk: The prison for the souls captured within the Maze, this black stone pillar reeks of evil power. While Zathasram is within 2 squares of the obelisk (within the glowing area marked on the map), he gains regeneration 10. A character who starts his or her turn within 2 squares of the obelisk is dazed until the start of his or her next turn as the whispers of souls trapped in the obelisk assault the character's mind.

DEVELOPMENT

Treasure: Zathasram wears an adamantite crown topped with fire opals, worth 7,500 gp. He carries 185 pp in a pouch at his belt, and wears *bracers of defense* (paragon tier). If the characters came seeking the Orb of Kevrik the Crusader (or trying to prevent the Order of the Emerald Claw from acquiring it), Zathasram also carries that crystal sphere wrapped in mithral filigree. The precise characteristics of the orb (also known as the Orb of Good) are up to your discretion.

With Zathasram defeated, the characters can also try to puzzle out the working of the soul obelisk to free the soul of, or even resurrect, Daven d'Vadalis.



FREEING A CAPTURED SOUL

Freeing a soul trapped in the soul obelisk involves a skill challenge. A trapped soul can be restored to life when the skill challenge is completed and the procedure is fully understood. If characters release a soul before completing the skill challenge or without complete knowledge of the process, the soul will travel on to Dolurh (or be released into the world, in the case of a demonic soul).

Level: 15 (XP 1,200)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Diplomacy, Insight, Religion

Arcana (DC 22, or DC 30 after the first successful check by the same character): The character examines the flow of energy within the obelisk to identify how souls are held within it. With a successful check, the character can interrupt the flow and loosen the bonds holding a soul in place, if he chooses to do so. This does not, however, reveal the identity of that soul. That information must be determined with Diplomacy or Insight. This skill can generate a maximum of 2 successes.

Diplomacy (DC 22, or DC 30 after the first successful check by the same character): The character concentrates on the souls trapped within the obelisk and finds that it's possible to communicate with them telepathically. They all clamor for freedom, but with a successful check, the character can calm them enough to sort through them. In addition to contributing a success to the challenge, this allows the same or another character to use Insight in the challenge, in order to identify specific souls. This skill can generate a maximum of 1 success.

Insight (DC 22, or DC 30 after the first successful check by the same character): No character can

attempt an Insight check until one character has made a successful Diplomacy check. A successful check allows the character sorting through the souls imprisoned in the obelisk to find a particular soul. The character also gets a sense of the tremendous variety of souls imprisoned in the obelisk—most of them monstrous or demonic. This skill can generate a maximum of 1 success.

Religion (DC 22, or DC 30 after the first successful check by the same character): The character studies the energy of the souls themselves and determines that they are bound to the obelisk as much as the obelisk contains them. With a successful check, the character can loosen the bonds holding a soul in place, if he chooses to do so. More importantly, the character also realizes that if some part of the victim's body is present when the soul is freed, then the effect will be the same as a Raise Dead ritual. Otherwise, the soul of a person moves on to Dolurh; the soul of a demon is freed to seek a mortal to possess. This skill does not reveal the identity of the soul. That information must be determined with Diplomacy or Insight. This skill can generate a maximum of 2 successes.

Secondary Skills: Endurance, Heal

Endurance (DC 15): Each character who makes a check in the challenge must also make an Endurance check. If the check fails, the character loses a healing surge as the fell power of the obelisk tears away some of the character's soul energy. This Endurance check does not contribute to the success or failure of the skill challenge.

Heal (DC 15): A successful Heal check can give a character a +2 bonus to any other skill check, including an Endurance check, as the attending character keeps the target character refreshed and focused despite the evil aura of the obelisk. Heal does not otherwise contribute to the success or failure of the skill challenge.

Success: If the characters reach 4 successes, they gain all of the information that could be revealed by individual skill checks whether they made those checks or not; that is., they understand that to bring Daven d'Vadalis back to the world, they must calm the souls with a Diplomacy check, identify d'Vadalis's soul, have a portion of his body in hand, and then use Arcana or Religion to actually release the soul from the obelisk. Any of these things that have been done already, such as calming the roiling souls, don't need to be done again. The characters can leave to retrieve the skull without canceling their success in the skill challenge. The freed soul enters the skull and a moment later, the living victim appears in the skull's place.

Even if the characters succeed on the skill check, however, it's possible that an overeager character freed the druid's soul without first locating the skull, in which case d'Vadalis moves on to Dolurh instead of being raised.

Failure: If the characters reach 3 failures, the obelisk is beyond their understanding. They might still decide to free a soul at random, or free the druid's soul without understanding how it could be reunited with his body. In the first case, a demon's soul is freed; in the second case, a demon is freed along with d'Vadalis. If the characters chance to have the druid's skull with them, then d'Vadalis is raised but is also possessed by the demon. In the more likely case that the skull is still buried in the pile, the demon takes up residence in one of the player characters. (If this doesn't fit with your campaign plans, an option is to let the demon roam until it possesses an NPC who will eventually cross paths with the characters as a high-level villain.) It can't yet take control of the victim, but in time, it will find a way. The exact effects of this demonic presence are left to your discretion. For inspiration, consult the *Demonomicon*.

L3. LEAVING THE WASTES

Encounter Level 16 (XP 7,600)

SETUP

3 Ghaash'kala defenders (D)

1 Ghaash'kala mystic (M)

2 angels of battle (A)

As soon as the characters make their intention to fight clear, the Ghaash'kala mystic lifts his hands to the sky, and two angels of battle swoop down, bathed in silvery light, in response to his summons. This costs the mystic's first standard action.

3 Ghaash'kala Defenders (D)		Level 15 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, orc		XP 1,200 each
Initiative +12 Senses Perception +12; low-light vision		
HP 148; Bloodied 74		
AC 31; Fortitude 29, Reflex 25, Will 27		
Speed 5 (7 when charging)		
⊕ Longsword (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the defender's next turn.		
⊕ Binding Flame Strike (standard; recharge ☹️ ☹️) ♦ Fire, Weapon		
+22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 fire damage and ongoing 10 fire damage, and the target is slowed (save ends both). If the target is marked by the defender or is already slowed, it is immobilized instead of slowed.		
Warrior's Surge (standard; usable only while bloodied; encounter) ♦ Healing		
The defender makes a melee basic attack and regains 37 hit points.		
Alignment Lawful good	Languages Common, Goblin	
Skills Diplomacy +14, Intimidate +14, Religion +17		
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 21 (+12)
Con 20 (+12)	Int 12 (+8)	Cha 15 (+9)
Equipment chainmail armor, heavy shield, longsword		

Ghaash'kala Mystic (M)		Level 17 Artillery (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, orc		XP 1,600
Initiative +11 Senses Perception +20; low-light vision		
HP 129; Bloodied 64		
AC 29; Fortitude 29, Reflex 27, Will 31		
Speed 6 (8 when charging)		
⊕ Quarterstaff (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage.		
✦ Binding Immolation (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire, Implement, Radiant		
Area burst 2 within 10 squares; targets enemies; +20 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 fire and radiant damage, and the target is slowed. <i>Effect:</i> Any ally in the burst gains 10 temporary hit points.		
✦ Warrior's Blessing (immediate interrupt, when a bloodied ally within 10 squares hits with a melee basic attack; encounter) ♦ Healing		
The triggering ally regains 10 hit points and deals 10 extra fire and radiant damage with the triggering attack.		
Warrior's Surge (standard; usable only while bloodied; encounter) ♦ Healing		
The mystic makes a melee basic attack and regains 32 hit points.		
Alignment Lawful good	Languages Common, Goblin	
Skills Diplomacy +16, Religion +17		
Str 19 (+12)	Dex 16 (+11)	Wis 24 (+15)
Con 21 (+13)	Int 19 (+12)	Cha 16 (+11)
Equipment hide armor, quarterstaff		

TACTICS

The defenders leap down from the ledge and charge the nearest characters, using *binding flame strike* as often as possible until their foes are burned to ash.

The mystic uses *binding immolation* as much as possible, spreading out the attacks to give temporary hit points to as many allies as possible.

The angels swoop in and out of the battle with *mobile melee attack*, remaining up in the air and out of reach as much as possible. They hurry to engage flying opponents.

2 Angels of Battle (A)		Level 15 Skirmisher (Leader)
Large immortal humanoid (angel)		XP 1,200 each
Initiative +13 Senses Perception +11		
Angelic Presence Attacks against the angel of battle take a -2 penalty unless the angel is bloodied.		
HP 148; Bloodied 74		
AC 29; Fortitude 27, Reflex 25, Will 28		
Immune fear; Resist 10 radiant		
Speed 8, Fly 12 (hover)		
⊕ Falchion (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Reach 2; +21 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage (crit 2d10 + 16).		
⊕ Mobile Melee Attack (standard; at-will)		
An angel of battle can move up to half its speed and make one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The angel doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of its attack.		
⚡ Storm of Blades (standard; encounter)		
Razor-sharp blades explode from the angel's wings. Close burst 3; +19 vs. AC; 6d8 + 7 damage. After using this ability, the angel of battle has a fly speed of 2 (hover) until the end of the encounter.		
Chosen Foe (free, after making a falchion attack; at-will)		
Once during its turn, an angel of battle can illuminate an enemy it hits with a falchion attack, bathing the enemy in light as bright as a torch and granting the angel's allies combat advantage against that enemy until the start of the angel's next turn.		
Alignment Lawful good	Languages Supernal	
Skills Intimidate +19		
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 19 (+11)	Wis 18 (+11)
Con 20 (+12)	Int 15 (+9)	Cha 25 (+14)
Equipment falchion		

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Light: The evening light provides dim illumination across the field of battle.

Ledge: The Ghaash'kala hail the characters from a ledge 10 feet above the canyon floor. Climbing the cliff to or from the ledge requires a DC 22 Athletics check.

Dragon Skull: A large skull, formerly belonging to a black dragon, interferes with easy movement around the canyon. Entering any of the four squares it occupies requires a DC 15 Athletics check and costs 2 squares of movement.

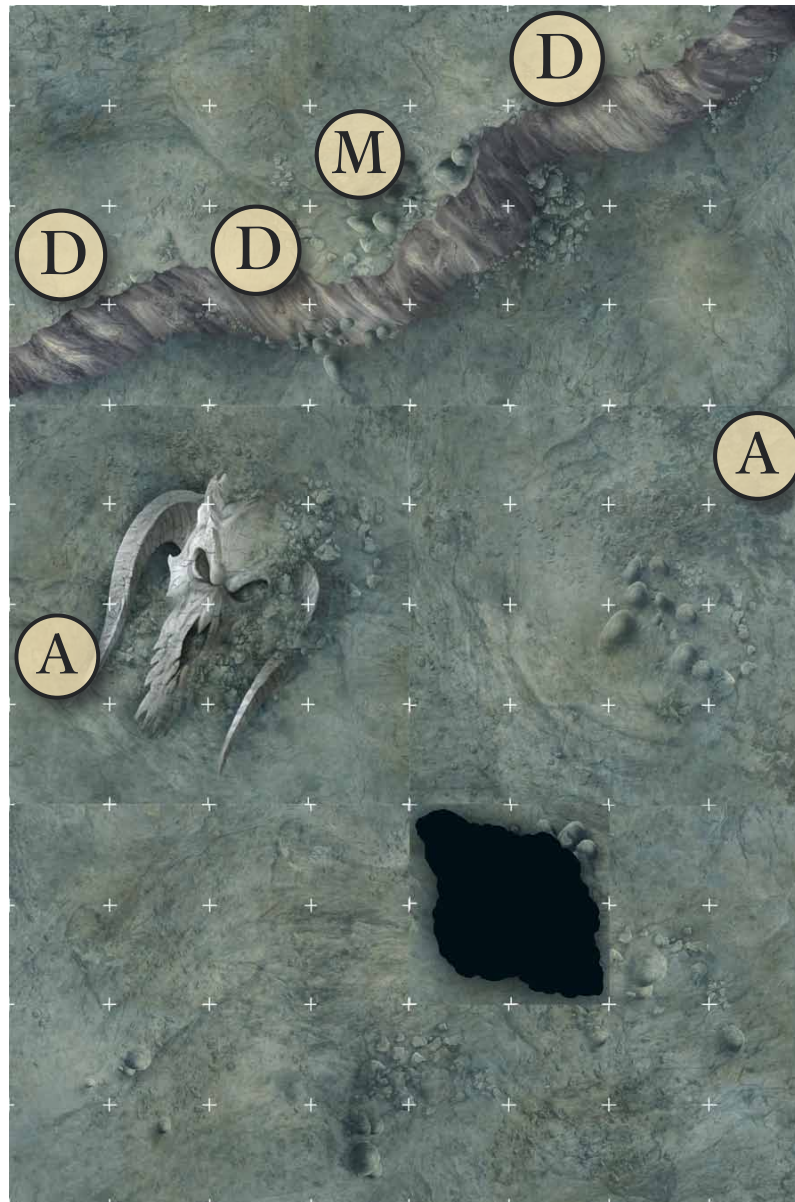
DEVELOPMENT

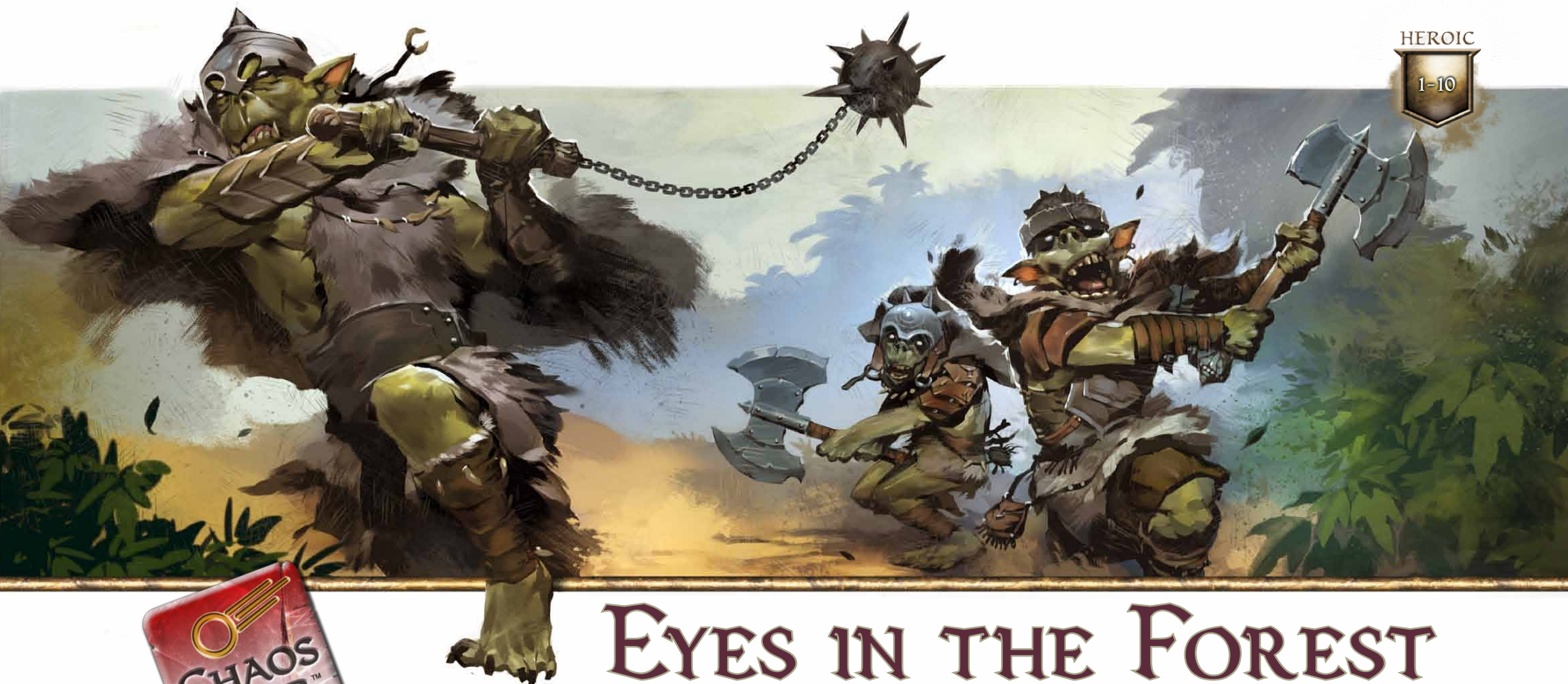
If the characters defeat the Ghaash'kala and the angels without killing any of them, they receive an additional 1,200 XP as a bonus reward.

Once the characters defeat the Ghaash'kala, they can leave the Demon Wastes without further incident ... unless you decide that further adventure awaits them in the heartless wastes!

About the Author

James Wyatt is the D&D Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron Campaign Setting*, and is the author of several Eberron novels.





EYES IN THE FOREST

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Robert J. Schwalb

illustrations by Kieran Yanner ♦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

“Eyes in the Forest” is a single combat encounter set in the Chaos Scar for five 1st-level characters. The Chaos Scar lures the bold and foolhardy alike to test their mettle against the perils it presents. While some find success, many fall victim to the monsters and traps that lie in wait. While the characters embark on their own expedition, they stumble onto a trail left by other would-be heroes. Should the characters follow it, they discover what waits for anyone without the strength and courage needed to survive the menacing valley.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out the map of the entire valley.

BACKGROUND

An adventuring party ventured into the Chaos Scar about a week ago. Not far into their journey, goblins ambushed them. Although the heroes gave as good as they got, they fell beneath the enemies’ black arrows and notched blades. The attack was prompted by the goblin warband leader’s enduring interest in eyeballs.

While the goblins proved victorious, they did so at great cost to themselves. The band has withdrawn to a ruin tucked in the woods to pick over the dead and harvest their ocular organs.

Boontah developed his unhealthy obsession of eyes after he was caught trying to steal from the lair of a gauth. Upon his capture, the fearless goblin showed a fascination with its eyes. The gauth, impressed by the brazen goblin’s audacity and recognizing a potentially useful tool, took the creature to meet its master,

a powerful beholder that lurks much deeper in the Scar.

The beholder agreed with its minion's assessment of Boontah, and gifted the would-be warchief with a pair of functioning eyestalks all his own, with the promise of more for services rendered. Since then, Boontah, and a band of goblins he cowed into submission, has been an excellent resource for the beholder. He routinely sends information about new

MINOR QUESTS

Consider a minor quest from the following to strengthen the encounter hook.

I Know that Horse! The horse might have once belonged to the PC before he or she became an adventurer. The PC remembers selling the horse to an adventurer who was friendly and taught the character a fair bit. Discovering the hero's fate would be important to such a character (100 XP).

Missing Companion: A character's relative might be an adventurer who has gone missing during an expedition into the Chaos Scar (100 XP).

Stolen Goods: The characters were robbed in a village and have tracked the thieves to the Chaos Scar, where it becomes clear the thieves were dealt with by goblins (125 XP).

Vanquished Heroes: If the players lost a party during an expedition into the Chaos Scar, their replacement characters might head into the valley to recover the bodies of their lost adventurers only to find they were taken by opportunistic goblins (150 XP).

inhabitants that arrive in the Scar, from adventurers to other monsters, back to his lord. To further honor his new master, Boontah has also taken to mounting the eyes of slain enemies on an ornate headdress he wears and never removes.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

"Eyes in the Forest" is an incidental encounter, best used to add a complication for heroes bound for one of the dungeons found in the Chaos Scar, or returning from one. Use the following hook to draw the heroes to the encounter.

LONE HORSE

A white mare crops grass in an empty field. She limps when she moves. You make out blood flecking her flanks and oozing from an arrow wound in her leg.

While traveling through the valley and its environs, the adventurers come upon an injured horse. The saddle, bags, and supplies suggest the steed belonged to someone. You can let the adventurers follow the horse's tracks back to the battlefield and ruin without trouble or you might require a skill challenge. Consider a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures) involving DC 10 Athletics (overcome obstacles), Nature (find clues, sense disturbances), and Perception (follow tracks) skill checks. If the characters succeed on the challenge, they begin the encounter below with a surprise round against the goblins. If the characters fail, the goblins gain the advantage of the surprise round.

TREASURE PREPARATION

"Eyes in the Forest" rewards a party with two parcels, #4 and #6 (see "Treasure Parcels" in the *Dungeon*

Master's Guide). These parcels consist of equipment and a magic item (chosen from the characters' wish lists) salvaged from the adventuring party killed by the goblins. If the characters missed treasure from a previous adventure, this encounter is also a good way to put it in their hands.

CONCLUSION

Defeating the goblins doesn't have to be the end of the adventure. Boontah and his goblins work for a much more powerful creature. His beholder allies, while not necessarily hungry to seek out those who have slain their pet, might well seek revenge when the characters least expect it.

If you dislike the beholder angle, consider making Boontah's warband an advance raiding party for a much larger group of goblins. In such a scenario, Boontah might be the son of a powerful goblin warchief, who swears a blood oath to avenge himself on those who have murdered his offspring.

Player characters might also use Gentle Repose to preserve the dead adventurers until they can be raised. When they succeed, the adventurers might be grateful or angry. Also, the adventurers might not be what they seem: They could be terrible villains who reward the heroes for their efforts by wreaking havoc in the countryside and beyond.

BOONTAH'S REDOUBT

Encounter Level 1 (593 XP)

SETUP

Boontah the goblin champion (G)

1 goblin acolyte of Maglubiyet (A)

1 goblin blackblade (B)

2 goblin thorns (T)

3 goblin crazies (C)

The goblins hunker down in a ruin tucked away in the small wood. The original occupants abandoned this outpost decades ago and now much of it has fallen in or collapsed.

The goblin thorns watch the surrounding woods, so characters moving into their line of sight will need to make DC 11 Stealth checks if they would remain hidden.

When the PCs can see the ruin, read:

A ruined keep rises from the grassy clearing, looking much like a rotting tooth. Moss, creepers, and lichen cling to the walls. Rubble-strewn cavities lead inside to a gloomy interior.

Perception

DC 5: *You hear soft voices coming from within the ruin.*

Characters who speak Goblin can make out nonsense punctuated with the following phrases:

"Boontah itches. Cream not work."

"I take eyes. Elf eyes best."

"I hate Boontah."

"Good fight, eh?"

Boontah the Goblin Champion (G)	Level 2 Elite Brute
Small natural humanoid	XP 250
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +0; low-light vision
HP 90; Bloodied 45; see also <i>wild goblin frenzy</i>	
AC 14; Fortitude 16, Reflex 14, Will 13	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
⊕ Flail (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+5 vs. AC; 1d12 + 3 damage, and the target slides 1 square.	
↘ The Eyes Have It (minor; recharge ☼ ☼ ☼) ♦ Weapon	
Boontah makes an eye ray attack chosen randomly from the following list. Using an eye ray does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
1— Fire Ray (Fire) : Ranged 5; +4 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 3 fire damage.	
2— Exhaustion Ray (Necrotic) : Ranged 5; +4 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of Boontah's next turn.	
↖ Slashing Chain (standard; requires flail; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Close blast 2; one or two creatures; +5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and Boontah shifts 3 squares to any unoccupied square within or adjacent to the blast.	
↖ Dizzy Goblin Strike (standard; recharge ☼) ♦ Weapon	
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square. <i>Effect</i> : Boontah shifts 1d4 squares and makes the following melee secondary attack, but cannot use <i>goblin tactics</i> (save ends). <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +5 vs. AC; 2d10 + 3 damage, and the target is stunned until the end of Boontah's next turn.	
Wild Goblin Frenzy (while bloodied)	
Boontah automatically recharges <i>dizzy goblin strike</i> at the start of each of his turns, but gains a -1 penalty to attack rolls and a +1 bonus to damage rolls. This penalty and bonus are cumulative.	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when Boontah is missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
Boontah shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 17 (+4)	Dex 13 (+2) Wis 8 (+0)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 8 (+0) Cha 10 (+1)
Equipment hide armor, flail	

Goblin Acolyte of Maglubiyet (A)	Level 1 Controller
Small natural humanoid	XP 100
Initiative +0	Senses Perception +3; low-light vision
Life Scourge aura 2; each creature within the aura cannot regain hit points.	
HP 29; Bloodied 14	
AC 15; Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, Will 14	
Speed 6	
⊕ Slashing Shroud (standard; at-will) ♦ Illusion, Weapon	
+6 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and the goblin acolyte of Maglubiyet becomes invisible to the target until the end of the acolyte's next turn.	
↘ Hand of Maglubiyet (standard; at-will) ♦ Force	
Ranged 10; +5 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 5 force damage, and the goblin acolyte of Maglubiyet chooses either to slide the target 3 squares or to immobilize the target until the end of the acolyte's next turn.	
↘ Maglubiyet's Fists (standard; recharge ☼ ☼)	
The goblin acolyte of Maglubiyet makes two <i>hand of Maglubiyet</i> attacks, each against a different target.	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when the goblin acolyte of Maglubiyet is missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
The acolyte shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Skills Diplomacy +6, Intimidate +6	
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 10 (+0) Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 13 (+1) Cha 13 (+1)
Equipment battleaxe	

Goblin Blackblade (B)	Level 1 Lurker
Small natural humanoid	XP 100
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 25; Bloodied 12	
AC 16; Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 11	
Speed 6; see also <i>goblin tactics</i>	
⊕ Short Sword (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+5 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.	
Combat Advantage	
The goblin blackblade deals 1d6 extra damage to any target it has combat advantage against.	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
The goblin shifts 1 square.	
Sneaky	
When shifting, a goblin blackblade can move into a space occupied by an ally of its level or lower. The ally shifts into the blackblade's previous space as a free action.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10	
Str 14 (+2)	Dex 17 (+3) Wis 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 8 (-1) Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, short sword	

2 Goblin Thorns (T)	Level 1 Minion Artillery
Small natural humanoid	XP 25 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 14; Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 13	
Speed 6	
⊕ Dagger (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+6 vs. AC; 3 damage.	
⊗ Shortbow (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 15/30; +8 vs. Reflex; 4 damage.	
Skittering Goblin (free, when the goblin thorn hits with a ranged attack; at-will)	
The goblin shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 10 (+0)	Dex 15 (+2) Wis 12 (+1)
Con 11 (+0)	Int 8 (-1) Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, dagger, shortbow, quiver with 15 arrows	

3 Goblin Crazies (C)	Level 2 Minion Brute
Small natural humanoid	XP 31 each
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +0; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 15; Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 12	
Speed 6	
⊕ Battleaxe (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+5 vs. AC; 5 damage.	
⊕ Crazed Charge (standard; at-will)	
The goblin crazy charges and makes the following attack in place of a melee basic attack: +6 vs. AC; 6 damage, and the target is immobilized and grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn. The goblin crazy drops to 0 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 16 (+4)	Dex 14 (+3) Wis 8 (+0)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 7 (-1) Cha 6 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, spiked helmet, battleaxe	

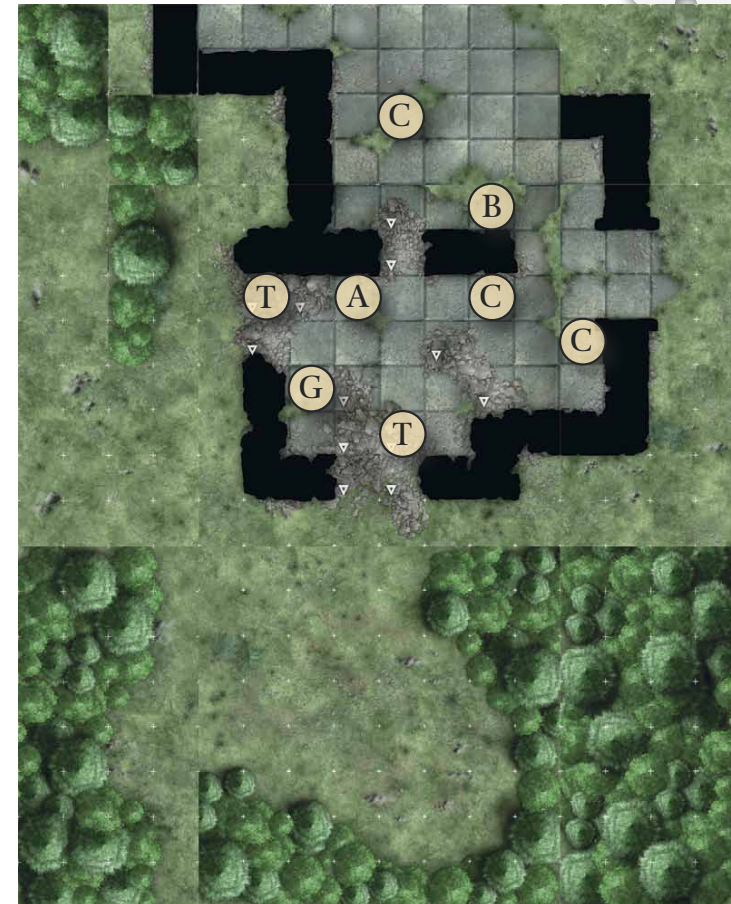
TACTICS

The goblins might be diminished by their encounter with the fallen adventuring party, but they are also heady from their victory.

The goblin thorns send arrows into characters they can see, shifting after each hit to adjust their positions to benefit from cover if possible. The acolyte supports the thorns with *hand of Maglubiyet* to pin down a character or drag him or her out from cover. The thorns and acolyte switch tactics if engaged. If pressed into melee, the thorns withdraw to resume their barrage from deeper in the complex, while the acolyte uses *slashing shroud* to cover its retreat.

The crazies are less cautious. They lower their heads and charge out from the ruin to impale the closest enemy they can reach. If a crazy fails to kill itself (with a hit), it eases its disappointment by hacking at its target.

Boontah follows a crazy, charging the closest enemy. On his next turn, he uses *dizzy goblin strike* to



give himself some room, and then directs his flail at his nearest enemies with *slashing chain*.

Finally, the goblin blackblade hides in the ruins, surveying the battlefield from his position. He then sneaks around to hit a soft PC—a controller or ranged striker—from behind. Once engaged, the lurker works with its allies to use *sneaky* and get combat advantage where possible.

All goblins here fight to the death.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Trees: Squares containing trees grant cover. The canopy is heavily obscured and characters can climb into it, up to 4 squares above the ground, with a successful DC 10 Athletics check.

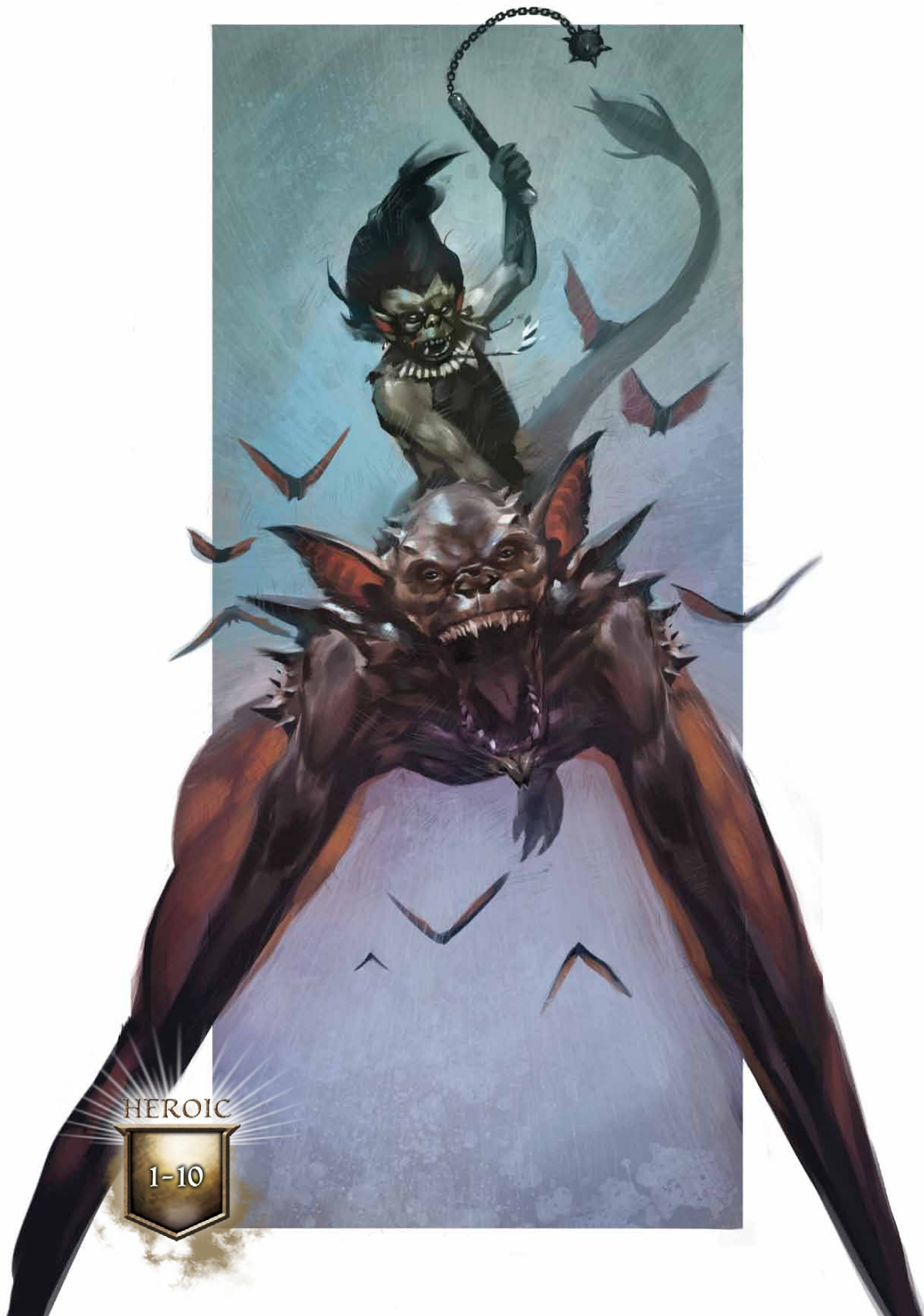
Rubble: Squares containing rubble count as difficult terrain.

Corpses and Flies: The adventurers' eyeless bodies are heaped in a pile. Squares containing the corpses count as difficult terrain and any creature entering the square causes black flies to erupt in a burst 1. The burst creates a zone of buzzing insects that lasts until the end of the encounter. Squares inside the zone are lightly obscured and living creatures in the zone take a -1 penalty to attack rolls.

Treasure: The goblins stripped any valuables they could find on corpses. Boontah carries a level 2 magic item (preferably hide armor or a magic weapon), a bronze nose ring worth 40 gp, and a small pouch containing 5 gp and 14 rotting teeth (his own). Boontah also has glued harvested eyeballs to sticks and mounted them in his headdress to accompany the eyestalks his master gifted him with. The eyestalks cease functioning upon the goblin's demise. The acolyte of Maglubiyet carries a *potion of healing*, and 5 gp and 34 sp in a leather pouch. The goblin cutter has a pouch filled with 30 sp, 18 cp, an *augmenting whetstone* (level 6, *Adventurer's Vault*, page 190). Scattered between the remaining goblins are 112 cp. If the characters keep the horse (a riding horse), remove the *augmenting whetstone*. 🌀

About the Author

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HEROIC

1-10

GLOWSTONE CAVERNS

By Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

illustration by Kieran Yanner

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“Glowstone Caverns” is a short adventure for five 4th-level characters. It takes place in a warren of goblins in the Chaos Scar. And as with most things in the Chaos Scar, not everything is as simple as it appears. The mission is certainly clear: Clear out a nest of goblins. What could be more straightforward? But these are not your everyday goblins. Something strange has taken hold of the Gnawstubble tribe, and it threatens to spill out like a plague into the surrounding area.

BACKGROUND

The Gnawstubbles were a goblin tribe much like any other living in the cave-riddled hills along the Chaos Scar. They grubbed into the soft, cracked stone in search of shiny gems and tasty subterranean foodstuffs, and they raided the surrounding countryside for other supplies. Their depredations were annoying but rarely fatal, and periodically local residents, usually those who lived near Restwell Keep, would hire adventurers to reduce their numbers.

Then the goblins tunneled their way into a strange cave deep inside the valley. Its walls were covered with weird nodules of an unknown metal, and oddly mutated forms of underground life inhabited the oily-looking pond at its center. The metal proved to have interesting properties when used in weapons and other tools. Its iridescent surface was endlessly fascinating to the goblins, who took to carrying the nodules with them, fondling and staring at the shiny objects whenever they could. The goblin chief claimed the new cavern as her own and moved her dwelling and family there.

The Gnawstubbles did not realize that the Chaos Scar meteorite had tainted this unusual cavern. Its bizarre influence had stained the rock and all the life in the caves for many years before the goblins discovered it. Now that the goblins have taken up residence and are in constant contact with the strange “glowmetal,” as they call it, they too have begun to absorb the bizarre taint. With their otherworldly metal weapons and strange new abilities, they have become a much greater threat. Already they have displaced mundane goblins in the vicinity, domesticated strange new allies, and they grow ever more bold in

their attacks against caravans and travelers outside the Scar. Adventurers who have survived encounters with the Gnawstubble clan have even reported being assailed by goblins riding strange, giant bats.

The characters might have been hired by a local authority to deal with the threat, or they might simply be looking for adventure in the notorious Chaos Scar. They soon discover that this is no ordinary goblin-stomping session.



AREA 1. VESTIBULE

Encounter Level 3 (750 XP)

SETUP

- 1 glowmetal hexer (H)
- 2 goblin cutters (C)
- 4 goblin warriors (W)
- 1 murk bat cloud (M)

Sentinels and their trained bats guard the entrance to the goblin warren.

Place the characters in any squares of the entrance tunnel.

When the characters first enter the cavern, read:

Spear-wielding goblins guard the entrance, while others armed with javelins are positioned on raised portions of the cavern floor. Toward the back of the cave is a swirling cloud of bats that partially obscure the figures behind it.

When the characters first see the glowmetal hexer, read:

A deformed-looking goblin raises a glowing metallic staff and utters arcane words.

Arcana Check

DC 10: *You feel uneasy, sensing that something is not quite right in this cavern.*

DC 15: *This area is permeated by emanations from the Far Realm.*

The goblins are alert and watching for intruders. They make active Perception checks against characters trying to use Stealth.

If one or more characters have not been detected before they attack or enter the cave, the inhabitants are surprised.

Glowmetal Hexer (H)	Level 3 Controller (Leader)
Small natural humanoid, goblin	XP 150
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +3; darkvision
HP 46; Bloodied 23	
AC 16; Fortitude 15, Reflex 16, Will 13	
Speed 6	
⊕ Glowmetal Staff (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage.	
☞ Eye-Eater Hex (standard; at-will)	
Ranged 10; +7 vs. Fortitude; 2d4 + 3 damage, and the target is blinded (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target is also dazed (save ends both).	
☞ Stinging Hex (standard; recharge ☞☞☞)	
Ranged 10; +7 vs. Will; the target takes 3d6 + 1 damage if it moves during its turn (save ends).	
☼ Maddening Cloud (standard; encounter) ♦ Fear, Zone	
Area burst 3 within 10; the burst creates a zone of phantom horrors that lasts until the end of the glowmetal hexer's next turn. Any enemy within the zone is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to Will defense. The zone grants concealment to the goblin hexer and its allies. <i>Sustain Minor:</i> The hexer can move the zone 5 squares.	
Madstone (immediate reaction, when damaged by an attack; encounter) ♦ Healing	
The glowmetal hexer regains 11 hit points, or ends one effect on it that a save can end.	
Lead from the Rear (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a ranged attack; at-will)	
The glowmetal hexer can change the attack's target to an adjacent ally of its level or lower.	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
The glowmetal hexer shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 9 (+0)	Dex 15 (+3) Wis 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 11 (+1) Cha 18 (+5)
Equipment quarterstaff, madstone	

2 Goblin Cutters (G)	Level 1 Minion Skirmisher
Small natural humanoid	XP 25
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 16; Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 11	
Speed 6	
⊕ Short Sword (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+5 vs. AC; 4 damage (5 damage if the goblin cutter has combat advantage against the target).	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
The goblin cutter shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 14 (+2)	Dex 17 (+3) Wis 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 8 (-1) Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, short sword	

4 Goblin Warriors (W)	Level 1 Skirmisher
Small natural humanoid	XP 100
Initiative +5	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 29; Bloodied 14	
AC 17; Fortitude 13, Reflex 15, Will 12	
Speed 6	
⊕ Spear (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.	
☞ Javelin (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 10/20; +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.	
☞ Mobile Ranged Attack (standard; at-will)	
The goblin warrior moves half its speed; at any point during that movement, it makes one ranged attack without provoking an opportunity attack.	
Great Position	
If, on its turn, the goblin warrior ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals 1d6 extra damage on its ranged attacks until the start of its next turn.	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
The goblin warrior shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 14 (+2)	Dex 17 (+3) Wis 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 8 (-1) Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, spear, 5 javelins	

Murk Bat Cloud (M) **Level 3 Skirmisher**
 Medium aberrant beast (swarm) XP 150

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +6; blindsight 5

Swarm Attack (Fear) aura 1; each enemy takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls while within the aura. An enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 3 damage.

HP 49; **Bloodied** 24

AC 17; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14

Immune gaze; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 against close and area attacks

Speed 2 (clumsy), fly 6

⊕ **Swarm of Slashing Wings** (standard; at-will) ⊕ **Fear**
 +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and Reflex defense until the end of its next turn.

↓ **Weird Shift** (immediate reaction, when hit by a close or area attack from an enemy; at-will)
 The murk bat swarm shifts 3 squares to a square adjacent to the triggering enemy and makes a *swarm of slashing wings* attack against the triggering enemy.

⚡ **Unearthly Shriek** (standard; encounter) ⊕ **Psychic**
 Close burst 2; targets enemies; +6 vs. Will; 3d6 + 3 psychic damage.

Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 13 (+2)	Dex 18 (+5)	Wis 11 (+1)
Con 17 (+4)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 14 (+3)

TACTICS

The murk bat cloud is somewhat domesticated by the goblins and works with them in the fight. It swoops into enemies' faces while slashing with many razor-edged wings. It looses an *unearthly shriek* against closely grouped enemies. If the swarm is reduced to 10 hit points or below and no goblins remain in the fight, it disperses as the bats scatter into the caverns.

The glowmetal hexer begins by using *maddening cloud* around allies and enemies near the entrance, moving it as needed to protect itself and allies during the fight. It then targets an enemy defender with *stinging hex* and directs its *eye-eater hex* against foes making ranged attacks. It uses its *madstone* when it first becomes bloodied, then retreats from a dangerous

situation, using *lead from the rear* to place allies in the way of ranged attacks while it makes a getaway.

The goblin warriors try to stay out of melee, letting the bats confound their enemies while the goblins take pot shots. The cutters attempt to gain combat advantage whenever possible.

If the fight is going poorly (more than half the defenders are down, or the glowmetal hexer is bloodied or worse), one or more goblins attempt to escape and bring reinforcements from area 2.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Guttering torches dimly light the area.

Ceiling: 20 feet high.

Flowstone Ledges: These are 5 feet high, with the exception of the larger ledge to the east, which has a 10-foot-high ridge on one side. Moving into a higher square costs 2 squares of movement. Creatures on a ledge gain a +1 bonus to melee and ranged attack rolls against lower enemies. A creature on top of the 10-foot-high ridge is not considered adjacent to a creature at ground level.

Treasure: The hexer carries a staff sheathed in glowmetal. This functions as a +1 *magic staff* but is tainted by the influence of the meteorite. The first time in an encounter that the staff's wielder uses an arcane attack power through it, he or she must make a DC 12 Endurance check. If the check fails, the wielder gains an unsightly disfigurement. If the check fails by 5 or more, the wielder's mind is strained by the weird emanations of the glowmetal. He or she takes a permanent -1 penalty to Will defense; this penalty is cumulative with each such failure. A single Remove Affliction ritual removes all disfigurements and penalties.

The hexer also possesses a *madstone*, a treated nodule of glowmetal.

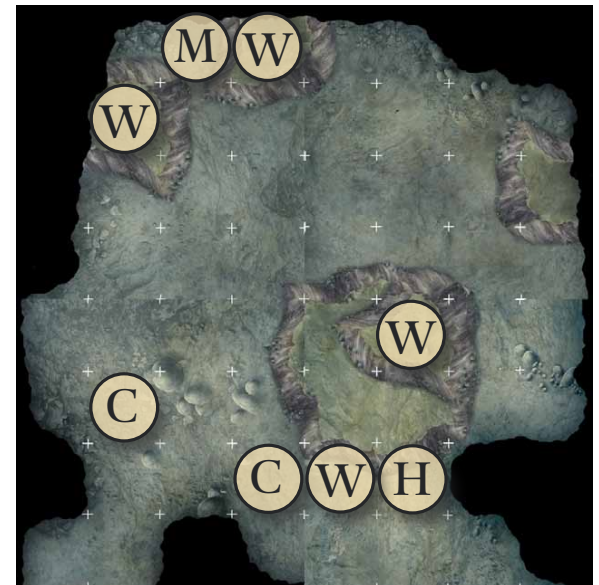
Madstone Level 8

This dully glowing lump of metal has a strange, oily texture. It heals wounds but leaves a strange lassitude.

Level 8 125 gp

Other Consumable

Power (Consumable): Immediate Reaction. *Trigger:* You are damaged by an attack. *Effect:* You expend a healing surge, or one effect ends on you that a save can end. Until the end of the encounter, you can no longer shift or use a shift granted by an effect.



AREA 2. BAT CAVE

Encounter Level 4 (950 XP)

SETUP

Specially assigned bat handlers raise and train the mutated shadowhunter bats and murk bat clouds that are native to the tainted cavern.

2 goblin bat handlers (G)

2 murk bat clouds (M)

2 mutated shadowhunter bats (S)

When the characters reach the opening (and have a light source or darkvision), read:

This large cavern is entirely dark. A rent in its floor splits the cave nearly in two, and stalagmites jut from the ground. Two goblins in leather armor stand on the opposite side of the rift.

Perception Check

DC 12: *The ceiling on the far side of the cave is encrusted with stalactites.*

DC 19: *(If the goblins have not been alerted to the characters) You make out creatures moving among the stalactites.*

TACTICS

The bats are resting on the ceiling, among the stalactites. Unless the trainers have been alerted to the presence of intruders, they do not begin combat mounted. They direct the murk bats against the nearest foes, then mount up (a move plus a standard action) and take to the air at the start of their initiative on round 2.

If the goblins are alerted to intruders in other areas, they mount their bats and move to respond, along with the murk bat clouds.

2 Goblin Bat Handlers (G) Small natural humanoid (blind)	Level 3 Lurker XP 150
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +10; blindsight (see text)
HP 38; Bloodied 19	AC 16; Fortitude 14, Reflex 15, Will 17
Speed 6	⊕ Flail (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon +5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.
✳ Globe of Darkness (minor; recharge ☒ ☒) ♦ Zone	Area burst 2 within 10; the burst creates a zone of darkness that remains in place until the end of the goblin bat handler's next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all enemies.
Combat Advantage	The goblin bat handler deals 1d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)	The goblin bat handler shifts 1 square.
Bat Sense	The bat handler gains any blindsight or darkvision of any allied bat within 5 squares.
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin
Str 8 (+0)	Dex 17 (+4) Wis 18 (+5)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 10 (+1) Cha 10 (+1)
Equipment leather armor, flail	

2 Murk Bat Clouds (M) Medium aberrant beast (swarm)	Level 3 Skirmisher XP 150
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +6; blindsight 5
Swarm Attack (Fear) aura 1; each enemy takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls while within the aura. An enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 3 damage.	
HP 49; Bloodied 24	
AC 17; Fortitude 15, Reflex 16, Will 14	
Immune gaze; Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerable 5 against close and area attacks	
Speed 2 (clumsy), fly 6	
⊕ Swarm of Slashing Wings (standard; at-will) ♦ Fear +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and Reflex defense until the end of its next turn.	
† Weird Shift (immediate reaction, when hit by a close or area attack from an enemy; at-will) The murk bat swarm shifts 3 squares to a square adjacent to the triggering enemy and makes a <i>swarm of slashing wings</i> attack against the triggering enemy.	
✳ Unearthly Shriek (standard; encounter) ♦ Psychic Close burst 2; targets enemies; +6 vs. Will; 3d6 + 3 psychic damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Str 13 (+2)	Dex 18 (+5) Wis 11 (+1)
Con 17 (+4)	Int 2 (-3) Cha 14 (+3)

2 Mutated Shadowhunter Bats (S) Level 4 Lurker
 Medium shadow beast (mount) XP 175

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
HP 45; **Bloodied** 22
AC 18; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 13
Speed 2 (clumsy), fly 8

⊕ **Tail Slash** (standard; at-will)
 +9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage. In dim light or darkness, the mutated shadowhunter bat gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals 6 extra damage.

⊕ **Flyby Attack** (standard; at-will)
 The mutated shadowhunter bat flies up to 8 squares and makes one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The bat doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of the attack.

Flittering Swoop (while mounted by a friendly rider of 3rd level or higher; encounter) ◆ **Mount**
 When a mutated shadowhunter bat makes a *flyby attack*, its rider can make one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The rider doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of the attack.

Burdened Mount
 While mounted, a mutated shadowhunter bat has altitude limit 2 while flying.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 3 (-2) **Cha** 12 (+3)

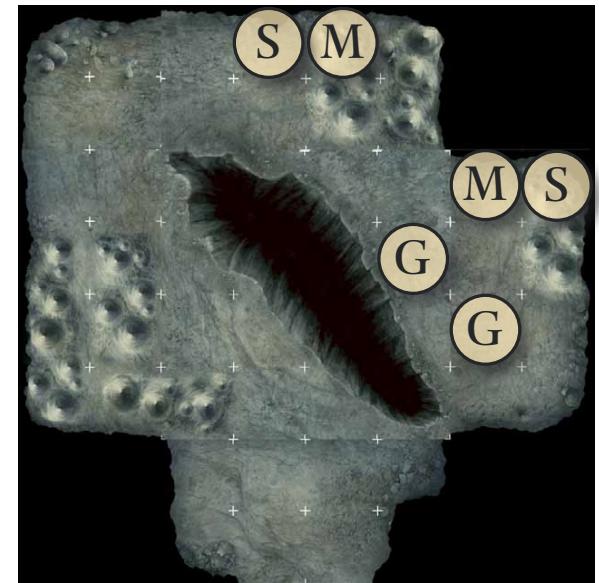
FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Dark.

Ceiling: 40 feet.

Crevasse: The floor is split by a crack about 20 feet deep. In addition to taking falling damage, any creature that falls in becomes wedged into the narrow bottom of the crevasse. It cannot begin to climb out until it extricates itself as a move action (Athletics DC 9).

Stalagmites and Stalactites: Stalagmites are 2 to 4 feet high. They are difficult terrain and provide cover. Stalactites provide cover for flying creatures within 10 feet of the ceiling.



AREA 3. TRASH HEAP

Encounter Level 3 (750 XP)

SETUP

This garbage-strewn tunnel leads to the warren's food preparation area, and what were once living quarters. The influence of the meteorite's corruptive influence has bestowed pseudo-life on the midden heap piled in an alcove. The creature serves as a guardian and does not bother the goblins as long as they continue to provide it with sustenance in the form of more trash and waste.

2 goblin cutters (G)

2 goblin mess cooks (C)

1 trash hulk (T)

When the characters see the trash heap, read:

Two burly-looking goblins face a long work table, their backs to you, hacking at an indefinable object with huge cleavers. A couple of ragged-looking goblins assist them, carting about platters and tending to a cook fire. Off to the side is a mound of assorted garbage: offal, scraps of leather and metal, discarded containers, and even a mangled corpse or two.

When the characters move within 5 squares of the trash heap, read:

The mound of refuse rears up and lashes out at you!

Perception Check

DC 17: Glistening slime coats the floor behind the garbage heap, almost like a trail.

2 Goblin Mess Cooks (C)		Level 3 Brute
Small aberrant humanoid		XP 150
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +2; low-light vision	
HP 54; Bloodied 27		
AC 15; Fortitude 16, Reflex 14, Will 13		
Speed 6		
⊕ Bloody Cleaver (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
⊕ Carving Knife (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.	
⊕ Gut (standard; at-will) ♦ Disease	The goblin mess cook makes a <i>bloody cleaver</i> attack and a <i>carving knife</i> attack. If both attacks hit the same target, it makes a secondary attack against that target. <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +6 vs. Fortitude; the target is exposed to filth fever (MM 211).	
✂ Thrown Knife (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	Ranged 5/10; +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)		
The goblin mess cook shifts 1 square.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin	
Str 18 (+5)	Dex 14 (+3)	Wis 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 8 (+0)	Cha 8 (+0)
Equipment cleaver, 3 carving knives		

4 Goblin Cutters (G)		Level 1 Minion Skirmisher
Small natural humanoid		XP 25
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 16; Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 11		
Speed 6		
⊕ Short Sword (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	+5 vs. AC; 4 damage (5 damage if the goblin cutter has combat advantage against the target).	
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)		
The goblin cutter shifts 1 square.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Goblin	
Str 14 (+2)	Dex 17 (+3)	Wis 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 8 (-1)	Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, short sword		

Trash Hulk (T)		Level 4 Elite Soldier
Large aberrant animate (construct)		XP 350
Initiative +1	Senses Perception +1; darkvision	
Stinking Refuse aura 1; each enemy that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its turn.		
HP 120; Bloodied 60		
Saving Throws +2		
AC 20; Fortitude 18, Reflex 12, Will 13		
Immune disease, poison, sleep		
Speed 5; can't shift		
Action Points 1		
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)	Reach 2; +11 vs. AC; 1d10 + 4 damage and the target is knocked prone.	
⊕ Garbage in, Garbage Out (standard; at-will)	The trash hulk makes a slam attack against 2 creatures within reach. If it hits with the first slam attack, it can also pull that target 1 square. If it hits with the second slam attack, it can also push the target 1 square.	
⊕ Take Out the Trash (standard; recharge Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ)	The trash hulk moves its speed and can move through enemies' spaces. When it enters a creature's space (ally or enemy), the golem makes a slam attack against that creature. It can attack each creature only once during this movement. At the end of its movement, it can slide one enemy adjacent to it into another unoccupied square adjacent to it.	
Death Slump (when reduced to 0 hit points)		
The trash hulk collapses into a pile of garbage. Until cleared, the space it occupied is difficult terrain, and any nongoblin creature that makes an attack while within that space takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.		
Stable Footing		
The trash hulk ignores difficult terrain.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 24 (+9)	Dex 5 (-1)	Wis 9 (+1)
Con 20 (+7)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 1 (-4)

TACTICS

These goblin mess cooks have developed outlandish appetites. Their jaws can open unnaturally wide, and their teeth have grown long and fanglike. They wait for the trash hulk to engage an enemy, then hack at that target with their cleavers and knives. The goblin cutters attempt to flank enemies, using the trash hulk for cover as much as possible.

The trash hulk attacks aggressively. It does not treat goblins as allies or enemies, but it does not attack them unless they are caught in *take out the trash*.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Bright.

Fire Pit: A fire blazes in a shallow depression in the cave floor. A narrow crack in the ceiling allows smoke to escape. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the fire takes 1d6 fire damage.

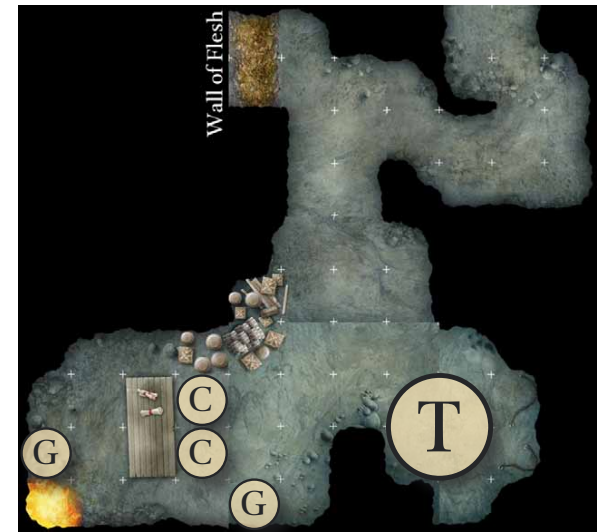
Fleshy Wall: One of the tunnels that must have led to living areas has been sealed with a strangely pulsing, fleshlike greenish stone. This material is 1 foot thick and as hard as stone (AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12; hp 120), and it regenerates 5 hit points at the start of its turn if damaged. A nasty greenish fluid spurts from it when it takes damage. If the characters manage to break through this barrier, they find the living areas abandoned. (The wall absorbed the goblins.)

Supplies: Small heaps of bags, pots, jars, and loose foodstuffs are scattered on the floor. These squares are difficult terrain.

Work Table: This is a heavy table made of a slab of stone propped on wooden legs. If tipped over, the top slides off into an adjacent space; any creature in that space must make a DC 12 Acrobatics check. If the check fails, the creature takes 1d6 damage. The stone slab can be propped up to form a barrier, providing cover to creatures behind it (or superior cover to prone creatures).

A creature can jump onto the table (DC 7 Athletics). Creatures on the table gain a +1 bonus to melee attack rolls against creatures on the floor.

Treasure: Rooting through the heaps of garbage and (including the remains of the trash hulk) uncovers a flask that turns out not to be empty. It contains a *potion of healing*. In addition, the goblin mess cooks are carrying a total of 35 gp and 90 sp. Nothing in the kitchen is fit to eat, but the cleavers can serve as handaxes and the carving knives as daggers.



AREA 4. TAINTED CAVE

Encounter Level 5 (1,150 XP)

SETUP

This is the heart of the corruption, and the creatures that inhabit this place are barely recognizable as the goblins they once were.

Glork, corrupt goblin chieftain (G)

2 corrupt goblin cutters (C)

2 corrupt goblin warriors (W)

1 goblin mass (M)

1 tainted pool hazard

The goblin mass starts the encounter submerged in the pool. Do not place it on the map until it attacks or a character detects its presence.

When the characters reach the cave entrance, read:

This large cave is dimly lit by the lurid glow from a large pool at its center and glistening metallic blobs on the walls. The oily-looking water shines an eerie purple. Several goblins stand about the pool, although they have an odd appearance and do not carry weapons.

At the back of the chamber, a putrid-looking creature that might once have been a goblin shouts a curse and orders the others forward. A dripping blade protrudes from the end of one arm, and on the other is a fleshy disk.

When Glork claimed this cavern, she moved her family into it along with a few trusted retainers. Long exposure to the emanations of meteorite's bizarre energy has transformed the cave's inhabitants horribly. They are now all considered aberrant creatures. Glork has become a bloated, deformed monstrosity, her armor and weapons absorbed into her flesh. The remaining goblins typically slept in a heap near the pool; during one sleep period, the entire group became melded into a shapeless mass. It still obeys Glork, however.

Perception Check

DC 17: *The pool's surface seems to swirl, as though something had been dropped in recently.*

DC 22: *Beneath the surface is a horrific mass of squirming flesh.*

Arcana Check

DC 12: *A sickly sensation seems to pulse through this area. It is far stronger here than in previous chambers.*

DC 17: *The source of the corruption seems to be the weird pool in the cave's center.*

When the goblin mass attacks or emerges, read:

From the pool lurches a horrific mass of flesh, seemingly made of dozens of goblins melded together.

Glork (G)		Level 5 Soldier
Small aberrant humanoid, goblin		XP 200
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +3; darkvision	
HP 63; Bloodied 31		
AC 21; Fortitude 19, Reflex 15, Will 17		
Speed 5		
⬇ Vicious Longsword (standard; at-will) ⬆ Weapon		
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage (crit 1d12 + 14), and the target is marked until the end of Glork's next turn.		
⬇ Corrupting Strike (standard; encounter) ⬆ Weapon		
+8 vs. Fortitude; targets an enemy marked by Glork; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed and weakened (save ends both). <i>Afterspell:</i> The target takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude until the end of Glork's next turn.		
⬅ Unearthly Shriek (standard; encounter) ⬆ Psychic		
Close burst 3; targets non-aberrant creatures; +10 vs. Will; 3d8 + 4 psychic damage.		
Spawn Corrupt Minion (move, while within 5 squares of a goblin mass; recharge Ⓜ Ⓜ)		
Glork causes the goblin mass to spawn a corrupt goblin cutter. The corrupt goblin cutter appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the goblin mass and makes a melee or ranged basic attack as a free action. Thereafter it acts immediately after Glork's initiative count. Characters do not earn experience for killing corrupt goblin cutters summoned in this way.		
Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)		
Glork shifts 1 square.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, Goblin	
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 15 (+4)	Wis 12 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	Int 11 (+2)	Cha 18 (+6)
Equipment chainmail, +1 vicious longsword		

Goblin Mass (M) **Level 6 Elite Brute**
 Large aberrant animate, goblin XP 500

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
Clutching Claws aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura is slowed until the end of its turn. Each enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.
HP 182; **Bloodied** 91
Saving Throws +2
AC 17; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16
Resist 5 psychic
Speed 2, swim 2; can't shift
Action Points 1

⊕ **Horrific Embrace** (standard; at-will)
 +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed. The goblin mass can have up to two creatures grabbed at the same time.

⊕ **Many-Armed Horror** (standard; at-will)
 The goblin mass makes a *horrific embrace* attack against each enemy adjacent to it.

⊕ **Absorb** (standard, usable only while the goblin mass has a creature grabbed; at-will) ⬠ **Healing**
 +7 vs. Fortitude; targets one or two creatures grabbed by the mass; the target is pulled into the goblin mass's space and takes ongoing 5 damage until it is expelled. If it has a creature absorbed at the start of its turn, the goblin mass gains 5 temporary hit points. The goblin mass can move normally while creatures are engulfed within it.

While absorbed, the target has line of sight and line of effect only to the goblin mass, and no creature has line of sight or line of effect to the target. The target can make only at-will attacks. When any target drops to 0 hp or below while absorbed, the goblin mass regains 45 hit points. An absorbed target can escape by succeeding on a DC 20 Athletics or Acrobatics check. If the goblin mass takes 16 or more damage from a single attack, all absorbed targets are expelled into unoccupied squares adjacent to the goblin mass; absorbed creatures are also expelled when the goblin mass drops to 0 hit points.

The goblin mass can instead absorb a goblin corpse by moving into its space. At the start of its next turn, the mass regains 10 hit points.

⬠ **Spawn Corrupt Goblin** (move; recharge Ⓜ Ⓜ)
 A corrupt goblin warrior appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the goblin mass and makes a melee or ranged basic attack as a free action. Thereafter it acts on the goblin mass's initiative count. The goblin mass loses 10 hit points.

⬠ **Death Burst** (when reduced to 0 hit points; encounter)
 Close burst 1; +7 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 damage. The area of the burst is filled with dismembered goblin parts and is difficult terrain.

Alignment Evil **Languages** –
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 7 (+1) **Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 21 (+8) **Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 2 (-1)

2 Corrupt Goblin Cutters (C) **Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
 Small aberrant humanoid XP 25 each

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 11
Speed 6

⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will) ⬠ **Necrotic**
 +6 vs. AC; 4 necrotic damage (5 necrotic damage if the corrupt goblin cutter has combat advantage against the target)..

Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
 The corrupt goblin cutter shifts 1 square.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, Goblin
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 19 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 7 (-2)

2 Corrupt Goblin Warriors (W) **Level 1 Skirmisher**
 Small aberrant humanoid XP 100 each

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 30; **Bloodied** 15
AC 17; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 6

⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will) ⬠ **Necrotic**
 +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage.

⚔ **Hurl Flesh** (standard; encounter) ⬠ **Necrotic**
 Ranged 5/10; +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage

Reintegrate (move; only while adjacent to a goblin mass; encounter) ⬠ **Healing**
 The corrupt goblin warrior regains 7 hit points.

Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
 The corrupt goblin warrior shifts 1 square.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, Goblin
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 7 (-2)

Tainted Pool (P) **Level 5 Lurker**
 Hazard XP 200

The oily, swirling waters of this glowing pool are strangely alluring.

Hazard: When creatures come close to the pool, they are struck by a compulsion to enter its waters. The pool saps the strength of creatures in it.

Perception
 No check is necessary to notice the pool.
Additional Skill: Arcana
 ⬠ DC 17: The character recognizes that the pool and the area around it is hazardous, in addition to being the focus of the concentrated chaos energy suffusing the area.
Initiative +7

Trigger
 The pool triggers when a nonaberrant creature comes within 3 squares of the origin square (marked on the map). When triggered, the hazard makes an attack against the triggering creature. It is no longer active after triggering but recharges slowly over time so that it can retrigger in a subsequent encounter.

Attack
Opportunity Action **Close burst** 3
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +6 vs. Will
Hit: The target is affected by a compulsion to enter the pool's water (save ends). It moves to the nearest space within the pool as a free action. While under the compulsion, the target remains in the pool and can take no action other than moving to another pool square. Any creature that starts its turn in a pool square loses a healing surge; a creature that has no healing surges remaining instead loses hit points equal to its healing surge value.

Countermeasures
 ⬠ Arcana (DC 17); standard action; the character suppresses the compulsion effect, allowing the affected creature to make a saving throw. If the creature saves, it can move half its speed as a free action.

TACTICS

Nearly mindless, the goblin mass exists only to incorporate more flesh into itself. It lurks in the pool until a living creature gets close enough to attack, then grabs it and absorbs it into its pulsing mass. When threatened or in need of assistance, it spawns a corrupt goblin warrior. Doing so weakens it, so it resorts to this action only when sorely pressed, preferably after it has absorbed a creature.

Glork does not hesitate to pull corrupt minions from the mass whenever she can. She uses *corrupting strike* to weaken enemies and reduce their ability to resist absorption by the goblin mass. When surrounded or when three or more enemies are within range, she lets loose with *unearthly shriek*.

The corrupt goblin cutters and warriors gang up on a single enemy and take advantage of *goblin tactics* to achieve flanking positions, using the goblin mass to help flank when they can. They don't have the survival instinct of normal goblins, though, and do not retreat even when the odds are heavily against them.

SKILL CHALLENGE: PLUGGING THE LEAK

The characters try to temporarily seal the planar wound to limit the influence of the meteorite until a permanent solution can be found.

This skill challenge can take place during or after the combat encounter. Completing it before the encounter is over should make the fight easier, since it removes some of the corrupted abilities from the creatures here. Even if it is performed after the fight, there is a time limit—too long exposure to the warping effects of the chaos “leak” will permanently corrupt the characters as well. The leak is focused on the pool in the middle of the cave.

Glork does her best to interfere with these efforts, directing her attacks against arcane characters in particular.

Level: 4 (XP 175).

Complexity: 1 (4 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Endurance, Nature, special

Arcana (DC 17; standard action): The character channels arcane power to strengthen the barriers between planes.

Endurance (DC 17; standard action): The character draws on his or her own life energy to patch the weak point. On a failure, the character loses a healing surge. A character can use a *madstone* to negate the healing surge loss. Each character can gain only 1 success in this way.

Nature (DC 17; standard action): The character reinforces the surrounding reality to enclose and diminish the planar wound.

Special: Channel Divinity (no check; standard action): The character channels divine power to enforce order on this riven part of the world. This requires a use of channel divinity and counts as an automatic success. Only 1 success can be gained in this way.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Heal, Thievery, special

Dungeoneering (DC 12; standard action): The character recalls information about aberrant creatures that provides further insight into sealing the wound, granting a +2 bonus to the next Arcana check made during the skill challenge. Success with this check also reveals that Glork and the goblin mass will be unable to spawn new corrupt goblins if the wound is healed.

Thievery (DC 17; standard action): The character draws on knowledge of magical traps to suggest ways of dealing with the threat. Success grants a +2 bonus to the next check using any of the primary skills.

Special: Using a sample of the glowmetal (whether taken from the cave walls or using one of the hexer's glowmetal items) as part of the skill challenge reduces the DCs of all primary skill checks by 2.

Conclusion: If the characters succeed in suppressing the chaos leak, the cave's inhabitants are easier to defeat. Otherwise, they cannot stop the meteorite's influence.

Success: If the characters earn four successes, they are able to reduce the influence of the meteorite. Glork and the goblin mass are no longer able to spawn corrupt goblins, nor can the goblin mass reincorporate fallen goblins into itself.

Failure: If the characters accumulate 3 failures, they are no longer able to stabilize the chaos wound. Each character loses a healing surge as the rift pulls at their life essence. Other solutions to the problem become necessary (see “Conclusion” below).

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The area is dimly lit by the eerily shining pool and by nodules of glowmetal in the walls.

Bedding: Glork sleeps in a rat's nest of accumulated trash on top of a filthy bedroll. The square containing her bedding is difficult terrain.

Pool: This shallow body of water (no more than 5 feet at the deepest) also glows with a strange purple hue. It is a site of concentrated chaotic residue left over from the meteorite's passage through the Scar. The pool is difficult terrain for creatures tall enough to wade through it.

Glork keeps her personal wealth in an oiled sack weighted down with stones in the center of the pool.

Treasure: Glork's longsword was absorbed into her mutated form but can be cut free. It is a *+1 vicious longsword*. Her "shield" is actually a mass of bone and flesh that was once her hand and forearm. It cannot be wielded and is worth nothing other than its gruesome scholarly interest. Her personal treasury contains 75 gp and two imperfect greenish diamonds, each worth 100 gp.

The glowmetal might be the key to forming a permanent seal of the pool, which continues to radiate energy that could corrupt any future inhabitants of these caves. Arcane scholars are likewise interested in acquiring samples. Collecting some nodules fetches 200 gp from someone who recognizes its potential. However, glowmetal is dangerous to stay in contact with over a long time. See the "Treasure" entry in area 1.

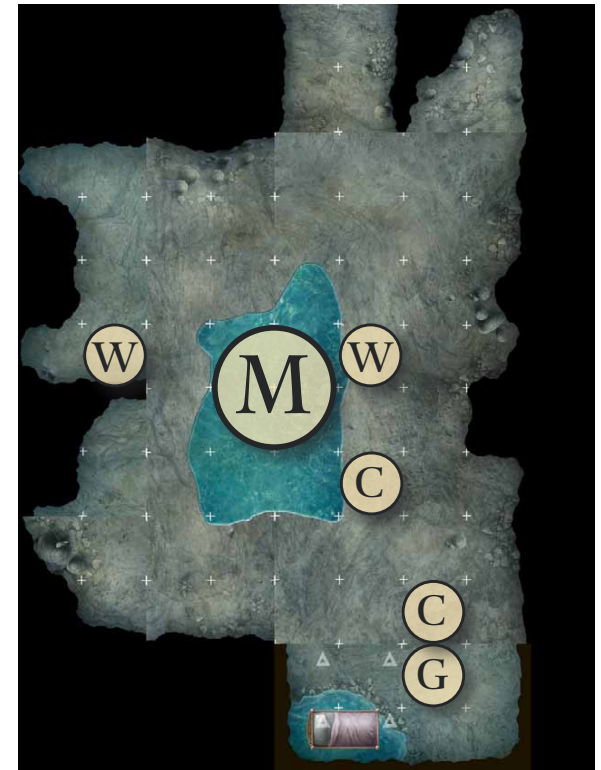
CONCLUSION

If the characters manage to suppress the chaos leak, they temporarily prevent further corruption from affecting these caves. The weak point is not completely repaired, though; only a special ritual can permanently seal it. The characters might be sent on additional missions to acquire materials necessary for this ritual.

If they defeated the monsters but were unable to patch the wound, the problem will arise again as other natural creatures wander into the caves. The wound might develop into a full-blown planar rift, bringing aberrant horrors from the Far Realm into the world. Until a sealing ritual can be performed, it will be necessary to seal off the caverns and stand guard to prevent other beings from entering—or leaving.

About the Author

Jennifer Clarke Wilkes has been editing just about everything at Wizards of the Coast since 1995, and does a fair bit of writing too. Her recent credits include *Draconomicon™*, *Chromatic Dragons*, *Divine Power™*, and *Wizards Presents: Worlds and Monsters*. When not editing, she is gaming and feeding her inner goblin.



NIGHTMARES UNLEASHED

A SIDE TREK FOR PLAYER CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 5TH LEVEL

By Craig A. Campbell

illustration by Craig J. Spearing

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The dream is always the same. The woman walks, alone, through a darkened forest. No birds chirp. No insects buzz. No beasties skitter through the brush. She shivers, then coughs. Her coughs continue, each louder and more violent than the last until they become like physical blows to her body. A stream of smoke pours out of her mouth and swirls across the ground. In moments, it takes the form of a seven-foot tall winged, horned, humanoid holding a flaming blade. Beyond it stand more shadowy, indistinct forms. The creature looks into the woman's eyes, into her soul, and speaks: "She must not live." It raises its fiery sword, but the woman turns away and flees. Briars tear at her clothes, and she tries to scream but can't. She stumbles and falls. As she rolls onto her back, the menacing figure steps over her and swings its sword down . . . and the dreamer awakens, her heart racing, her face streaming with tears.



HEROIC

1-10

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Redra Galliston always wondered why her mother, Kirstal, had nightmares every night.

When Redra was ten, her mother described the dream in detail. Kirstal explained to her daughter that she had been plagued by this nightmare every night for twenty years. Kirstal was certain that the nightmare was an omen, her own personal prophecy that shadowy assassins were searching for her. Though she had never seen any waking evidence of this, she was certain this was the reason.

When Redra was 10 and no longer needed constant attention from her mother, Kirstal gave in to the nightmare. For nearly three years, Redra cared for her mother, watching helplessly as the woman withered away from the fear and paranoia of her own unrealized prophecy.

On the night of Redra's thirteenth birthday, Kirstal awoke from a nightmare-plagued sleep, sprang to her feet, and ran screaming into the night. Redra followed, calling for her mother and trying to rouse her from her panic.

The pair raced through the forest near their home until Kirstal stumbled at the edge of a sinkhole and fell in. Redra arrived at the edge of the depression just in time to see a swarm of kruthiks tearing her mother to pieces, leaving only her bones behind.

Ignoring Redra, the kruthiks burrowed back into the earth as quickly as they had appeared, leaving behind a tunnel that led deep beneath the ground. Grief-stricken, Redra silently gathered her mother's remains and buried them in a small graveyard near their home.

The next night, when Redra fell asleep, she experienced her mother's nightmare, down to every

detail. She dreamt it again the next night and the night after that.

Hoping to avoid her mother's fate, Redra sought answers. Her plight led her to a wizard named Bartleby, whom she persuaded to tutor her. For seven years, Redra immersed herself in the study of magic in the hope of finding a way to rid herself of the cursed dream.

During her studies, Redra became convinced that the dream-monster was neither a symbol nor a generic fear but a specific, real entity whose words threatened an actual person—someone who must be protected. This realization bolstered Redra's resolve. She was struggling not only to save herself but to save another woman, too.

Three weeks ago, Redra discovered a ritual that opens a portal to the plane of dreams. This was the key she could use to end her nightmares forever . . . or so she thought.

Convinced that her trial was nearly over, Redra traveled to her mother's grave and cast the ritual at dusk. She intended to call forth the monster from her nightmare and confront it so that she could destroy it and free herself from its influence once and for all.

When the portal opened, a pack of kruthiks swarmed through. Instead of attacking, they scattered into the night, as if fleeing from something worse behind them. Then a terrifying beast of fire and smoke stepped from the realm of dreams.

The creature attacked Redra immediately. The young wizard fought with all her skill but was no match for the nightmare assassin. The monster believed Redra was dead when she fell, so it moved on to wreak havoc elsewhere.

Redra, however, was not dead, although she was very nearly so. Now she lies unconscious in a pool of blood. The portal remains open, and other things are stirring there.

The easiest hook for this adventure is for the player characters to be traveling or setting up camp in the waning light when they witness a bright flash of light followed by a thunderous boom from a mile or so away. Moments later, they hear the savage bellowing of Redra's nightmare monster, and a DC 17 Perception check will pick up muffled screams drifting on the breeze. A pulsing blue light can be seen faintly in the distance, marking the location of the dream portal and beckoning the player characters to investigate.

Alternatively, the player characters might be approached by Bartleby while in town. The old wizard explains to the player characters that his apprentice, Redra, has gone off to do something very foolish in the graveyard, though he doesn't quite know what she was planning to do. If your player characters balk at this errand of mercy, Bartleby offers a reasonable reward for Redra's safe return.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

This adventure consists of three encounters:

In the first encounter, the player characters run across a swarm of kruthiks who have come out of the dream-portal. This happens in and around a deadfall in a narrow gully near the graveyard where Redra lies bleeding.

In the second encounter, the player characters discover Redra in the graveyard. They can heal her, calm her down, and question her regarding what happened, which will lead them to the final encounter.

In the third encounter, the player characters track Redra's nightmare, a spectral assassin cambion hellsword which, along with some other monsters from the dream realm, are wreaking havoc on the edge of Redra's hometown.

ENCOUNTER 1: SKITTERS IN THE DARK

Encounter Level 4 (911 XP)

SETUP

2 kruthik adults (A)

3 kruthik young (Y)

6 kruthik hatchlings (H)

A pack of kruthiks escaped through the portal from the plane of dream and are roaming the land looking for food. The player characters encounter them in a gully while making their way toward the glow of the dream-portal.

When characters are on their way toward the blue glow, read the following:

You've come to the banks of a gully lining a small riverbed. The gully varies from 30 to 40 feet wide. Its sides drop sharply to the gully floor 10 feet below, which is thickly overgrown with thorny brush.

If characters climb down into the gully and try to hack their way through the thorns, they'll find it tough going; see Features of the Area below.

If characters look for another way across, ask for Perception checks. This is an easy (DC 7) check, but don't tell the players that. The character with the highest roll spots a fallen tree spanning the gully about 50 yards to their left.

Staging for this encounter is important. If the log bridge is offered too blatantly as the best or only way across the gully, players will immediately sense a trap. Describe the steep, thorn-filled gully as a significant obstacle between them and the strange disturbance. When characters find the log bridge, point out that crossing it without falling into the thorns will require an Acrobatics skill check, but the log is sturdy and thick. Let players make their plan, decide who goes first, and describe any other special precautions. Then have the first character make an Acrobatics check to cross. The log is more than 1 foot wide, so the DC for this check is only 12. The character falls if the roll is 7 or less (DMG pg. 180); on a roll of 8-11, they don't move and can try again.

While the characters are preparing to cross, the kruthiks are preparing to attack. Wait until the kruthiks actually attack before setting up the encounter map. They strike when approximately half of the characters are on each bank and someone is halfway across the bridge.

If any characters are actively standing guard during the crossing, have them make Perception checks against the kruthiks' Stealth check (+5). If no one is on the alert for danger, then match the kruthiks' Stealth check against the characters' passive Perception. If characters fail to spot the kruthiks, then the creatures gain surprise. If someone notices the kruthiks, read the following:

You spot movement in the brush below the bank and hear sounds of clicking and chittering. Then a swarm of four-legged, vaguely reptilian creatures breaks from the gully. Their daggerlike legs slash the air as they lunge toward you.

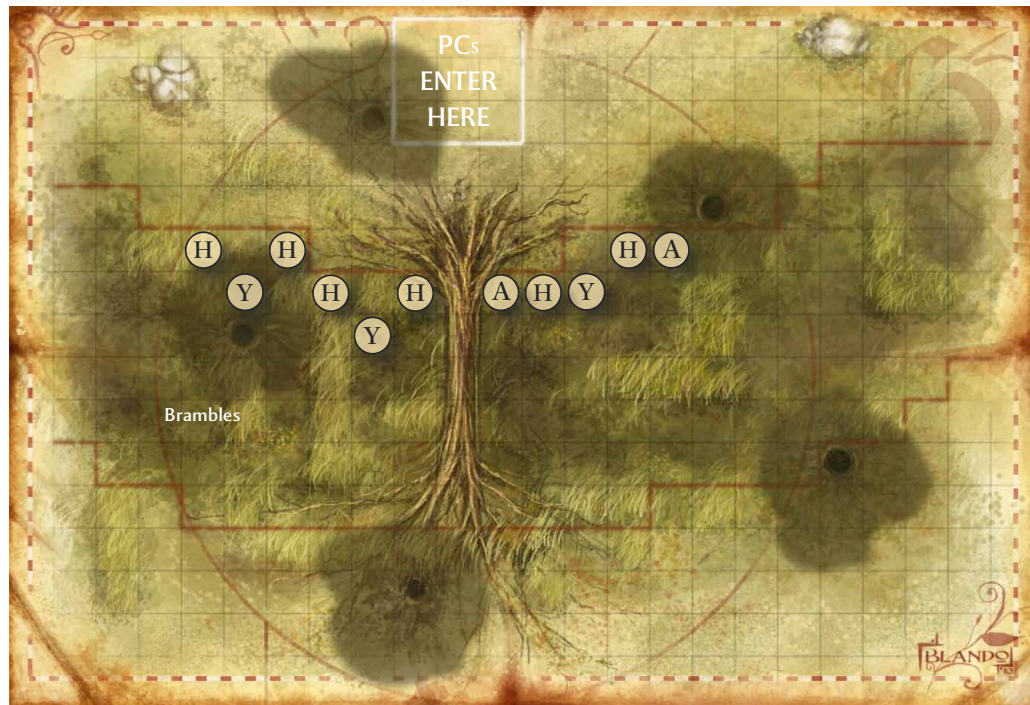
TACTICS

The kruthiks are nonintelligent but possess a pack cunning. They always flank when possible and maneuver to make the most of their *gnashing aura*.

On their first turn, the kruthiks boil up out of the brush, all onto the same side of the gully. The hatchlings swarm the characters, charging if possible. The young tend to move after the hatchlings in order to gain the best flanking positions. The adults begin combat with *toxic spikes* in order to slow promising targets (someone on the log is a prime candidate) and then enter melee.

This fight can be an easy win for the characters if the kruthiks are mishandled. The kruthiks have two advantages, and you should make the most of them. If characters are surprised, they can be hemmed in. If the kruthiks launch their attack properly, they can trap half of the characters on one side of the gully and tear them up while only one or two kruthiks prevent the rest of the characters from crossing the log to help. This should be a frightening experience for the characters who are trapped and ought to spur their friends to heroic rescue efforts.

The kruthiks' positions on the map are suggestions. Start them near the opposite bank if they can cause more damage against that group.



FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The area is dimly lit.

Gully Walls: The walls of the gully are 10 feet high and sloped at a 60-degree angle on both sides. Climbing up or down the gully wall requires a DC 12 Athletics check. Failure results in the creature falling into the gully and landing prone. The kruthiks have a climb speed, so they can move up or down the gully walls without impediment.

Log Bridge: Creatures can move across the log bridge at half speed but must make a DC 12 Acrobatics check to keep their footing. On a roll of 7 or less, the character falls into the gully. On a roll of 8-11, they don't move but can try again with their next move action. The kruthiks' climb speed allows them to ignore this impediment.

Thick Underbrush: Some squares of the gully bed are choked with thorny brush, as indicated on the map. The brambles are hindering terrain—a character can enter a bramble square without difficulty but must make an Athletics check (DC 12) to leave one. If the check fails, the character is immobilized until the beginning of his next turn. If the check succeeds, the character is slowed until the beginning of his next turn. The kruthiks are not hindered, thanks to their tough hide.

2 Kruthik Adults (A)		Level 4 Brute
Medium natural beast (reptile)		XP 175 each
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +4; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
Gnashing Horde aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.		
HP 67; Bloodied 33		
AC 17; Fortitude 14, Reflex 15, Will 13		
Speed 6, burrow 3 (tunneling), climb 6		
⊕ Claw (standard, at-will)		
+8 vs AC; 1d10+3 damage.		
✂ Toxic Spikes (standard, recharge ☒ ☒) ♦ Poison		
The kruthik makes 2 attacks against two different targets: ranged 5; +7 vs AC; 1d8+4 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages -
Str 17 (+5)	Dex 18 (+6)	Wis 12 (+3)
Con 17 (+5)	Int 4 (-1)	Cha 8 (+1)

3 Kruthik Young (Y)		Level 2 Brute
Small natural beast (reptile)		XP 125 each
Initiative +4	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
Gnashing Horde aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.		
HP 43; Bloodied 21		
AC 15; Fortitude 13, Reflex 14, Will 11		
Speed 8, burrow 2 (tunneling), climb 8		
⊕ Claw (standard, at-will)		
+5 vs AC; 1d8+2 damage.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages -
Str 15 (+3)	Dex 16 (+4)	Wis 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 4 (-2)	Cha 6 (-1)

6 Kruthik Hatchlings (H)		Level 2 Minion
Small natural beast (reptile)		XP 31 each
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
Gnashing Horde aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.		
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 15; Fortitude 13, Reflex 15, Will 12		
Speed 8, burrow 2 (tunneling), climb 8		
⊕ Claw (standard, at-will)		
+5 vs AC; 4 damage.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages -
Str 13 (+2)	Dex 16 (+4)	Wis 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 4 (-2)	Cha 6 (-1)

ENCOUNTER 2: THE CRAZED WOMAN AND THE DREAM-PORTAL

Roleplaying Encounter

SETUP

The player characters have followed the blue glow to the dream-portal and discovered Redra lying on the ground, bloody and beaten near the magical gate. Her encounter with the spectral assassin has left her weak, confused, and a bit crazed. When the characters first speak to her, she babbles incoherently, sometimes reciting magical formulas, other times fixing a terrified stare somewhere in the sky or over the characters' shoulders. Keep things tense. Play this up in order to prompt the player characters to calm her and treat her wounds before questioning her.

For example, if the characters approach Redra with weapons drawn, she becomes adversarial and tries to crawl away. If the characters stow their weapons and approach her carefully, she will be more trusting.

This encounter is not a skill challenge, but a few skill checks will make Redra easier to talk to. If the players don't realize Redra's fragile state of mind, you can help them deal with her by prompting them with skill checks appropriate to their characters' predilections.

When the characters find Redra, read:

The forest opens up to reveal a small graveyard. Three-dozen grave markers of stone and wood dot the clearing. The scene is lit by the ghostly blue glow that you saw earlier. The light comes from a blue miasma of magical energy swirling above one of the wooden markers. A hazy, alien landscape can be dimly seen within the pulsing glow. A young, human woman lies on the ground near the swirling light. She is covered in blood. As you approach, her head lolls toward you, and her eyes open wide. She cackles loudly and speaks with labored breath. "Not . . . dead."

CALMING REDRA

Redra is in deep psychic shock from being attacked. Three successful skill checks can calm her down and allow the characters to question her. She won't answer any questions until at least one skill check succeeds. She will answer one question after each of the first two successful skill checks before lapsing back into incoherent babbling or traumatized bewilderment. After the third skill check, she becomes responsive but remains weak and somewhat confused.

The most likely uses for skills are listed below. Use these as a guide when players come up with creative ideas of their own. Adjust your roleplaying of Redra's lucidity based on how the characters roleplay this encounter, even if they haven't made all of the skill checks yet.

Diplomacy (DC 12) if characters try to allay Redra's suspicions and assure her that they only want to help.

Heal (DC 10) if characters treat Redra's wounds.

Insight (DC 15) if characters try to deduce what happened from Redra's babblings and address her fears directly.

Arcana (DC 15) if characters try to gain a clue directly from the swirling blue portal and use that information to calm her.

WHAT REDRA KNOWS

Redra can share the following information with the characters. Feel free to expand these items with information from the *Adventure Background*.

If Redra is calm, she provides coherent information.

If she has not been calmed down, Redra provides information in a crazed, disjointed manner. Examples of both are provided in each entry.

- ◆ Redra was attacked by a man-like shadow wearing armor and carrying a fiery longsword. (“The nightmare is here! Red eyes and red death! Red eyes and red blade!”)
- ◆ She has dreamt of the creature for seven years. It menaces her in her dreams nightly and she can’t escape it. (“Sleep, die, sleep, die, sleep, die, sleep, die! Two thousand and five hundred nights! Don’t let me die again!”)
- ◆ The creature came from the portal, which she opened. It attacked her and then headed toward her town. It must have thought she was dead. (“The nightmare is real! It was never only a dream. I’m not dead! Bartleby! Mother!”)
- ◆ Redra’s mother dreamed of the creature for years. The nightmares drove her mad and ultimately led to her death. (“Mother’s dead. I saw. Now it’s mine. All mine. All mine!”)
- ◆ Other creatures came through with the monster: a pack of the same, vaguely reptilian creatures that killed her mother and two other nightmarish creatures that followed the shadowy thing. (“Not alone. Death is not alone! It has friends. Not friends . . . fiends! They killed mother!”)

By the time the characters are done helping and questioning Redra, they should know that a devil-like creature and other monsters came through the portal and are headed toward the sleeping village. If they handled the scene well, they could know much more than that.

EXPANDING THE ENCOUNTER

If you wish to expand this encounter, you can have more nightmarish creatures emerge from the portal.

A particularly effective use of this would be to tailor it to the player characters. By this point in your campaign, you may already know what frightens the characters. If not, it can’t hurt to ask some leading questions before the game begins. Select monsters (or frightening situations) based on those answers. When to present these manifested fears is up to you. If possible, try to do more than simply bringing in more monsters to fight. It’s ideal if you can force the characters to choose between ignoring their own nightmares in order to pursue Redra’s attacker, or facing and perhaps conquering their personal fears but at the expense of innocent lives in the village.

ENCOUNTER 3: REDRA'S NIGHTMARE

Encounter Level 6 (1,400 XP)

SETUP

- 1 Redra's nightmare (N)
- 2 foulspawn manglers (F)
- 1 villager (V)

Redra's nightmare creature is accompanied by a pair of foulspawn manglers. By the time the player characters catch up with them, they have reached the edge of Redra's village. The creatures are intent upon laying waste to the village, and they don't see the player characters coming.

If the characters initiate combat from the "PCs Start" area on the map, they get a surprise round. If they choose to sneak further toward the village, they can get closer but run the risk of the foulspawn manglers attacking the hapless villager near the garden.

When the player characters approach the village, read:

Before you lies a small village consisting of single-story wooden homes. Two fenced areas, one a garden, the other likely a corral, stand next to small, sparsely-decorated houses. What you imagine might be an otherwise idyllic hometown is now marred by blood-curdling screams of fear as several villagers flee the scene. Ahead, you see a pair of short, spindly, four-armed humanoids bearing daggers. They don't appear to notice you.

Perception Check

DC 14: A villager crouches on the far side of a garden fence. One of the four-armed monsters looks at the poor man and licks its lips.

DC 22: You hear a great bellow from the far side of one of the houses. A deep voice echoes, "Flee, little ones, or be the next morsel on my table!"

TACTICS

Redra's nightmare begins combat out of sight but moves toward and attacks the player characters as soon as they make their presence known. It starts by using *whirlwind charge* against as many player characters as possible. Then it falls back on *invisible killer* whenever *assassin's fading* gives it the opportunity. It flanks with the foulspawn manglers whenever possible.

The foulspawn manglers make their fist attacks against the villager in front of them, who has AC 12 and 1 hit point. When that NPC is dead or as soon as the player characters attack them (regardless of whether they hit), the foulspawn attack the player characters. They keep on the move and flank with each other and Redra's nightmare when possible. While they are not directly subservient to Redra's nightmare, they recognize its power and take orders from it.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The area is dimly lit.

Houses: The houses are simple wooden structures with gabled roofs. Climbing up or down the exterior wall of a house requires a DC 15 Athletics check. Though the roofs are sloped, the slopes are not steep; moving across the roofs does not cost extra or require skill checks.

Garden and Corral Fences: The fences around the garden and corral are 3 feet tall and made of sturdy wood. Getting over a fence requires a DC 12 Acrobatics check (with a running start) or a DC 12 Athletics check (no running start). Each fenced area contains an unlocked gate, as noted on the map.

Water Trough: The water trough in the corral is difficult terrain requiring one extra square of movement to enter.



Well: A well takes up one square near the corral. It is encircled by a 3-foot stone wall and has no awning over it. A creature can step up onto the wall without any difficulty. Staying atop the wall while fighting requires balancing (PH pg. 180): the character grants combat advantage and must make an Acrobatics check (DC 20) to keep his footing if he takes damage. If the Acrobatics check fails, the character has a 50/50 chance of either falling prone on the ground in an adjacent square or backward into the well. A character falling into the well gets the standard saving roll to catch the edge, which leaves him prone but still atop the well. The well is 20 feet deep with 5 feet of water at the bottom. Climbing back out requires a DC 15 Athletics check. The pulley at the top of the well will not support the weight of a character, if someone tries climbing the rope.

Brush: Some squares are overgrown with brush, as indicated on the map. These squares are difficult terrain requiring one extra square of movement to enter.

CONCLUSION

Once the player characters have defeated Redra's nightmare and the foulspawn manglers, the village is safe. A search of the body of Redra's nightmare reveals a 100 gp gem and a magic item chosen by the DM and appropriate to the party level.

If the player characters do not escort Redra from the graveyard, she returns to the village a few hours later. Once she rests and gets a hot meal, she is willing to discuss everything that happened at more length. Fill in any undisclosed information from the *Adventure Background*.

The dream-portal closes two hours after Redra cast the ritual.

Redra's Nightmare (N)	Level 8 Elite Lurker
Medium immortal humanoid (devil)	XP 700
Initiative +12	Senses Perception +7, darkvision
HP 140; Bloodied 70	
AC 22; Fortitude 20, Reflex 18, Will 22	
Resist 10 fire	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6, fly 8 (clumsy)	
Action Points 1	
⊕ Greatsword (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire, Weapon	
+13 vs. AC; 1d10 + 2 damage. If Redra's nightmare is invisible, the target also takes 2d6 extra damage and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).	
Whirlwind Charge (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire, Weapon	
Redra's nightmare moves its speed, then makes a <i>greatsword</i> attack against each enemy adjacent to it.	
Assassin's Fading (standard; at-will) ♦ Illusion	
Redra's nightmare becomes invisible until the end of its next turn, and it can shift 2 squares.	
Triumphant Surge	
Redra's nightmare gains 5 temporary hit points each time it bloodies an enemy or reduces an enemy to 0 or fewer hit points.	
Invisible Killer	
While invisible, Redra's nightmare scores a critical hit on a roll of 19-20.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Supernal
Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +14, Stealth +13	
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 18 (+8) Wis 16 (+7)
Con 16 (+7)	Int 10 (+4) Cha 21 (+9)
Equipment chainmail, greatsword	

2 Foulspawn Manglers (F)	Level 8 Skirmisher
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 350 each
Initiative +9	Senses Perception +7; low-light vision
HP 86; Bloodied 43	
AC 22 (24 while bloodied); Fortitude 19, Reflex 20 (22 while bloodied), Will 19	
Speed 7 (9 while bloodied)	
⊕ Bone Dagger (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+13 vs AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.	
‡ Dagger Dance (standard, encounter; recharges when first bloodied) ♦ Weapon	
The foulspawn mangler makes 4 <i>bone dagger</i> attacks and shifts 1 square after each attack.	
↘ Bone Daggers (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon	
The foulspawn mangler makes 2 <i>bone dagger</i> attacks: ranged 5/10; +13 vs AC; 1d4 + 3 damage with each hit.	
Combat Advantage	
The foulspawn mangler deals an extra 2d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Mangler's Mobility	
The foulspawn mangler gains a +5 racial bonus to AC against opportunity attacks provoked by movement.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 10
Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +12	
Str 13 (+5)	Dex 17 (+7) Wis 6 (+2)
Con 14 (+6)	Int 10 (+4) Cha 14 (+6)
Equipment: dagger x8	

BUILDING ON THIS ADVENTURE

This side trek can kick off a larger story arc.

- ◆ The words “she must not live,” spoken by the monster in Redra’s dream, have greater meaning. The monster is referring to a daughter that Redra will bear. The nightmare monster serves a devil currently trapped in the plane of dream who believes that it will be killed by Redra’s daughter when she is grown. It plagued Redra’s mother’s dreams in an attempt to drive Kirstal insane before she gave birth to Redra, and now it hopes to do the same to Redra. In this option, either Redra can be pregnant at the time of this adventure, or she may cross the characters’ paths again at a later date.
- ◆ The nightmare monster can’t actually die, because it is a creation of Redra’s imagination that can be recreated whenever she dreams. Once defeated, it reforms in the plane of dreams and begins plaguing Redra’s sleep again. The characters must help Redra find a way to expunge the memory of these dreams from her mind. Until she does so, she’ll never be rid of the nightmares or the creature’s threat. The nightmare monster’s words, “she must not live,” refer to its belief that killing Redra will grant it a real life of its own in the world, rather than only in one mortal’s dreams.

- ◆ Over time, Redra grows more and more unhinged by her experience with the nightmare monster, and her dreams tap into that plane ever more powerfully. Each night, she subconsciously plumbs that realm in the hope of finding someone or something that can transform her into a nightmare creature. She will return at some point to the player characters’ lives as a powerful adversary. Redra might even invade their dreams. Here, the words spoken by her nightmare refer to Redra dying metaphorically and becoming a nightmare creature herself.
- ◆ Redra continues to have the nightmare and eventually seeks the player characters to help her eliminate the source of the dark dream. This might happen immediately after this adventure or later, when the player characters are better-equipped to help her. A powerful nightmare creature is responsible for Redra’s dream. This creature plagues Redra and others with nightmares in order to feed upon their nocturnal fear. The inherited nature of the dream (passing from Kirstal to Redra) is simply a way for the creature to invoke even greater fear in its target. In time, this creature will gain enough strength to emerge from the plane of dreams and destroy Redra and many others. The player characters must travel to the plane of dreams and destroy the abomination in its home in order to free Redra from the curse.

About the Author

Craig Campbell was suckered into playing D&D in 1990 when some of his college friends told him he needed to get out less. In the time since, he’s devoured many sourcebooks, transforming himself into a zombie-like creature that constantly seeks to tell amazing stories and eat the brains of his players. Hailing from northeastern Wisconsin (go Packers!), he currently lives in Marietta, Georgia with his all-consuming love of bad movies.



DECK OF MANY THINGS



By Rodney Thompson

illustrations by William O'Connor

Of all artifacts to grace the world with their presence, perhaps none is more dangerous than the infamous *Deck of Many Things*. The artifact has appeared in every edition of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*®, and it first appeared in the *GREYHAWK*® supplement in 1975. Through each of its iterations, the *Deck of Many Things* has remained a dangerous and chaotic artifact. This 4th Edition update of the classic artifact retains much of the traditional version's chaotic nature while bringing its mechanics more in line with what modern Dungeon Masters can use in their games.

THE DECK OF MANY THINGS

The *Deck of Many Things* is appropriate for paragon-level characters.

The *Deck of Many Things* is, by itself, an object that holds within it the potential for either great ruin or great reward. Though the true origins of the *Deck of Many Things* have been lost to the ages, many historians believe that the artifact was originally a gift from a powerful and ancient archfey to a long-forgotten emperor. The archfey knew that the emperor was extremely superstitious and could not resist reading

his own fortunes within the cards. Some hold the *Deck of Many Things* responsible for shattering that ancient empire and giving rise to powerful warlords that vied for control of the remnants of that empire. The *Deck of Many Things* passes from hand to hand, bringing the low the mighty and elevating the meek (and sometimes vice versa).

The Deck of Many Things Paragon Level

This ornate deck of 22 cards is a tool of the forces of chaos and anarchy. It frequently appears when the world has grown too calm, or when someone has grown too powerful, sowing chaos wherever it lands.

The *Deck of Many Things* is a +5 *magic tome* implement with the following properties and powers.

Implement (Tome)

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +5d12 damage

Property: Sorcerers with the Chaos Power class feature can use the *Deck of Many Things* as an implement for sorcerer powers and sorcerer paragon path powers.

Property: You cannot be dominated.

Power (Encounter): Free Action. You alter the fortunes of your enemies, forcing an enemy within 10 squares to reroll one attack roll, skill check, or saving throw it made, taking the result you choose.

Power (Daily): Minor Action. Roll a d20. Once before the end of the encounter, you can replace any d20 roll made by an ally or an enemy within 5 squares of you with your d20 roll.

GOALS OF THE DECK OF MANY THINGS

- ◆ Sow chaos and discord throughout the world.
- ◆ Be present at events of great importance, and then add a chaotic element to the proceedings of those events to alter the fortunes of all involved.
- ◆ Topple powerful leaders (good or evil) and cause far-spanning organizations to crumble.

ROLEPLAYING THE DECK OF MANY THINGS

The *Deck of Many Things* is an agent of chaos that does its work subtly and by working through those who possess it. The *Deck* wants to use its owner as its agent, making temptation its greatest weapon. Whenever the owner is contemplating a risky action, it might try to tempt its owner by providing signs that it thinks that taking the risk would be a good idea—even if the chances of success are slim.

The *Deck* never communicates overtly, but occasionally the top card of the *Deck* might flip over on its own to reveal whether the *Deck* is pleased or displeased (this does not trigger the *Deck*'s drawn card effect).

Additionally, while the owner is holding the *Deck*, that character occasionally sees visions of multiple

possible outcomes of any given action, showing the way luck can affect the outcome.

CONCORDANCE

Starting Score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner is unaligned	+1
Owner has the fey origin	+1
Owner is reduced to 0 hp	+1
Owner kills a solo monster that is higher level (maximum 1/day)	+1
Owner obtains a magic item (maximum 1/level)	-1d10
Owner goes a day without casting an arcane spell (maximum 1/day)	-1

PLEASED (16-20)

“Hmm, seems like the cards are falling in my favor these days.”

When the owner has finally done the Deck’s bidding, or enough of it anyways, the Deck gives the owner the chance to draw from it with better-than-average odds of avoiding some of the more ruinous cards.

Property: Any time you roll a result of 1 on any die, reroll that die until you have a result other than 1.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You draw three cards from the Deck of Many Things, and then choose any one card you drew, resolving the effect of that card as determined below. The Deck of Many Things then vanishes and is lost (see “Moving On,” below).

SATISFIED (12-15)

“There’s wisdom in the cards; if only you could see it.”

The Deck of Many Things is pleased with the chaos that the owner is sowing, and begins trying to tempt its owner into drawing from it by sweetening the deal with multiple draws.

Property: Any time you roll a result of 1 on any die (except a d20), reroll that die until you have a result other than 1.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You draw two cards from the Deck of Many Things, and then choose any one card you drew, resolving the effect of that card as determined below. The Deck of Many Things then vanishes and is lost (see “Moving On,” below).

NORMAL (5-11)

“Curious, the cards show me how big a role luck plays in our lives.”

When first drawn from its container, the Deck conveys little more than a sense that so much in the world is a matter of luck, and not skill.

CASTING FORTUNES

At the Dungeon Master’s discretion, the Deck of Many Things can invite its owner to perform a reading for individuals for whom a turn of fortune can influence fate. How might the world turn if a beggar draws the Sun or the Gem, or an emperor in the middle of a vast war draws the Void or the Donjon? The Deck desires these readings.

When the Dungeon Master sees an opportunity, he or she can nudge the owner of the Deck toward performing a reading, preferring persons of great power and influence, but it is the character’s choice to perform the reading. Doing so increases concordance by 2. The lucky (or unlucky) soul must consent to the reading, but need not know fully what that means. Mechanically, the player draws a single card on that person’s behalf, with the result of the card representing a full reading. The effect of the card takes place as if the person had drawn it, except the deck does not disappear.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You draw a card from the Deck of Many Things, and then resolve the effect of that card as determined below. The Deck of Many Things then vanishes and is lost (see “Moving On,” below).

UNSATISFIED (1-4)

“I’m afraid that it might not be a lucky time for me.”

An owner that rejects the Deck’s desires soon experiences a streak of bad, if harmless, luck. The luck is mostly an inconvenience for now, but the Deck wants to make sure the owner knows it is displeased.

Property: Any time you roll the maximum result on a die (except a d20), treat the result as a 1 instead.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You draw two cards from the Deck of Many Things, and then choose any one card you drew. You must choose a card with the Ruin descriptor if one was drawn. Resolve the effect of the chosen card, as described below. The Deck of Many Things then vanishes and is lost (see “Moving On,” below).

ANGERED (0 OR LOWER)

“The Deck shows me dark portents; my future is looking grim.”

An angered Deck of Many Things can be a dangerous item indeed. Anyone drawing from the Deck at this point is extremely likely to find ill luck befalling him or her.

Property: Any time you roll the maximum result on a die, treat the result as a 1 instead.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You draw three cards from the Deck of Many Things, and then choose any one card you drew. You must choose a card with the Ruin descriptor if one was drawn. Resolve the effect of the chosen card, as described below. The Deck of Many Things then vanishes and is lost (see “Moving On,” below).

MOVING ON

"It's gone! Vanished into thin air!"

The *Deck of Many Things* fades in and out of history, wreaking havoc and upsetting the order of things from time to time. It is an agent of chaos in an otherwise ordered world, and once someone has drawn from the *Deck of Many Things* it vanishes, never to be seen again by that person. It leaves behind only the fate chosen by the card that was drawn.

THE CARDS

Each card drawn from the *Deck of Many Things* has a special effect that triggers when it is drawn. Though the concordance score of the artifact determines how many cards are drawn, only one card triggers each draw. The effect of each drawn card is described below.

Some of the cards are marked as a Ruin. This helps determine which card's effect comes into play when the *Deck of Many Things* is unsatisfied or angered.

BALANCE

Ruin

You have been judged—and found wanting. You gain one of the following two minor quests, depending on your alignment. If you are unaligned, you can choose either quest.

If you are good or lawful good:

Minor Quest: A Walk on the Dark Side

To be truly a model for good, you must experience evil firsthand. You must slay or otherwise bring ruin to a specific good or lawful good creature (chosen by the Dungeon Master) of 21st level.

Until you complete this quest, you gain no XP rewards from other completed major or minor quests.

Quest XP: 3,200 XP, and if you choose to do so you can change your alignment to unaligned or evil

If you are evil or chaotic evil:

Minor Quest: A Shot at Redemption

None are so vile that they cannot earn redemption if their desire is true. You must pledge yourself to the service of a powerful good or lawful good creature (chosen by the Dungeon Master) of 21st level, and convince it to grant you spiritual clemency by performing a task it assigns.

Quest XP: 3,200 XP, and if you choose to do so you can change your alignment to unaligned or good

COMET

Double the XP award for the next major quest the party completes.

DONJON

Ruin

You are imprisoned by magic—which leaves you in a state of dreamless sleep—deep beneath the earth. Though your body vanishes, your magic items and other gear remain behind you. The party gains the following major quest:

Major Quest: Prison of the Donjon

The characters must find the location of your imprisonment. The prison is deep beneath the earth (possibly within a dungeon, or in a drow citadel in the Underdark). The characters must journey to that location, find your imprisoned body, and use the Remove Affliction ritual to free you from the prison.

Quest XP: 16,000 XP

EURYALE

Ruin

You take a -3 penalty to saving throws. Only the Remove Affliction ritual can remove this effect, but only after you roll a natural 20 on a saving throw.

FATES

You gain the *shelter of fate* legendary boon.

Shelter of Fate

Level 21

You feel the hand of fate hovering above you, sheltering you thanks to the magic of the Deck of Many Things.

Legendary Boon

Power (Consumable): No Action. Choose one of the following effects.

- ◆ One attack roll just made against you becomes an automatic natural 1.
- ◆ One saving throw you just failed becomes an automatic natural 20.
- ◆ One Athletics, Acrobatics, or Endurance check you just made becomes an automatic natural 20.

FLAMES

Ruin

You earn the enmity of a powerful being from another plane, and gain the following minor quest.

Minor Quest: Enmity of Flames

You must defeat the creature that has sworn enmity against you, which has vowed to slay you or plague your life in some way. The Dungeon Master choose the enemy, and it can be any 21st-level creature that is not an elite, solo, or minion from another plane, such as a ghaele of winter (*Monster Manual*, page 103), a marut blademaker (*Monster Manual*, page 185), a marut castigador (*Monster Manual 2*, page 162), a marut prosecutor (*Monster Manual 2*, page 162), a storm archon

tempest weaver (*Monster Manual 2*, page 17), or a cyclops feyblade (*Monster Manual 2*, page 40).

Until you complete this quest, you gain no XP rewards from other completed major or minor quests.

Quest XP: 3,200 XP

FOOL

Ruin

Any time you draw the Fool, before any choices are made you discard the Fool and draw a card off of the top of the *Deck of Many Things* until you draw a card with the Ruin descriptor. Keep only the last card drawn, then make any choices you are allowed.

GEM

You gain 225,000 gp worth of gold and gems.

IDIOT

Ruin

You take a -2 penalty to Intelligence checks and Intelligence-based attack rolls and skill checks. Only the Remove Affliction ritual can remove this effect, but only after you roll a natural 20 on an Intelligence-based attack roll or skill check.

Once this effect begins, you draw another card and gain its effect.

JESTER

Draw two more cards from the *Deck of Many Things*. If either of them has the Ruin descriptor, that card replaces the Jester as your chosen card (if both do, you must select one of those two cards). Otherwise, you can choose any other card from this draw (including the two you drew) to replace the Jester as your chosen card.

KEY

You gain a magic item (a weapon) of your choice, which must be of 21st level or lower.

KNIGHT

You gain the service of a companion character (see *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, page 31). The companion character is of the same race and gender as you, and he or she has a level equal to your level - 1. The companion character is summoned from elsewhere in the world, appears instantaneously, and knows that it has been summoned by powerful forces to aid you.

MOON

When you gain the benefit of the Moon card, you have 1 minute to choose any ritual. You instantly gain the benefit of having performed that chosen ritual with the maximum possible result (if the ritual allows for variable results). You do not expend any of the component costs for the ritual, and you gain the benefit instantaneously. You cannot choose any ritual that creates a permanent object, such as the *Enchant Magic Item* ritual.

ROGUE

Ruin

You earn the secret enmity of one of your companion characters (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 31), or another community or religious leader, chosen by the Dungeon Master. You do not learn of this person's enmity immediately, since it is secret, but you do gain the following quest:

Minor Quest: Rogue's Curse

You must discover the person who has been turned against you by the *Deck of Many Things* and either defeat that person or successfully persuade him or

A QUESTION OF ENMITY

Two of the cards in the *Deck of Many Things* earn the character the enmity of another being. In the case of the Flames card, the enmity should be more overt, and the character should experience this rivalry on multiple occasions. Seeking out the creature should not be a simple task, and the character should clash with the creature's allies and followers a few times before the quest is resolved. In the case of the Rogue card, this enmity is secret and should come from someone once thought of as a friend or ally. The Dungeon Master should wait for a dramatically appropriate moment to reveal this enmity, leaving the character guessing which of his or her allies is going to soon become a source of betrayal.

her to cease his or her enmity toward you. The person turned against you is either one of your companion characters, or another creature that is not an elite, solo, or minion, chosen by the Dungeon Master.

Until you complete this quest, you gain no XP rewards from other completed major or minor quests.

Quest XP: 3,200 XP

RUIN

Ruin

All your magic items turn into residuum equal to 80 percent of their purchase value.

SKULL

Ruin

Four sword wraiths (*Monster Manual*, page 167), a nightwalker (*Monster Manual*, page 197) and an

immolith demon (*Monster Manual*, page 56) appear and attack you and your allies immediately.

STAR

You gain the legendary boon, the *mark of the star*:

Mark of the Star

Level 21

The symbol of the Star card from the Deck of Many Things is permanently emblazoned upon your body.

Legendary Boon

Power (Daily): Free Action. Choose one ability score. Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls made using that ability score, and a +1 bonus to skill checks with skills that use that ability score.

SUN

You gain a magic item (a wondrous item) of your choice, which must be of 21st level or lower.

TALONS

Ruin

You cannot use magic item at-will, encounter, or daily powers. Only the Remove Affliction ritual can remove this effect, but only after you have given away a magic item of your level or higher.

THRONE

If you have a lair, keep, or other base of operations, you gain 225,000 gp worth of wondrous lair items (*Adventurer's Vault 2*, page 79) of your choosing. These items immediately appear anywhere you desire.

Alternatively, if you do not already have a lair, keep, or base of operations, you can choose for the party to gain the following major quest:

Major Quest: What's Rightfully Yours

The characters have been rewarded with a keep somewhere in the world to claim as their home.

However, the keep is currently in the hands of other creatures. The characters must go to the keep and claim it as their own, ousting those that currently inhabit it.

Quest XP: 16,000 XP

VIZIER

You gain the vision of the vizier legendary boon.

Vision of the Vizier

Level 21

The Deck of Many Things has blessed you with knowledge well beyond that possessed by other mortals.

Legendary Boon

Power (Consumable): Free Action. You instantly gain the benefit of having performed the Consult Oracle ritual or the Voice of Fate ritual with the maximum possible result. You do not expend any of the component costs for the ritual and learn the answers to your questions instantaneously. Once you have learned the answers to all your allotted questions, you lose this legendary boon.

THE VOID

Ruin

You fall unconscious and cannot be awakened. The party gains the following major quest:

Major Quest: Recovering the Prison

The characters must find the object in which your psyche is imprisoned. The prison is on another plane, and the characters must journey to that plane, find the object containing your psyche and recover it, and then break the object to release your psyche. Once the prison object is broken, you are no longer unconscious.

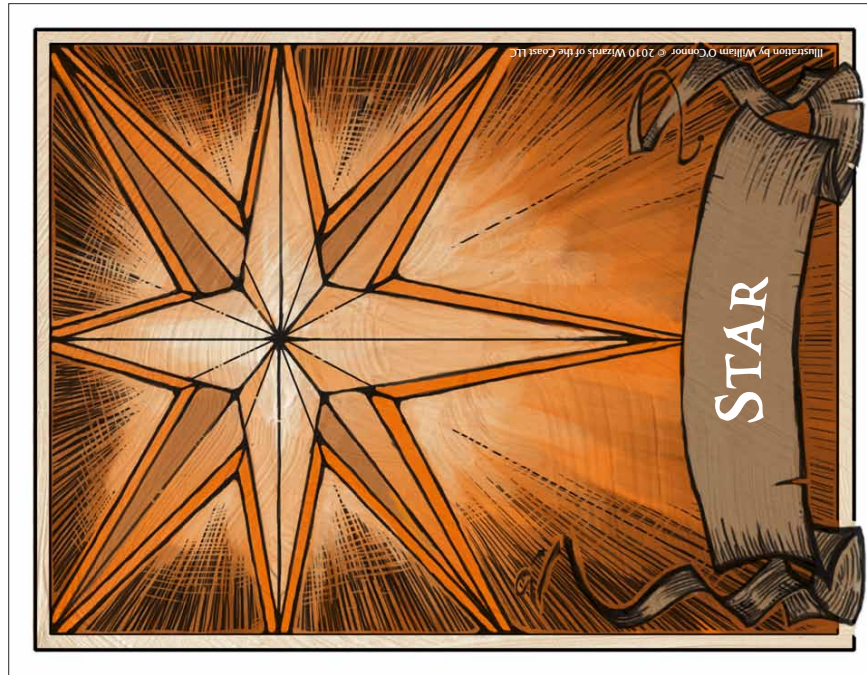
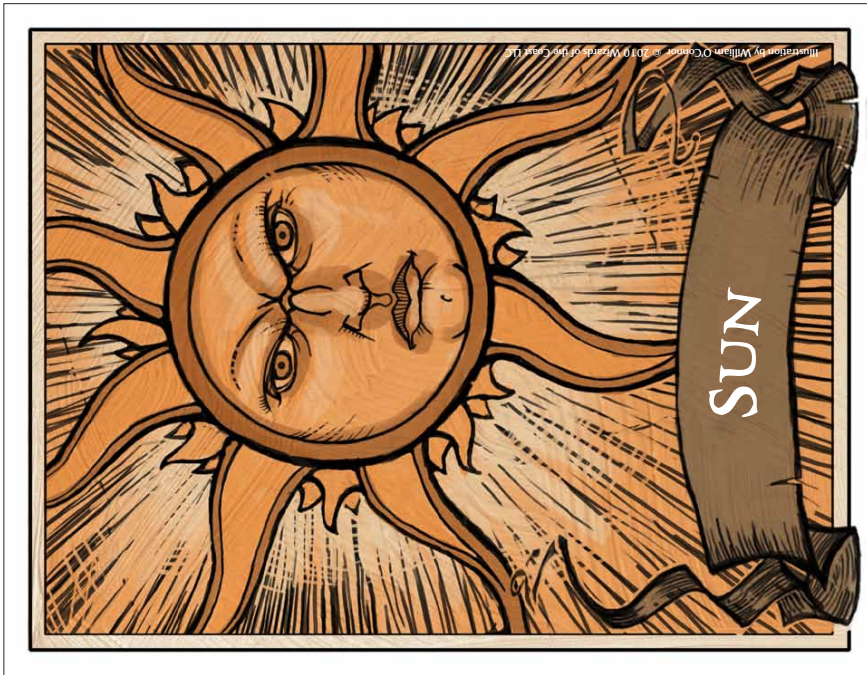
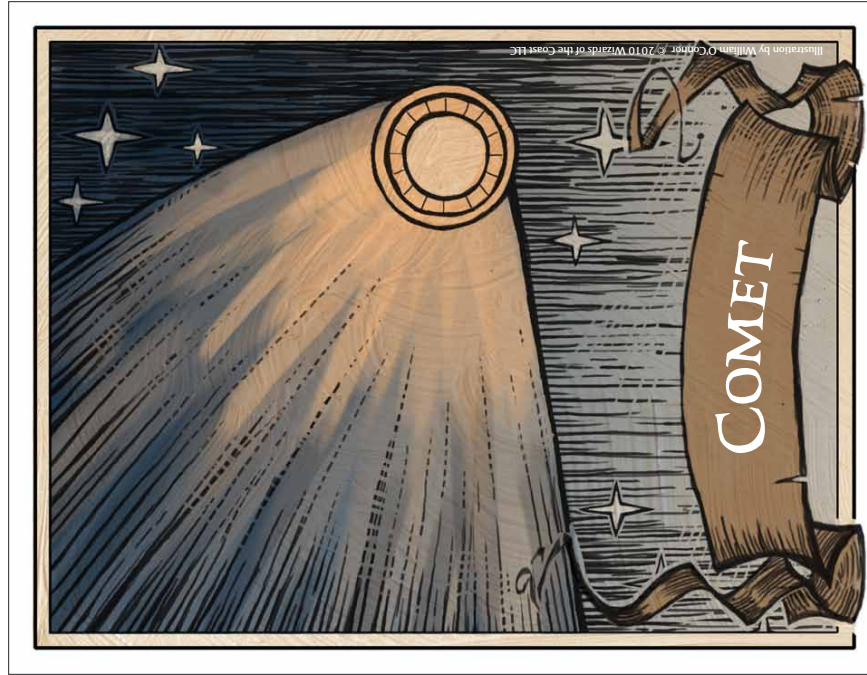
Quest XP: 16,000 XP

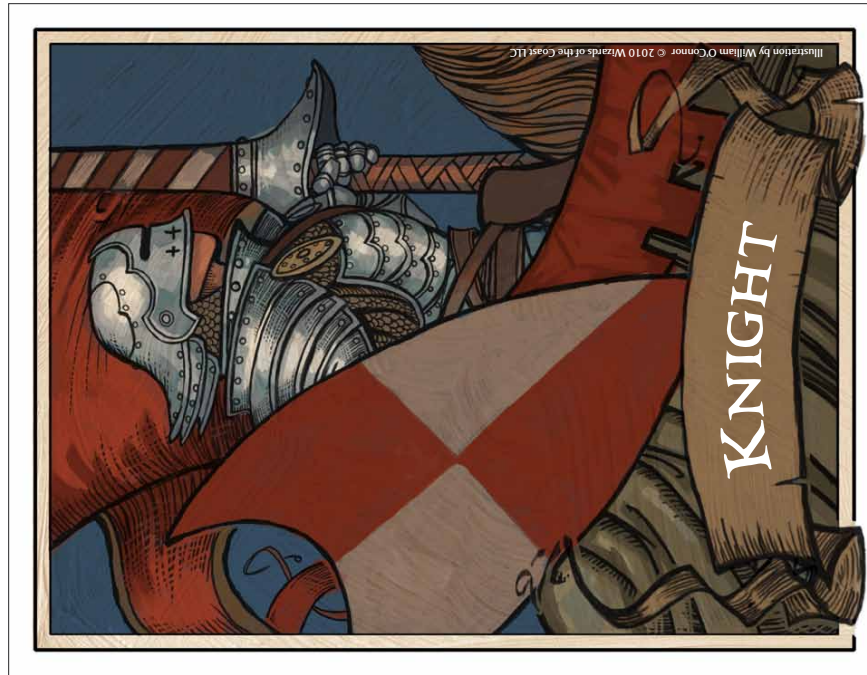
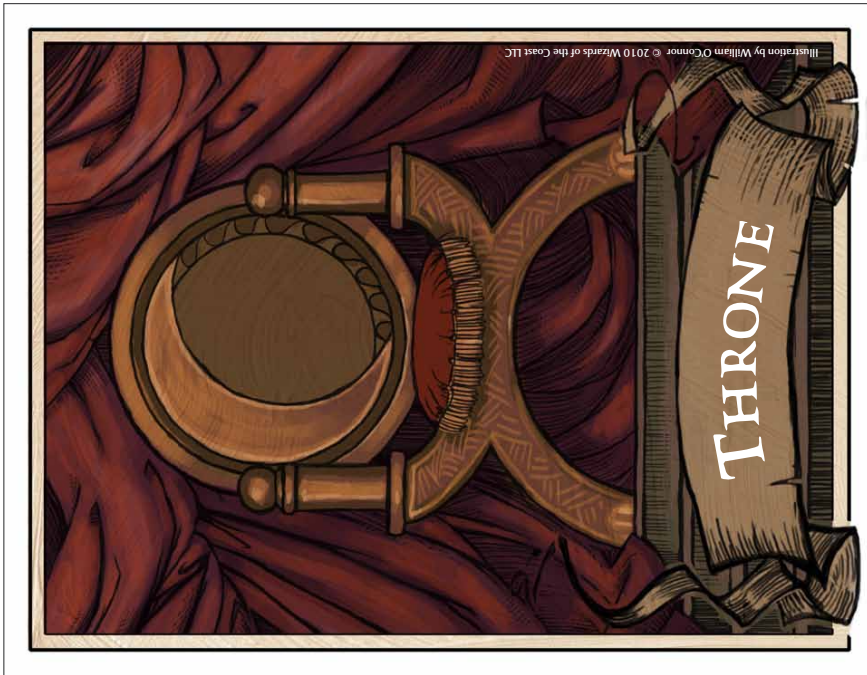
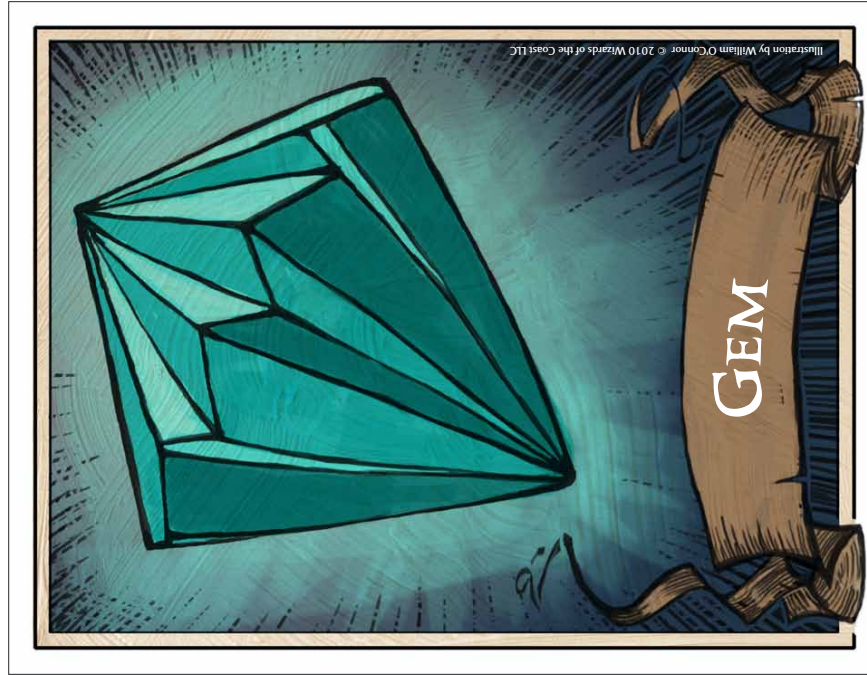
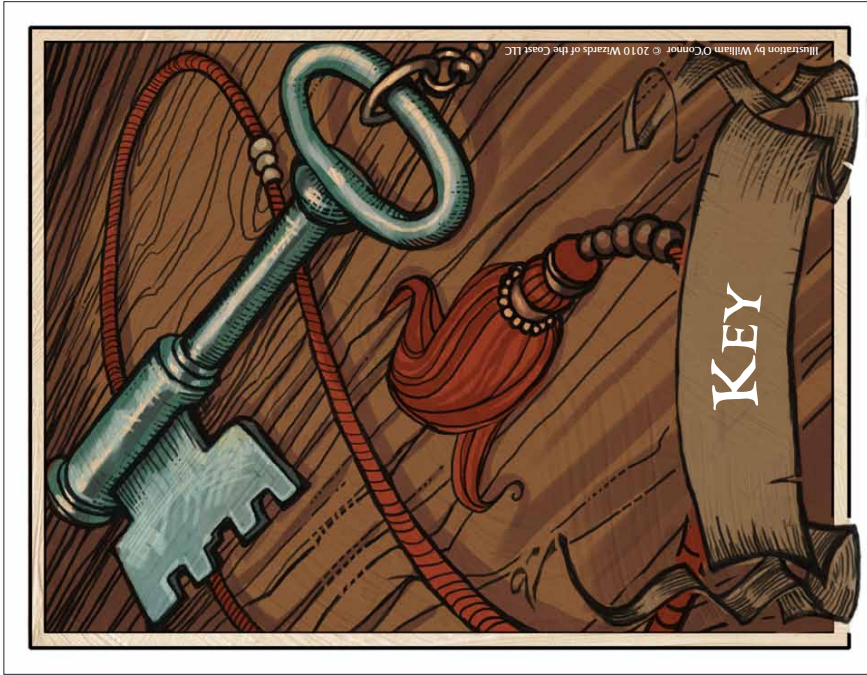
DONJON/THE VOID

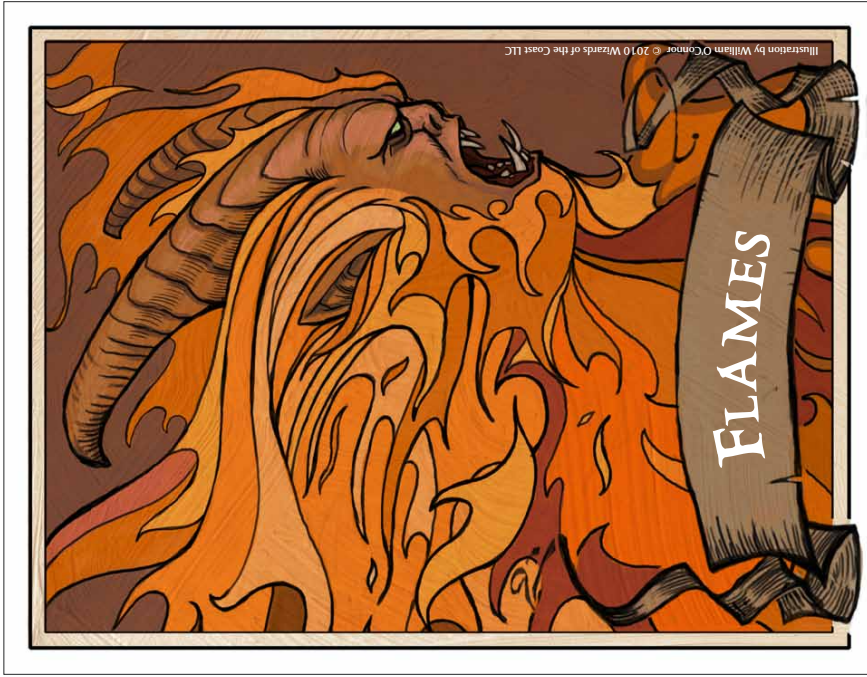
Two of the cards in the *Deck of Many Things*, the Donjon and the Void, each remove a character from the party, either physically or mentally. If a player gains the effect of one of these cards, you should allow the player to create a new character (at the same level as the character who drew from the *Deck of Many Things*) who joins the party soon after. This can be a good chance for the player to try out a race, class, or character archetype he or she has not played before, so don't be afraid to encourage the player to try something radically different from the character that is imprisoned. When the characters complete the major quest and rescue that player's character, give the player the option of continuing to play the surrogate character, or resuming play as the imprisoned character. If the player chooses the latter, apply any XP gained since the character was imprisoned to that character, in addition to any XP earned from the quest. That way, the player isn't punished for resuming the imprisoned character, and the story can continue as normal.

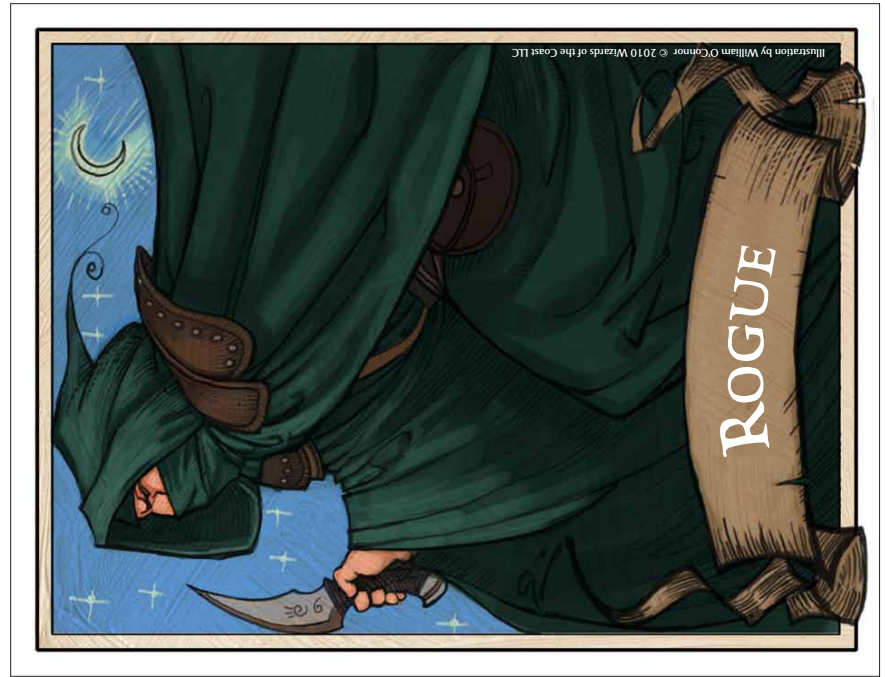
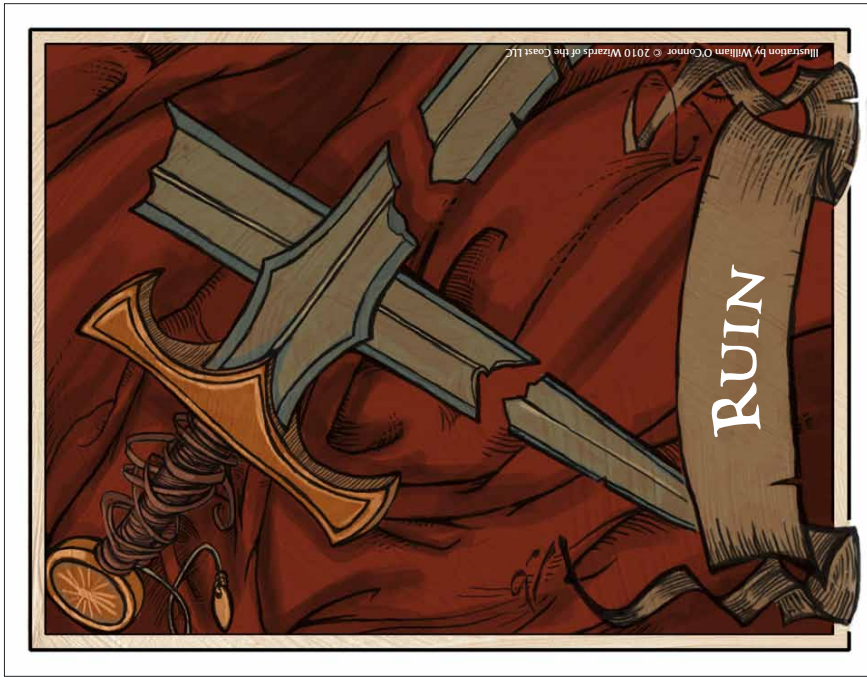
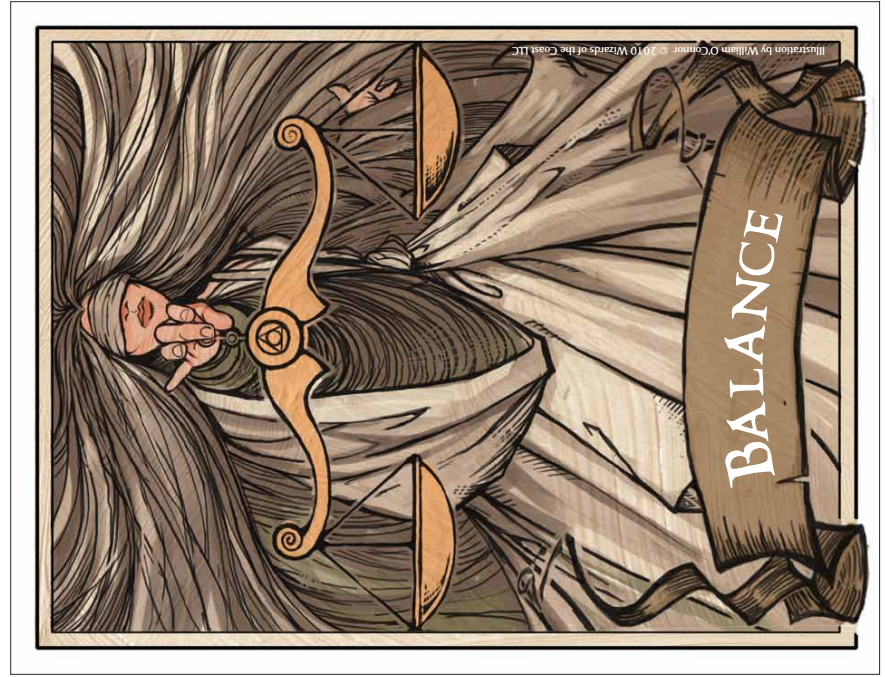
About the Author

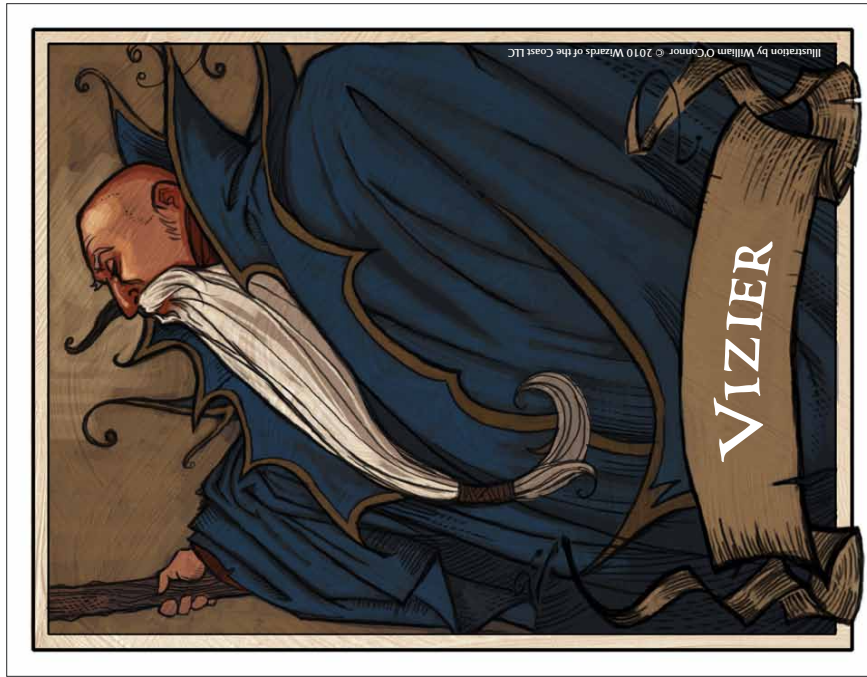
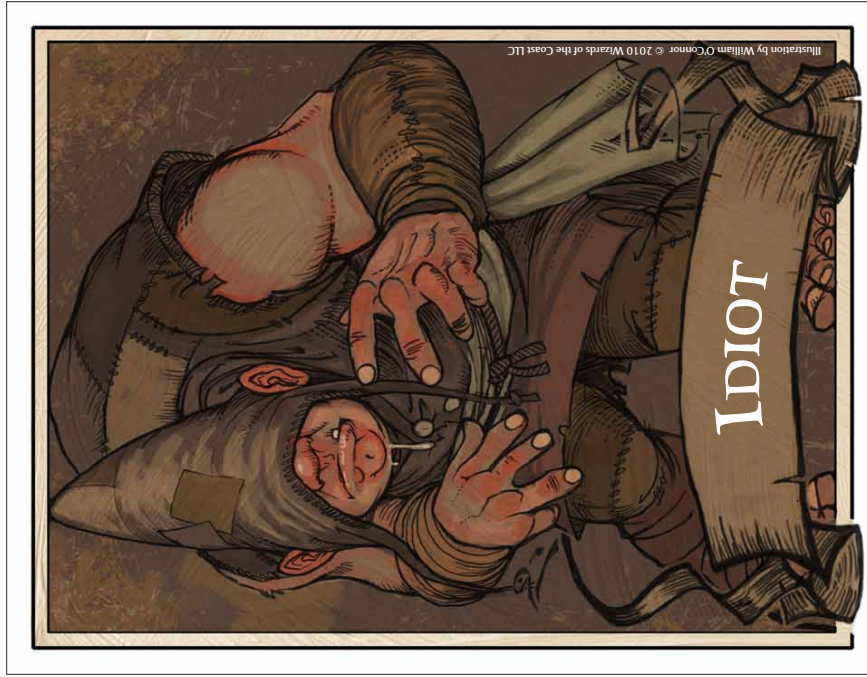
Rodney Thompson is an RPG developer and designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, TN, his credits for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game include the *Eberron® Campaign Guide* and *Martial Power™ 2*, and he is the lead developer for the *Dark Sun* campaign setting books. Rodney is also the lead designer and developer of all of the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition* books.

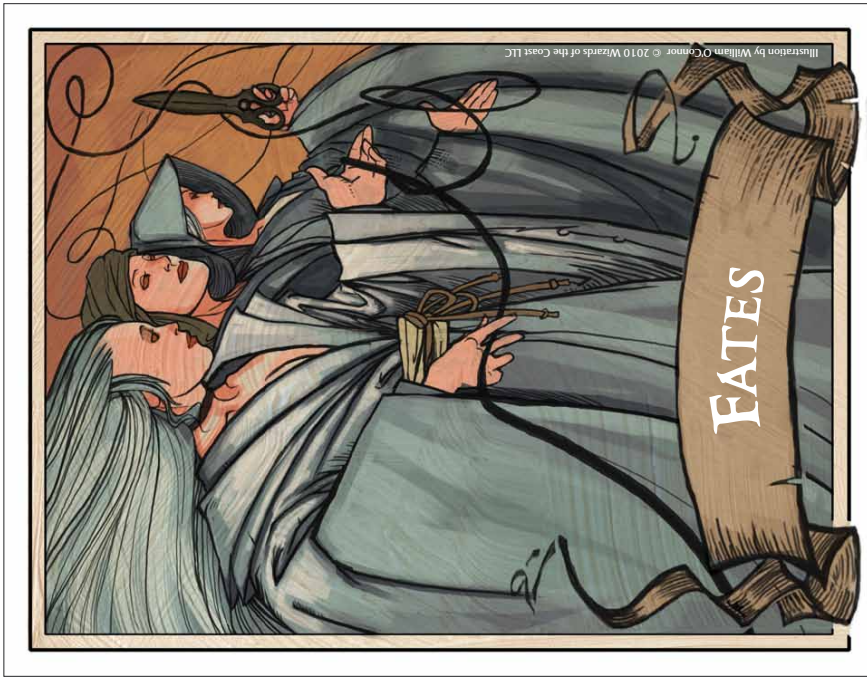
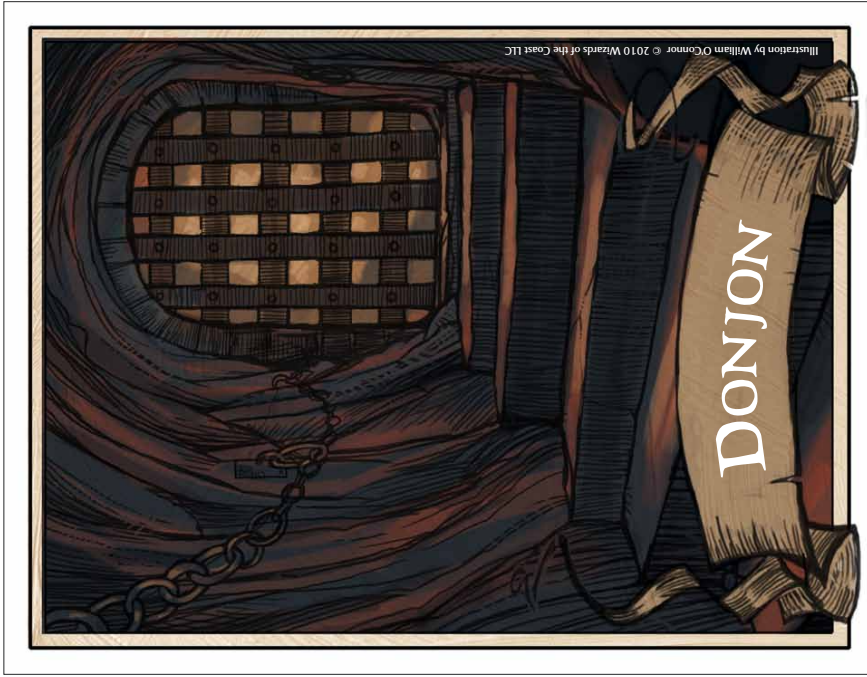














DEITIES & DEMIGODS:

TOROG

THE KING THAT CRAWLS

By Brian R. James

illustrations by Craig J. Spearing and Dave Allsop



The young god appeared helpless before the feral onslaught of the monstrous primordial. Over and over the deranged monster Gargash rammed his great horned skull into Torog's unarmored legs, crushing bone and rending flesh with each brutal strike. The searing pain would have been unbearable to most beings, including other immortals. However, in acts where others experienced horrific agony, Torog tasted only dull ecstasy.

More so than any divine being, Torog had been blessed with perfect health. Horrific wounds that would fell greater gods would regenerate and heal over in moments. Yet for all the benefits such fantastic power provided, Torog could feel little pleasure or pain. Feeling aloof and ostracized by his divine peers, Torog sought comfort and solace through his study of pain—insights gained primarily through self experimentation and the vivisection of mortals.

Laying there, pinned against the cavern wall and impaled by Gargash's great horns, Torog began to laugh—a genuine deep-bellied chuckle that had not escaped his lips in centuries. Then, willing his wicked blade into a free hand, Torog began to chop and hack at the immobilized primordial. One by one, the enraged deity severed Gargash's chitinous forelimbs and scourged the primordial with his own razorlike spines.

As Gargash felt his strength disappearing, he cursed Torog. With his last words, in guttural speech that the immortal could not understand, Gargash achieved a final spiteful act by sealing Torog's fate to the Underdark and ensuring the god's wounds would never heal.

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Torog is a malicious deity who revels in the pain and suffering of others. His bitterness and contempt for life stems from eons of imprisonment in the Underdark, a realm he resentfully claims as his own. From great torture dens deep beneath the earth, Torog commands legions of twisted, sadistic creatures that are ready to inflict their deity's will on the world.

Though other malign gods have a well-deserved reputation for malevolence and depravity, Torog stands apart if only for his proximity. While his divine fellows scheme upon their astral thrones, the King that Crawls lurks underfoot in the mortal world, capable and willing to directly impact current events. Torog's assaults on the surface world are legendary and serve as a lasting reminder that he could reach up at any time to smash an unsuspecting city to dust.

Unlike most deities, Torog does not create lesser aspects that mimic his shape and powers. Those that earn the favor or enmity of the King that Crawls deal with him in person. Even at his most amiable Torog is terrifying to behold. His hate-filled eyes drive daggers into your soul and his maddening voice makes all

but the stoutest individuals collapse before him in obeisance.

Neither is he pleasant to view.

Torog's body is crisscrossed with grievous wounds that never heal. From within the bloody ichors left in his wake spawn grotesque monstrosities resembling his favored

creatures: centipedes, leeches, roaches, and other vermin.



TOROG IN THE WORLD

Most civilized folk harbor an inborn fear of the King that Crawls. From a young age, nursery rhymes caution naughty children against misbehaving, warning that the King that Crawls will snatch them away while they sleep if they do not heed their parents. As the child grows into an adult, this adolescent fear never fully dissipates, because, unlike the bogeyman of our own children's tales, Torog is no imaginary beast. Torog's name is rarely spoken, not even as a curse, because legends claim that reciting the dark name of the King that Crawls dooms the speaker to being snatched up and dragged into Torog's torturous realm in the Underdark.

Despite Torog's nefarious reputation, all who travel underground are wise to appease the King that Crawls with tribute. Miners, spelunkers, and other subterranean explorers bury coins before earthen altars at tunnel entrances to curry favor with the King that Crawls. It's not uncommon for some city-states to dump great offerings of gold and silver into the Hole (page 9) to stave off Torog's wrath.

DISCIPLES OF THE KING THAT CRAWLS

Few are they whose ethos truly aligns to this depraved faith, the followers of which include slavers, torturers, and other sadists. Torog's faith has no formal structure or set doctrine, which has given rise to a limited number of disparate sects that operate under their own leadership and agendas. Though the faith remains repugnant to most civilized races, it has begun to take hold in a few debased nations where slavery is commonplace.

On the surface world, true clerics of the faith are few, but gaining in number. Torog's priests are as varied as his numerous sects. They do, however, share several common qualities among them. Since they do not fear pain or disfigurement, disciples of Torog are fearless in combat; striking boldly in melee where a more sensible opponent might withdraw. Most ritually scar or tattoo their bodies as a symbol of their devotion.

Novice devotees are known as the Taken, because most are abducted in service to the King that Crawls. Indoctrination teaches that every kidnapping strengthens unholy Torog, and as a result it is a Taken's sacred duty to perpetuate the practice. Higher ranking acolytes and adepts, known as tormentors and disciples of pain respectfully, are pledged to spread agony and suffering as they set out to enslave all to Torog's will.

Torog does not have much interest in his followers, seeing them as little more than pawns to be used and discarded at his whim. As such, all who serve the King that Crawls begin their service by being tortured. The few who brave both the mental and physical torment survive to enjoy high-ranking positions in his clergy. Those who fail are dissected and reassembled into a twisted servitor "race" known as the wrackspawn (*Underdark*, page 154)

CONSEQUENCE OF FAITH

Despite his general indifference to his flock, Torog does occasionally grant a divine boon to individuals that gain his attention. Most disciples don't wait for Torog's divine favor, instead taking the power for their own in the form of magical tattoos.

TOROG'S DIVINE BOON

Some say that those who enjoy *Torog's lamentation of the shackled* feel no pain as a result of severe injury, amputation, or acts of torture. Those wounds might still lead to death, but Torog grants his faithful composure during such horrid conditions.

More information on using boons as an alternate rewards can be found in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, page 139.

Torog's Lamentation of the Shackled Level 3+

Torog grants his boon to ardent disciples whose embrace pain and bondage. Only by pledging themselves body and soul to the King that Crawls does Torog release them from earthly restraints.

Lvl 3	680 gp	Lvl 18	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	2,125,000 gp

Divine Boon

Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to saving throws against the slowed, immobilized, and restrained conditions.

Level 8: +2 item bonus.

Level 13: +3 item bonus.

Level 18: +4 item bonus.

Level 23: +5 item bonus.

Level 28: +6 item bonus.

Power (Daily): Immediate Reaction. *Trigger:* You become slowed, immobilized or restrained. *Effect:* You teleport 2 squares and the triggering effect ends.

Level 8: Teleport 3 squares.

Level 13: Teleport 4 squares.

Level 18: Teleport 5 squares.

Level 23: Teleport 6 squares.

Level 28: Teleport 7 squares.

TATTOOS

In religious art, Torog is depicted as a manacled claw lurking beneath the surface, ready to reach up and snatch his enemies. This symbol is one of many tattooed by his unholy disciples. The most fervent devotees cover their entire bodies with such symbols, though only one can be magical at a time.

Additional information on magical tattoos can be found in *Adventurer's Vault 2*, page 83.

Tattoo of Bloodied Chains Level 7+

This tattoo shows a coiled length of bloodstained chain.

Lvl 7	2,600 gp	Lvl 27	1,625,000 gp
Lvl 17	65,000 gp		

Wondrous Item

Property: The first time you're bloodied by an attack during an encounter, the enemy that bloodied you is immobilized (save ends).

Level 17: The enemy takes a -2 penalty to saving throws against the immobilized effect.

Level 27: The enemy takes a -4 penalty to saving throws against the immobilized effect.

Tattoo of the Penitent Martyr Level 11

This tattoo depicts a pair of hands held together in prayer and bound with blood-red cord.

Wondrous Item 9,000 gp

Property: Once while using a daily attack power, when you miss with an attack roll, you can take damage equal twice the number of healing surges you have remaining. If you do so, you reroll the missed attack roll.

CULTS AND SECTS

Included here are sample cults and sects, each venerating the King that Crawls in a manner distinct from the next.

ORDER OF AMALGAMATION

One of the most abhorrent cults in service to the King that Crawls, the Order of Amalgamation seeks divine favor through acts of self mutilation and the grafting of monstrous limbs to their bodies (page 11).



Goal: Their unceasing aspiration to craft the perfect hybrid race drives the Order of Amalgamation to experiment upon a large and diverse assemblage of humanoid and beasts. Over the centuries, many ghastly abominations have been released into the wild, the result of failed breeding or other surgical experimentation. The hook horror (*Monster Manual*, page 158) is one of hundreds of monstrosities to have been born of this perverse cult.

Size: Tiny but widespread. Each cell is small, never having more than a dozen members at any one time.

Alignment: Chaotic evil.

Philosophy: *“Mortal bodies are flawed. Only through purposeful dissection and reassembly can perfection of form be achieved.”*

Leadership: Individual cells are commonly led by a wrackspawn surgeon (page 11). Otherwise, the ruling priest, who is afforded no special title, is the individual with the most grafts.

Headquarters: Given their abhorrent appearance, members of this order typically avoid high population areas, operating instead from remote wilderness lairs set among an abundance of wildlife that they can capture.

Membership Requirements: Most inductees are self-loathing introverts who engage in deliberate acts of self-cutting or flagellation. Pain-induced visions lead these individuals into the wilderness far from civilization where they are abducted by the order.

Activities: New acolytes are indoctrinated into the Order of Amalgamation through the Blessing of the Eviscerated: a grisly ritual in which the inductee willingly agrees to have a limb severed and replaced with a monstrous graft. If the graft takes they are welcomed into the Order; otherwise they are left to bleed out and die.

THE MASQUERADE

The Masquerade is a hedonistic guild that caters exclusively to the aristocracy. All the best revels are hosted by the Masquerade, and its elite constituents, represents the *crème de la crème* of high society.

Goal: Unlike many of Torog’s sects who revel only in inflicting physical pain, the Masquerade works diligently to understand the intimate details of their victim’s nature, and so know how to cause the most pain and mental anguish when needed.

Size: Tiny, but widespread in power. The Masquerade favors large metropolitan areas where it can spread like cancer among the city’s decadent nobility.

Alignment: Evil.

Philosophy: *“True pleasure is won only through pain.”*

Leadership: The Masquerade is led by an enigmatic female known only as the Red Lady—in fact an angel of torment (page 10) in service to Torog, though she conceals her origin by having amputated her own wings and covered her ethereal body in long flowing gowns. The Red Lady attends every revel but remains aloof from the proceedings. Only the highest ranking adepts of the sect can approach her. Many high profile members of the order are comely with no obvious scars or physical impairments. Such adherents masquerade as concubines or otherwise ingratiate themselves into positions of power throughout the city.

Headquarters: Sects of the Masquerade can be found in most large human cities; the greatest cells secretly flourishing in states with strict puritan governance. Despite their liturgy of inflicting pain and suffering, the Masquerade is prudent in concealing their activities from local authorities.

Membership Requirements: Devotees are lured into the cult through orgies of excessive revelry, drinking, and more intimate pursuits. Membership is highly



coveted and it’s not uncommon for unscrupulous gentry to murder or bribe their way into the society.

Activities: Within this secret society the bored aristocracy can play out their sadomasochistic fantasies openly and without reproach. The dark secret of the Masquerade is that membership is short lived. Once the devotee has outlived his or her usefulness to the Red Lady, either through draining of their financial assets or political influence, the dilettantes are enslaved and sent to one of Torog’s torture dens in the Underdark.

PILGRIMS OF THE SCARLET WASTES

Pilgrims of the Scarlet Wastes are itinerate wanderers, eschewing the manacles of civilization to lead a life of freedom and self reflection. Most in “civilized society” view the Pilgrims as unwashed heathens or roving folk with unbalanced minds who cry out against the supposed sins of civilization.

Goal: The tenets of their faith bring the Pilgrims into direct conflict with followers of Erathis.



Size: Small but growing. Roughly two score are numbered among this sect’s membership.

Alignment: Unaligned.

Philosophy: “Decadence in civilization leads inevitably to ruin and bondage. Only through strict self-discipline and the willful rejection of society’s temptations can Torog’s righteous judgment be avoided.”

Leadership: The Pilgrims are led by a former Archbishop of Erathis.

Headquarters: None. The Pilgrims wander freely across the Scarlet Waste and beyond, periodically returning in pilgrimage to the Hole (page 9)—a holy site of great significance to their order.

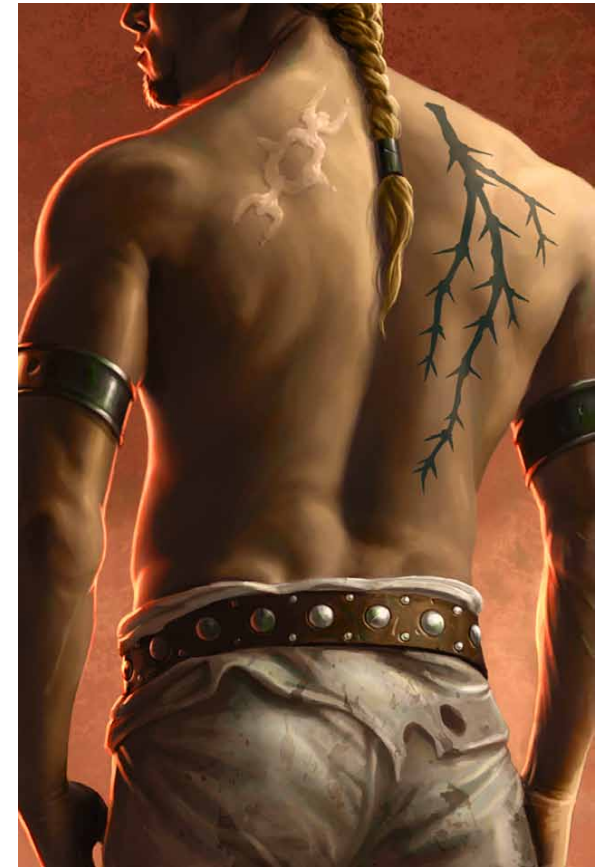
Membership Requirements: Early members were apostates of Erathis, disenfranchised souls who had come to see innovation and society as the cause, not the salvation of the world’s ills.

Most recent followers are drawn from the poor of larger cities. In time these unfortunate souls come to believe that it is their duty to suffer for the sins of society, and only through strict adherence to the tenets of their code can the world escape final judgment at the hands of the King that Crawls.

Activities: Between periods of self reflection wandering the Scarlet Wastes, the Pilgrims journey beyond the desert to spread their gospel in the world’s largest cities.

WEEPING ROSE HERESY

In a bizarre twist on commonly held doctrine, this heretical sect espouses the belief that Torog is a benevolent deity who has taken the torments of world upon his shoulders so that the innocent need not suffer.



Goal: The tenets of their faith do not permit slaves to turn against their masters. Individuals that are released from bondage, however, maintain their faith, congregating in subterranean abbeys sanctified to the King that Crawls.

Size: This faith is a small but increasingly gaining support among individuals born into slavery.

Alignment: Unaligned.

Philosophy: “As the chosen peoples of the King that Crawls, we persevere in the face of adversity and willingly take on the burdens and pains of others.”

History: Cynical theologians posit that the heresy might have been established by the League of Due Hierarchy, an authoritarian sect that promotes the spread of slavery, though no evidence supports that claim. The true origin of this faith remains an enigma.

Leadership: The Weeping Rose has no central leader, though cells exist in various slave communities throughout the world.

Membership Requirements: Inductees into the faith are said to have been granted a vision of the Weeping Rose in their dreams. Many etch the symbol on their flesh as a sign of their devotion.

Activities: Followers of the Weeping Rose heresy are noted for self-flagellation and their darkly humorous view of the world. They take up causes or tasks that no others dare.

HOLY SITES

The King that Crawls holds dominion over the Underdark and, as such, temples dedicated in his name exist predominately under the cold, hard earth. Torog's most notorious centers of worship are known as torture dens. These hidden sanctums of sadism harness both Torog's divine power and the power generated by his victim's agony.

On the surface world, dungeon complexes beneath nondescript edifices comprise most of Torog's temples. These unhallowed halls are typically constructed with low ceilings, forcing the faithful to "Crawl in abasement before the Patient One."

THE HOLE

A gigantic chasm hewn from the arid silt bed of the Scarlet Wastes, the Hole offers a direct pathway are the lowest depths of the Underdark.

History: Centuries past, a great city of humans was constructed from the red clay of the Scarlet Wastes. Capital of a mighty desert empire, the grand crossroads of Sar-Chavat grew over time into a sprawling metropolis of idolatry and sin. Templars in service to Erathis ruled here, though they had long ago turned away from virtue to embrace arrogant and gluttonous ways. During the city's ill-fated centennial celebration, the earth opened wide beneath Sar-Chavat, swallowing the city whole; its grim fate is oft attributed to the machinations of Torog.

Description: Today, all that remains of Sar-Chavat is a yawning chasm a half mile wide at the surface. Bards' tales speak of five colossal claws piercing the surface from below, then closing into a fist as Torog drags the doomed city downward. Toppled buildings and other nondescript ruins line

the periphery of the immense cavity as well as a shelf a few hundred feet below the surface. A large watercourse, once the lifeblood of the doomed city, now flows into the Hole, its thunderous cascade audible for miles. Behind the pounding spray a treacherous path zigzags along the inside edge of the Hole into its darkened depths.

Adventure Hooks: Characters might find exploration of the Hole to be an appropriate challenge late in the heroic or early paragon tiers.

The adventurers learn of a treasure caravan being sent to the Hole to empty its wealth into the great cavernous depths.

An emaciated band of quaggoth exiles have taken refuge in the upper ruins of Sar-Chavat. They are not overtly hostile to adventurers and might be persuaded to act as guides if fed and treated with respect.

TOROG'S MINIONS

Torog's debased treatment of his minions is legendary. All his servants, from the lowliest wrackspawn dregs to his mightiest angels and exarchs, must prove their worthiness by undergoing prolonged and insidious tortures.

ANGEL OF TORMENT

For benevolent deities, angels of torment are rare instruments of divine wrath, sent to the world to exact retribution against the most grievous wrongdoers. In service to evil gods, however, angels of torment are a scourge upon the mortal world and greatly feared for the sadistic acts carried out in their god's name.

Angel of Torment	Level 18 Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (angel)	XP 2,000
Initiative +16	Senses Perception +20; blindsight
HP 169; Bloodied 84	
Regeneration 10	
AC 34; Fortitude 31, Reflex 29, Will 30	
Immune fear; Resist 10 acid, 10 radiant	
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)	
⚔ Claws (standard; at-will) ♦ Acid, Weapon	
+23 vs. AC; 3d8 + 8 damage plus 1d8 acid damage, and the target is marked until the end of the angel's next turn.	
⚔ Lashing Chain (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 4; targets one or two creatures; +23 vs. AC; 3d8 + 6 damage, and the angel pulls the target 3 squares to a square adjacent to it. The target is marked until the end of the angel's next turn.	
⚔ Wave of Torment (standard; recharge 2/3) ♦ Psychic, Radiant	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +19 vs. Will; 3d10 + 4 psychic damage plus 1d10 radiant damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). <i>Miss:</i> Half damage	
Angelic Presence	
Any creature marked by the angel and within 5 squares of the angel takes 10 damage each time it makes an attack that does not include the angel as a target.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Supernal
Str 24 (+16)	Dex 20 (+14) Wis 23 (+15)
Con 17 (+12)	Int 22 (+15) Cha 22 (+15)



ANGEL OF TORMENT IN COMBAT

Lashing chain is the signature attack of an angel of torment. Hooks at the end of each chain latch onto the exposed flesh of their enemies, then the chain drags screaming victims in close for a killing blow from the angel's acidic claws.

ANGEL OF TORMENT LORE

Religion DC 23: As a deity, Torog commands the loyalty of a full range of angels, though he “favors” angels of torment above all others. Angels in service to Torog routinely maim their own wings and deface their bodies in homage to the King that Crawls. Despite this mutilation, angels retain their supernatural ability to fly. Isolated for long periods from the Astral Sea, Torog's angels lose their *angelic presence* ability unless they remain close to the King that Crawls or one of his places of power.

WRACKSPAWN

Creatures flayed in the torture pits of Torog are reborn as the deadly wrackspawn, and they are granted the dubious reward of eternal life in exchange for loss of individuality and absolute fealty to the King that Crawls.

Wrackspawn Surgeon		Level 14 Elite Lurker
Medium immortal humanoid		XP 2,000
Initiative +15	Senses Perception +10	
Bloodwrack aura 2; each bloodied enemy within the aura takes a -4 penalty to saving throws.		
HP 230; Bloodied 115		
Regeneration 5		
AC 28; Fortitude 27, Reflex 25, Will 26		
Resist 10 psychic		
Saving Throws +2		
Speed 6		
Action Points 1		
⚔ Dagger (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+19 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage.		
⚔ Serpent Strike (minor 1/round; at-will) ♦ Poison		
+17 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).		
Drone of Confusion (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic		
Until the end of its next turn or until it attacks, the wrackspawn is invisible to any creature within 5 squares of it.		
Surgeon's Precision		
A wrackspawn surgeon's melee attacks deal 4d10 extra damage against creatures that grant combat advantage to the surgeon.		
Shifting Tumble (immediate reaction, when the wrackspawn surgeon takes damage; at-will)		
The wrackspawn surgeon shifts half its speed.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech	
Skills Heal +15, Intimidate +18		
Str 18 (+11)	Dex 19 (+11)	Wis 17 (+10)
Con 25 (+14)	Int 21 (+12)	Cha 23 (+13)
Equipment 2 daggers		

WRACKSPAWN SURGEON IN COMBAT

Wrackspawn surgeons typically avoid combat, though if drawn into a conflict they employ their surgeons' blades with deadly efficiency.

WRACKSPAWN LORE

Religion DC 21: Wrackspawn are loyal tools created from the victims of Torog's torture dens. Each wrackspawn is an assemblage of parts from numerous humanoid creatures, bound together with foul rituals and dark magic.

MONSTROUS GRAFTS

With fervent pleasure the Order of Amalgamation invokes terrible rituals, willingly grafting monstrous limbs and organs onto their flesh as a perverse adulation for the King that Crawls.

In game terms, a monstrous graft is a form of template granting an additional power to a nonplayer character, corresponding to the type of graft. Grafts do not change the level of the host creature, nor do they make it elite, but they do introduce a compelling story element while making the creature slightly more powerful.

Although grafts are designed with evil nonplayer characters in mind, an adventure or section of a campaign could revolve around a player character or good-aligned nonplayer character unwillingly gaining a graft after falling victim to the Order of Amalgamation. Whatever the case, a monstrous graft should be treated as something to be expunged, the sooner the better.

TROLL ARM

The regenerative ability and added reach of the claw attack make a troll arm an attractive graft

Prerequisite: Humanoid

Troll Arm	Graft
Regeneration 5 (while not bloodied only; additionally, if the graft recipient takes acid or fire damage, regeneration does not function until the end of the recipient's next turn)	
⚔ Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; Level +5 vs. AC; 2d6 + level damage.	

CARRION CRAWLER TENTACLE

Few attacks are more feared than the paralyzing tentacle of a carrion crawler.

Carrion Crawler Tentacle	Graft
⚔ Tentacle (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison	
Reach 2; Level +5 vs. Fortitude; 1d4 + level damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target is instead immobilized and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).	

CHUUL PINCERS

The chuul is rightly feared for its huge vicelike pincers.

Chuul Pincers	Graft
⚔ Pincers (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; Level +5 vs. AC; 1d6 + level damage, or 3d6 + level damage against an immobilized creature.	

About the Author

Brian R. James lives in the Seattle area with his wife, four children, and house full of geek paraphernalia. His freelance design credits include *The Grand History of the Realms™*, *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Guide*, *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead™*, *Dragon® magazine Annual*, *Underdark™*, and the forthcoming *Demonomicon™* supplement. Follow Brian online at www.twitter.com/brianjames



FORGOTTEN REALMS

REALMSLORE: VAASA

BY BRIAN R. JAMES

illustrations by Peter Tikos ♦ cartography by Mike Schley

“They may send legions in the thousands to stop us, but they will fail. They may send paladins by the score to smite us, but they too will fail.

By the Will of the Voice, the soul of Vaasa belongs to Telos, and through his might the Warlock Knights cannot fall.”

—Lord Ivor “the Grinder” Chernin,
Knight-Vindicator of Vaasa

Carved by sweeping glaciations, scalded by dragons’ breath, and trampled upon by armies of titans, Vaasa is a primeval land—a remnant of a lost age when the elder races inhabited Abeir-Toril. Fortunes can be made in Vaasa, for those willing to risk its dangers.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Despite ostensible rule by the Warlock Knights, much of Vaasa remains untamed wilderness beyond their influence. Among the frozen tundra and soft, sucking bogs there is beauty here, primal and cold.

Scattered amid the muddy northern plains lie hard-edged stones deposited by ice sheets and blasted by war. Woodlands here are small and infrequent, the few standing copses dominated by the sharp-tipped skeletons of long-dead timber.

Vaasa has few large settlements outside of its capital, Telos City. Most civilized folk here live in the eastern reaches within the shadow of the Galena Mountains, their hard-working communities owing their existence to workable soil and rich mines.

Humans of the region are primarily of Damaran descent, a mixture of Jhaamdathi (immigrants from Impiltur) and Nar bloodlines. Vaasa, along with other nations of the Demonlands (a region in north-central Faerûn comprising the realms of Impiltur, Damara, Vaasa, Narfell, and the Great Dale), uses the old Impilturan Calendar for its reckoning of years, the first *sardal* (the Damaran word for year) commencing in the Year of Splendor (-74 DR).

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VAASA LORE

A character knows the following information with a successful skill check.

History DC 15: Civil unrest triggered by the assassination of Queen Brienne Dragonsbane in the Year of the Forged Sigil (1459 DR), distracted the realm of Bloodstone from the marshalling Vaasan armies in the north. The following year war ensued; and the capital of Bloodstone was seized by Warlock Knights in a devastating assault and soon after razed to the earth. This harrowing event precipitated the collapse of the unified kingdom. Thereafter, the Warlock Knights seceded from Bloodstone, claiming the conquered territory of Vaasa as their own.

Streetwise DC 10: Vaasan coins are minted in Telos City from a secret alloy of ironfell (*FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Guide*, page 276) and other precious metals. Coppers are called nubs, silvers are dirks, and gold coins are anvils. Platinum is traded in thin ingots worth 50 anvils each.

Most trade is conducted through overland travel, and caravans must be large and well guarded to mitigate losses due to monster attacks. Earlier this spring (1480 DR) Vaasan engineers reopened the old trade route through Gramble's Climb, permitting Vaasan goods to pass through the port city of Hulburg to Vesperin, Sembia, and beyond.

PEOPLE OF VAASA

Vaasan society is built upon the backbreaking labor of the peasant working class, known locally as serfs. Serfs are a hardy folk, eking out a modest living under harsh conditions and with limited resources. As a feudal society, population centers in Vaasa are divided into fiefdoms presided over by Fellthanes. These landed lords in turn acquiesce to the authority of Vindicators and the Ironfell Council in Telos. Though the aristocracy is predominantly human, the majority of Vaasans citizens are shield dwarves and mountain orcs, toiling tirelessly in countless mines lining the slopes of the Galena Mountains.

WARLOCK KNIGHTS

Vaasan lords are, without exception, all members of the Warlock Knights. While some titles are hereditary, most earn their rank through hard work and exploiting the weaknesses of their rivals. Not all knights are landed lords however. As one rises through the ranks of nobility, the Ironfell Council grants the lord a parcel of land to rule. In turn, the lord gains vassals who swear allegiance in exchange for the protection of their family and homesteads.

As the nobility of Vaasa's brutal feudal system, Warlock Knights have life-and-death authority over the common folk of the realm. As the ultimate authority of the land, the Ironfell Council has power to conscript a lord's vassals into military service at need.

Within their ranks, the Knights follow a peerage hierarchy. From junior to senior the ranks are as follows: Jack, Lancer, Halberdier, Bombardier, Executor, Myrmidon, Brigadier, Fellthane, Vindicator,

Councilor. All Warlock Knights wear a simple loop of dark, crystalline iron as a symbol of their station and power. Higher-ranking knights adorn their *ironfell rings* with jewels imbued with eldritch might.

As common foot soldiers, Jacks have little privileges and have not yet earned the right to wear the ceremonial armor of a Warlock Knight. Despite forced conscription, most Jacks come to prefer life as a soldier over the backbreaking drudgery of serfdom. Beginning with the second rank, the Knight designation is added to the title (for example, Knight-Lancer, Knight-Bombardier, and so on). As landed knights, Fellthanes have absolute power over their holdings and maintain private armies.

As their name implies, all Warlock Knights dabble in the arcane arts, through their mastery of martial exploits remains their primary competency.

Bound Ones: In Vaasa, practitioners of arcane magic are permitted their studies only by swearing lifelong fealty to the Warlock Knights. Known as *Nishaadhri*, or Bound Ones, this order of warlocks is commonly garbed in gray robes, each wearing a dark veil over their eyes. Bound Ones often serve as advisors to high-ranking knights, employing their debilitating magic as their masters command.

Nishaadhri gain their formidable abilities through a special star pact with the primordial Telos. As they rise in status, a chosen few are recruited to join an elite sect formed by the Voice of Telos. These Luminaries function almost as priests do in other kingdoms, presiding over shrines and temples consecrated to Telos. Luminaries are also responsible for the crafting of shardsouls, monstrous automatons formed from Telos's body and set to serve in Vaasa's armies.



NOTABLE PERSONALITIES

Included here is a small sampling of notable personalities.

Voice of Telos: All Warlock Knights bow to the authority of the Voice of Telos, the sovereign of Vaasa in all but name. This enigmatic leader of the Ironfell Council came to power after he (or she) unearthed Telos's comatose form in the crater fields of central Vaasa. Cowled from head to foot in long nondescript robes, no one is certain of the race or gender of their ruler. The Voice speaks not through words but instead projects commands directly in the minds of his (or her) subjects.

Kaggen Entreri: Even as a young Knight-Bombardier, Kaggen has distinguished himself as a fierce swordsman and natural leader. Kaggen's platoon has been recently been deployed to Frohm's Rest to investigate reports of a Zhengyian relic unearthed in the region. Unknown even to himself, Kaggen Entreri is the lost heir of the royal house of Dragonsbane. His late mother, Queen Brianne kept knowledge of this illegitimate pregnancy secret from all but her closest advisors.

Telvannah: As Ulk (high shaman) of the White Worm tribe, Telvannah wields greater authority than her chieftain and husband Tor-Rem. Entering a trance-like state, Telvannah can call upon the Spirit of the Remorhaz, granting her extraordinary control over heat and fire. Telvannah's spirit companion is a tundra yeti, which bolsters the Ulk's primal power with protective evocations.

Darlisan the Rover: This man of few words is renowned throughout the Demonlands as an impeccable huntsmen and infallible tracker. Between work leading caravans or collecting bounties, Darlisan may be found hunting large game in the Bleak Steppes of

Haatar-Baen with his signature ivory-carved longbow, "Loxodonta".

King Borigon Hillsafar: Third son of famed Garumbelly "Grumble" Hillsafar, Borigon claimed his father's throne in the Year of the Second Circle (1470 DR) when Warlock Knights invaded Hillsafar Hall. After driving off the invaders, King Borigon welcomed in a handful of neighboring clans displaced during the war. Then, with great reluctance, King Borigon ordered the main gates sealed. In the decade since, the gates have remained unopened and the Bloodstone Mines abandoned, leaving many to wonder at the fate of the dwarves.

Grintalalch the Red: This inscrutable sprig operates a merchant company based in the city of Deepearth (located in a huge cavern underneath Bloodstone Valley). When on the surface, Grintalalch is commonly found overseeing his illicit trade empire in the tent city of Fugue. Some reports link Grintalalch to the Citadel of Assassins, but those claims have never been corroborated.

Tamarand, "King of Justice": Many formidable dragons nest in wilderlands of Vaasa, but none invoke more awe than "His Resplendence" Tamarand, sovereign of gold wyrms throughout Faerûn. Chosen of the benevolent deity Bahamut, Tamarand and his followers stand at odds with depredations of the Warlock Knights. Yet in recent years the ancient wyrm's focus has shifted to the rising threat of Kultaakarr, and its burgeoning titan armies.

ADVENTURERS

If ever there was a realm in desperate need for heroes, Vaasa is it. Between despotic knights, rogue dragons, and thundering giants, Vaasa has its fair

share of threats to overcome. Lest those with less idealism scoff at the notion, Vaasa also holds uncounted treasure and hidden relics aplenty for those who covet wealth over virtue.

CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS

Included here are story hooks and sample motivations tailored to a select race, which may be helpful in fleshing out your character's history.

Spirit Hunter of the White Worm (Human): Your people have roamed the frozen tundra of northern Vaasa for uncounted centuries, challenging the fierce remorhaz for hunting lands. The Ulk, your tribe's high shaman, has sent you into the lands of the south to battle "evil spirits." As it happens, a spirit hunter considers most anyone they meet to be an evil spirit!

Associated Skills: Nature, Endurance

Suggested Classes: barbarian, seeker

Bloodstone Runehammer (Dwarf): As a Runehammer, you're sworn to defend the dwarven holds of Bloodstone from monstrous incursions, an increasingly demanding profession in recent winters. Since their expulsion by the Warlock Knights, the dwarves of Clan Orothiar have joined with their kin from Clan Hillsafar to reclaim the Bloodstone Mines.

Associated Skills: Dungeoneering, Perception

Suggested Classes: fighter, warlord

Telosian Scamp (Halfling): The only thing more wretched in Vaasa than a serf is a scamp. This derogatory term coined by the Warlock Knights encompasses any of the smaller races (halflings, goblins, and kobolds primarily) often enslaved in this land. On the outskirts of Telos City, however, the scamps rule the streets.

Associated Skills: Intimidate, Streetwise

Suggested Classes: fighter, rogue

Order of the Golden Cup (Human): Though they're no longer permitted to worship in the open, Ilmataran faith remains strong among the peasantry of Vaasa. As a Revered Brother or Sister of Ilmater's holy order, you are dedicated to healing the sick, protecting the innocent, and soothing the hurts of the world. You are a hero of the common people of Vaasa as you are reviled by the Warlock Knights.

Associated Skills: Heal, Insight

Suggested Classes: Cleric, Paladin

Scion of the Granite Tower (Human, Half-Elf): As blood scion of Bodvar the Black, you are charged with the defense of the Granite Tower, a secluded fortress-enclave nestled in the western highlands overlooking Haatar-Baen. You were trained in swordsmanship at a young age and seldom travel without your signature darksword (see *Meleguant's Darkblade* below).

Associated Skills: Athletics, Stealth

Suggested Classes: fighter, swordmage

Meleguant's Darkblade Level 12+

Forged long ago in a pact with a Prince of Netheril, this blade of shimmering black glass trails shadowy tendrils as it strikes with preternatural alacrity.

Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy Blade, Light Blade

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 cold damage per plus, or +1d10 cold damage per plus against shadow creatures.

Property: This weapon scores critical hits on a 19 or 20.

Spysong Troubadour (Human): You are member of an elite spy network, collecting intelligence across the breadth of the Vaasa and Damara. Your patron is the venerable half-elf Riordan Parnell,

who governs the organization from his secret retreat in the Cave of the Whispering Wind. Spysong's primary mission is to undermine the authority of Yarin Frostmantle, Lord of Damara, and see the despot hanged for the murder of Brianne Dragonsbane.

Associated Skills: History, Streetwise

Suggested Classes: ranger, bard

Vault-Warden of the Lost Ways (Dwarf): You trace your dwarven ancestry to Clan Namarforge, ruling house of ancient Sarphil (a lost dwarven kingdom that once flourished beneath the West Galena Mountains along Vaasa's southern border). As one of the few remaining Vault-Wardens, you are charged to navigate and maintain "the Lost Ways," a vast network of winding tunnels which delve far beneath the Moondeep Sea.

Associated Skills: Dungeoneering, Endurance

Suggested Class: warden

Zhengyian Blood Mage (Human, Half-Orc): In the decades since the fall of the Witch-King, hidden Zhengyian relics have been unearthed across Vaasa. For some, contact with these fell artifacts exposed the individual and their descendants with a trace of Zhengyi's dark power. Blood Mages are most prevalent among the half-orcs of Palischuk; among them, Knight-Vindicator Mansard Kanaoth—the only half-orc on the Ironfell Council.

Associated Skills: Arcana, Bluff

Suggested Class: sorcerer

GEOGRAPHY

A great vale bounded on three sides by the icy peaks of the Galena Mountains, Vaasa is a subarctic wasteland of frozen tundra, sodden moors, and harsh windswept steppes. Only the heartiest folk live in Vaasa.

REGIONAL FEATURES


Black Holes of Sunderland: Along the slopes of southeast Vaasa loom the monster-filled caves known as the Black Holes. This vast network of natural caverns is extensive; rumored to connect to tunnels in Damara and extend as far west as the Great Grey Land of Thar. In recent years, a tribe of feral quagoths took up residence in caves close to the Vaasan frontier. This savage clan venerates a primal aspect of Malar they call "the Render."

Bleak Steppes of Haatar-Baen: This cold short-grass steppe lining Vaasa's southern frontier is nearly uninhabited. This is due largely to the tainted topsoil that causes vegetation grown in the region to become poisonous. Indigenous terrors of Haatar-Baen include large hunting packs of ravenous leucrotta that compete for limited food and resources with a bizarre breed of large cat with midnight fur whose eyes and mouth glow emerald green when it attacks.

Bloodstone Valley: This once verdant valley nestled among the walls of Bloodstone Pass is today lifeless and barren. The White Tree, which once protected the valley and all of the Bloodstone Lands against creatures of the Abyssal plane, stands lifeless and petrified outside the ruins of Bloodstone City. Once capital of the unified Kingdom of Bloodstone, the city was overrun by Vaasans a decade past, and it remains garrisoned by a large contingent of Warlock Knights to this day.

Bottomless Bogs: In the northwest, the departing ice sheet has left behind a treacherous bowl of swampland dotted with numerous fetid lakes. For much of the year the Bottomless Bogs are mostly navigable with the aid of veteran guide. In the summer months, however, the entire region becomes one vast morass of sludge and mud where "the tallest horse





would wet its belly,” as the saying goes in Damara. More insidious are the sucking pits from which the region takes its name. Many an expedition has been lost in search of the enchanted hot springs rumored to lie within this bleak wetland.

Cinnabar Wastes: This rocky badland in northeast Vaasa is littered with great scree fields and immense boulders, most dragged to their current positions by advancing glaciers in centuries past. The region takes its name from these brightly colored rocks, ranging in color from bright scarlet to deep burgundy. A clan of nomadic fog giants, noteworthy for their domestication of savage bulettes, claims the region as their hunting grounds.

Clefts of Razack: Thought to have been hewn by the axe of the elder titan lord Razack during the Age of Giants, this impressive gorge stretches over sixty miles west to east with many smaller ancillary canyons spidering off along its length. Racing through “Razack’s Scar,” as it is also known, is the frigid Beaumaris River.

Galena Mountains: Towering fifteen thousand feet over the Vaasan lowlands, the Galena Mountains are a breathtaking sight to behold. Covered year round in ice and snow, the mountains seemingly pierce the heavens. Dwarven clans have established mighty halls beneath this great range, as have tribes of goblins and countless other monstrosities. Few can ignore the lure of wealth promised by some of Toril’s richest mines.

Kultaakarr: In the decades since the retreat of the Great Glacier, giants have migrated in increasing numbers back to this subkingdom of ancient Ostoria. Here a new generation of titan lords has reestablished the realm of Kultaakarr, founding their provisional capital in the excavated ruins of Baunilorotha. The Warlock Knights claim this land for Vaasa, but they have yet to challenge the giants directly.

ZHENGYI THE WITCH-KING

Despite the passage of more than a century since his demise, the name Zhengyi still invokes fear in the hearts of men. In the Year of the Bright Blade (1347 DR), the Witch-King gathered to Castle Perilous a mighty army, the ferocity of which has never been matched. With this monstrous host, the powerful lich quickly tamed the Vaasan tundra and moved to capture Damara as well. Only through the valiant efforts of Gareth Dragonsbane and his stalwart companions was Zhengyi ultimately defeated and his horde scattered.

Two years ago, a great earthquake rattled the Bloodstone Lands. In its wake, Castle Perilous sloughed off crumbling stone and the marks of age, revealing a sleek and dark edifice beneath. Black runes shimmer with darkness on this castle’s walls, absorbing the wan northern light but providing no clues to the castle’s sudden rejuvenation. The dungeons of the castle are rumored to be filled with horrors beyond imagination. Even if they were empty, the grounds above are swarming with a number of chromatic dragons, lured to the castle by a familiar voice from days long past.

SETTLEMENTS

Avang: This small community (population 500) at the base of Garumn’s Climb services exports from Delhalls and smaller mines in the region. Since spring, elemental incursions in the remote Tortured Lands have driven refugees from Ilinvur and the Plains of Barze into western Vaasa, doubling the size of Avang in a few short months.

Darmshall: Over the last century, Darmshall has grown from a large fortress sheltering 600 souls to Vaasa’s third largest city (population 5,000). Darmshall is defended by towering stone walls lined with weapons of war. Increasing numbers of Warlock Knights arrive here daily as Vaasa once again prepares for war.

Fugue: In the shadow of the Iron Divide sprawls the Fugue Plane, a ramshackle tent city (population 2,000) filled with hopelessness, poverty and death. Since the Vaasan Gate was sealed ten years past, citizens have not been permitted to exit the realm into neighboring Damara. So here the desperate masses huddle, living in filth and squalor, waiting for salvation from the tyranny of the Warlock Knights.

Ishe: A remote windswept community (population 300) of grizzled trappers and drunken derelicts, Ishe is a common stopover point for explorers traveling beyond Vaasa’s northern border.

Kond: Carved into the steep cliffs overlooking the Beaumaris River, Kond (population 800) was originally a minotaur delve until the creatures were swept away by Warlock Knights in the Year of the Strangled Jester (1453 DR). Today, a series of advanced pulleys and cranes aided by warlock magic are used to lift trade goods floating down from Moortown 500 feet in the air to wagons waiting above.



TELOS CITY

Constructed within a massive meteor crater, stretching half a mile wide and 800 feet deep, stands the Vaasan capital of Telos. The city is named for the slumbering primordial entombed beneath the city streets.

Population: 15,000. Like Vaasa itself, the majority of Telosian citizens are humans (60%) and dwarves (20%). Much of the population is comprised of refugees from neighboring settlements sacked during the last war. Orcs, goblins, and kobolds are common throughout Telos, though most indentured as slaves.

Government: The Ironfell Council presided over by the Voice of Telos governs the realm from the Citadel of the Iron Sky in the city center. The council convenes five days out of every month to address matters of state.

Defenses: More fortress than city, Telos' high walls and arcane wards offer excellent protection. Beyond legions of battle tested Warlock Knights, the Voice of Telos also commands the loyalty of a dozen storm giants who dwell in a cloud palace overlooking the city.

Inns and Taverns: Unless granted a special dispensation, visitors to Telos are restricted from entering the city center. Mostly reputable establishments on the outskirts of town include: Iron Flagon (tavern), Red Dog (tavern), Alderman's Hall (boarding house), Bronze Windlass (inn).

Supplies: Contraband goods (such as weapons and armor crafted from *ironfell*) may be brokered from a black market in the Scamp Warrens east of the city.

Temples: No divine temples stand in Telos, though the Citadel of the Iron Sky serves a similar roll for the faithful of Telos.

Maur-Eturo: A longtime crossroads for trade passing through eastern Vaasa, Maur-Eturo (population 1,500) is a human town notable for its large ranches of domesticated krotter and rothé, large herd animals commonly used for their meat and milk.

Modurt: Modurt (population 2,500) is a sizable goblin community with a larger-than-average population of shapeshifting barghests. Thus far, Modurt has avoided the attention of the Warlock Knights, who have largely ignored the less populous territories of western Vaasa.

Moortown: Since its founding nearly two centuries past, Moortown has been repeatedly overrun by monstrosities slinking out of the Bottom Bogs. Yet despite the dangers, foolish settlers always return to this miserable settlement hoping to tame the wild swamp and unearth its hidden treasures. The Cult of the Dragon is rumored to have a presence in Moortown, despite numerous attempts to run the zealots out of town.

Palischuk: Once a small hamlet alone on the Vaasan frontier, Palischuk today is a thriving metropolis (population 10,000) and mercantile powerhouse fueling Vaasa's war machine. Humans represent only 20% of the city's population, which is dominated by orcs and half-orcs. 🌀

About the Author

Brian R. James lives in the Seattle area with his wife and four children in a house full of geek paraphernalia. His freelance design credits include *The Grand History of the Realms™*, *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Guide*, *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead™*, *DRAGON Magazine Annual*, *Underdark™*, and the forthcoming *Demonomicon™* sourcebook. Follow Brian online at www.twitter.com/brianrjames.



THE MIND'S EYE OPENED

By Robert J. Schwalb ♦ illustration by Tyler Walpole

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Worlds exist beyond the starry dominions where the gods dwell, far from the tumultuous vistas where fire, stone, wind, and storm vie for dominance. To think of this realm beyond invites madness because beholding its awful splendor through the smallest crack can blast the mind to slivers. Stepping beyond this world into the Far Realm might cause you to think you can become a god. Then, in the fullness of your power, the essence of who you are will be subsumed into the insanity and corruption that place breeds.

Why would anyone dare plumb its secrets? Some are lured through false promises and fevered dreams to peer through reality's cracks and sample something greater than the gods, the primordials and their creation. These doomed souls might thrive for a time, but in the end, they pay a price far greater than they can possibly imagine.

The Far Realm is not some other plane to visit and explore. It is alive, aware, and possessed of an alarming appetite for worlds to consume. The Far Realm continually tests reality's bounds, pushing and prodding in its eternal struggle to breach the wards. From time to time, the Far Realm achieves a foothold,

PSIONIC CHARACTERS

leaking into the natural world and what it touches is transformed into gibbering, raving abominations. Sometimes something physical escapes—a bit of flesh or a dollop of slime. This substance is no detritus, but rather it acts as a seed of new life. Where it takes root, it spawns an aberrant monstrosity that hears the whispers from the Outside and strives to complete the twisted instruction imprinted on its mind: conquest, destruction, or mutation.

One should fear the Far Realm and its creations, because awareness of its potential for destruction of the natural order provides the wisdom and resolve to stand against those who would imperil this world by dabbling in the forbidden. Those who live in the world take heart from the primal champions who sustain the ancient wards, from the pious heroes who advance the gods' ban, and all others who seek out the corruption and lance it like a tumescent boil. Most of all, though, rational beings take heart from those who wield the mind's inner power and who channel psionic energy through the ancient disciplines to destroy the Far Realm's brood. These beings are the world's answer to the aberrant infection, and without them this world would be doomed.

The *Player's Handbook 3* contains many exciting options. New races, classes, feats, equipment, skill powers, and hybrid classes fill its pages. Although all are worthy for examination, the focus of this article is the psionic power source. Introducing a new power source into an existing campaign can be as easy or as challenging as you choose. As with primal magic, psionic power has a story, details to help ground it in the world of D&D®. Manifesting as a reaction to the Far Realm's intrusion, certain individuals can tap the mind's power and use it to alter reality around them. Some psionic characters come from disciplined,

scholarly traditions, approaching psionic energy through pseudoscience and philosophical perspectives. Others are self-taught, learning to harness their talents through trial and error until it becomes something akin to magic.

The easiest way to introduce psionic power is to assume it has always existed in your world. Further, the heroes have not yet crossed paths with psionic relics, institutions, or other characters could be circumstance or rarity. Psionic power might be strong in some parts of the world, such as in Sarlona from the *EBERRON® Campaign Setting*, relatively new and unexplored as is likely the case for the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting*, or widespread such as in the *DARK SUN® Campaign Setting*.

On the other hand, you might choose another path for the power source. Psionic magic might be feared and misunderstood, with its practitioners hunted down by killers knowingly or unknowingly employed by aberrants and their sympathizers. Psionic power could also be new to your world, a phenomena arising as a direct result from the setting's first Far Realm incursion. Or it might be forgotten, and many ages might have come and gone since the last breach, causing everyone to forget all the organizations, lore, and heroes.

In short, how psionic power appears, or any other power source for that matter, is up to you to decide, using some, all, or none of the story information provided.

The *Player's Handbooks* are frequently game changers. Packed with new and seductive options, you might find your players lured away from their current characters as the new hotness grabs their attention. You have several ways you can answer the impulse, as described below. The options range from minor solutions to more dramatic ones.

The Interlude: Rather than monkey with existing characters, run a special one-shot session with new characters of whatever level you like. Try to find a way to link the adventure's story into the overarching campaign so the events described can impact what happens in your regular game. Also consider having the interlude take place somewhere near the current adventuring party and have it be about the same level as the current campaign. This way, the players can try out the new mechanics and, if they like them, roll the new characters into your regular game.

Retraining: Allow the players to retrain their multiclass feats right away, even if they're in the middle of a level. Doing so allows the player to access psionic material immediately but without slowing down the story with an extra game session (using the interlude) or changing up the line-up with new characters. Multiclass feats are also an awesome tool to reflect psionic power's slow return. Maybe the characters are the first of a new generation of psionic heroes? As the players become more comfortable with psionic power, you might consider letting them make further changes as described below.

Hybrids: The hybrid rules allow players to mash two classes together to create an entirely new class. Under normal circumstances, the decision to play a hybrid character must be made with a new character,

but if a player has a hankering to play a psionic class and the character's presence in the campaign is important, you can let the player rebuild his or her character into a hybrid class. You might also set a minor quest as an objective before letting this happen. Such a quest might require the character to seek out a psionic master, visit a psionic academy, locate a magic item with psionic powers or properties, or defeat a powerful aberrant monster.

Rebuilding/Retirement: Players with a strong interest in psionic rules aren't going to be placated by hybrids or multiclass feats. To maintain the narrative, you can let the player rebuild his or her character from the ground up, preferably staying within the same role (fighter becomes battlemind, rogue becomes monk). As with hybrids above, putting a quest between the player and the rebuild is a good way for the transformation to make sense in the game. Again, the player might have to recover a psionic artifact, locate a lost monastery, do a favor for Ioun, or something else.

Failing the above, let the player retire the old character and bring in a new one. Retirement might disrupt your plans a bit, but keeping the players happy and coming back to the table is more important than changing a few things around behind the screen. If the player opts for retirement, try to set up a dramatic end for the original character so his or her exit happens in a meaningful way that can serve the campaign's story.

PSIONIC TALENTS

Another option for injecting psionic power into your games is to use psionic talents. Like the legendary boons and grandmaster training described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, characters can unlock their hidden potential and acquire psioniclike abilities

in place of magic items. Psionic talents describe an awakening to greater power likely resulting from an aberrant plan. Rather than develop psionic powers, the character harnesses a bit of psionic energy, probably as a result from fighting aberrant monsters, and acquires a technique similar to what other psionic classes can perform. Psionic talents can be a great intermediary step to converting a character to a psionic class using the aforementioned solutions. Once the character develops genuine psionic powers, the talent should probably fade into *residuum* equal to its value.

Empathic Mind Level 8+

You experience others' emotions and can make their pain into a balm for your wounds.

Lvl 8 3,400 gp Lvl 28 2,125,000 gp
Lvl 18 85,000 gp

Psionic Talent

Property: While you are not bloodied, you gain a +4 item bonus to Insight checks.

Power (Encounter ♦ Psionic): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an enemy with an unaugmented at-will attack power. *Effect:* You gain 10 temporary hit points.
Level 18: 15 temporary hit points.
Level 28: 20 temporary hit points.

Mercurial Mind Level 3+

Focusing your thoughts allows you to move with blurring speed to stay one step ahead of your enemies.

Lvl 3 680 gp Lvl 23 425,000 gp
Lvl 13 17,000 gp

Psionic Talent

Property: While you are not bloodied, you gain a +1 item bonus to speed.

Power (Encounter ♦ Psionic): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an enemy with an unaugmented at-will attack power. *Effect:* You shift 2 squares once the attack is resolved.
Level 13: You shift 4 squares once the attack is resolved.
Level 23: You shift 6 squares once the attack is resolved.

Muddling Mind Level 15

You pierce an enemy's mind and manipulate its senses so it perceives what you want it to perceive.

Lvl 15 25,000 gp

Psionic Talent

Property: While you are not bloodied, you gain a +4 item bonus to Stealth checks.

Power (Encounter ♦ Psionic): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an enemy with an unaugmented at-will attack power. *Effect:* You become invisible to the target until you make an attack or until the start of your next turn.

Sculpting Mind Level 7+

You channel psionic energy into your body to rise above your physical limitations.

Lvl 7 2,600 gp Lvl 27 1,625,000 gp
Lvl 17 65,000 gp

Psionic Talent

Property: While you are not bloodied, you gain a +4 item bonus to Athletics checks.

Power (Encounter ♦ Psionic): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an enemy with an unaugmented at-will attack power. *Effect:* Until the end of your next turn, you can jump horizontally a number of squares equal to your speed without having to make Athletics checks or have a running start.
Level 17: You gain the benefit of this power while jumping vertically as well as horizontally.
Level 27: When you are under the effect of this power and jump while making a double move, your jump distance is twice your speed.

Warding Mind Level 4+

Your heightened senses pick out thoughts and impulses from your foes, helping you react with speed and precision.

Lvl 4 840 gp Lvl 24 525,000 gp
Lvl 14 21,000 gp

Psionic Talent

Property: While you are not bloodied, you gain a +4 item bonus to Acrobatics checks.

Power (Encounter ♦ Psionic): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an enemy with an unaugmented at-will attack power. *Effect:* Until the end of your next turn, you gain a +2 item bonus to AC and Reflex.
Level 14: +4 item bonus to AC and Reflex.
Level 24: +6 item bonus to AC and Reflex.

FAR REALM MUTANT THEME

The *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* presents several monster themes to modify existing monsters through mechanical adjustments such as skill modifiers and new powers. A theme helps reflect a particular story element while also strengthening connections between different creatures. The Far Realm Mutant theme and Those Who Hear (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, page 120) are powerful tools for demonstrating the Far Realm's growing influence in the world and for building monsters and villains appropriate for psionic adventurers.

FAR REALM MUTANT

The Far Realm respects no form. It seeks to alter, transform, and remake those exposed to its odious influence until they become abominations born from nightmare and madness. The world is spared the worst the Far Realm has to offer thanks to the ancient cordon raised by the gods and primordials, which was reinforced by the primal wards established in days long passed. However, the Far Realm finds ways through the barrier to infect the world with its poisonous nature.

Mind flayers, aboleths, grell, and foulspawn all hail from the Far Realm, having emerged in ages past when the barriers between realities were weak and porous. When first spawned into Creation, these monstrous entities were unformed, shapeless masses, devouring and destroying everything in their path. Only through the world's stabilizing influence combined with their own bestial cunning and malign intelligence were these early pioneers fixed in their

present forms. They became the abhorrent alien creatures found throughout the world today, though with the Far Realm's touch indelibly stamped upon them.

Despite the best efforts to preserve and reinforce the ancient wards to keep the alien from intruding into the world, corrupting energy does leak in from time to time. Rarely does a creature from the Outside escape to wreak havoc in the world, but rather the Far Realm's influence twists and mutates those creatures nearest to the breach, until they become unrecognizable monstrosities. Where whispers from the Beyond can ravage the mind as in the case of Those Who Hear, physical exposure to the Far Realm unravels the body.

The Outside's energy is not selective about whom they affect. Any creature, from common animals to sentient humanoids, from shadow creatures to the immortals themselves face mutation and madness when exposed to the Far Realm's power. No rhyme or reason exists behind the transformations. One creature might acquire only cosmetic changes—odd hair, eye, or skin colors are common, as are extra digits, growing fur, scales, or feathers, while another could erupt into a forest of waving tentacles and blinking eyes, gibbering maws, or bubble up with pustules and tumors.

Where a breach occurs, mutants appear, but rare is the mutant who lingers. Instead, driven by madness brought on by their transformations, they range out, spreading mischief and destruction wherever they go. Some die due to the overwhelming burden of the transformation on their forms. Others hide, withdrawing into the wilderness or descending into the Underdark to live, hunt, and breed as they wish. A mutant might also acquire traits of another aberrant creature and seek out its people to join their cause.

Far Realm mutants keep company with other mutants, aberrant monsters, and cultists. They are the foot soldiers, expendable wretches used to shock and scatter foes, while their masters lend support from behind them. Few other creatures can tolerate the mutants because they are too chaotic and loathsome to trust.

Mutants are frequently chaotic evil driven mad by their transformations and empowered by the hateful energy from the Outside. The few able to cling to their sanity are evil or unaligned. Mutated beasts are unaligned.

Origin: Change the creature's origin to aberrant. Exposure to the alien influence alters the creature's body so that it effectively belongs to the Far Realm.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Endurance, Insight, and Intimidate checks.

ATTACK POWERS

Far Realm mutants possess aggressive, disturbing attack powers designed to create confusion and panic. Powers also reflect the instability of their forms and they might be erratic and have strange side effects.

GRASPING TENTACLE

Nothing says mutant like an errant tentacle. Soldiers are obvious choices for this power, but brutes and close-range controllers can be good options too. If you apply this power to a minion, halve the damage.

‡ Grasping Tentacle (standard; at-will)

Level + 3 vs. Reflex; the target is grabbed. The target takes a -5 penalty to skill checks made to escape the grab. Each time the target ends its turn grabbed, it takes 5 damage (10 at paragon tier; 15 at epic tier).

HIDEOUS AGGRESSION

Hatred for the natural world impels mutants to greater and more terrifying acts of violence. Brutes and lurkers benefit the most from this power since they are in the best position to drop and bloody their enemies.

◀ **Hideous Aggression** (no action, when this creature bloodies an enemy or reduces an enemy to 0 hit points; encounter) ♦ **Fear**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; level + 3 vs. Will; the target is pushed 1 square, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include this creature as a target (save ends).

SLOBBERING MAW

A creature with this power has an extra slobbering and drooling mouth. Skirmishers, lurkers, and artillery do well with this defensive power.

‡ **Slobbering Maw** (immediate reaction, when an enemy ends its turn adjacent to this creature; recharges when first bloodied) ♦ **Acid**
Targets the triggering enemy; level + 5 vs. AC; 1d6 acid damage, and the target takes 5 acid damage (10 at paragon tier, 15 at epic tier) whenever it ends its turn adjacent to this creature (save ends).

UNSPEAKABLE ERUPTION

The corruptions some mutants bear might be too heavy a burden and, if their concentration falters, they erupt in a gory shower. Since this power removes the creature from play when it's first bloodied, you should use it sparingly and only on expendable creatures.

◀ **Unspeakable Eruption** (no action, when this creature is first bloodied by an attack; encounter) ♦ **Acid**
This creature explodes and drops to 0 hit points. Close burst 1; the target takes 15 acid damage (25 at the paragon tier, 35 at the epic tier).

VILE INFESTATION

Some mutants can spread the Far Realm's corruption through their attacks. Skirmishers with this power who are paired with controllers who can daze and stun become potent foes.

‡ **Vile Infestation** (standard; encounter) ♦ **Polymorph**
Targets one dazed, stunned, or helpless creature; level + 3 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed and grants combat advantage (save ends both).

WRONGNESS

The Far Realm contamination manifests as a palpable wrongness in some mutants, and those nearby experience a primitive fear growing within them as if on some instinctual level the thing they face should not be. This power is useful for brutes and soldiers supported by aberrant controllers such as mind flayers.

Wrongness (fear) aura 1; each enemy within the aura takes a -2 penalty to Will. While this creature is bloodied, the penalty is instead -5.

UTILITY POWERS

Exposure to the Far Realm's energy frequently results in "improvements" that modify a creature's behavior and increase its chances for survival.

INSANE CLARITY

Pain and madness strip away a mutant's expectations. Sometimes this proves helpful by letting the mutant find unexpected solutions to its problems.

Insane Clarity (no action, when this creature makes an attack roll or skill check and dislikes the result; encounter)
Reroll the triggering attack roll or skill check. If the result of the reroll is an odd number, this creature is dazed until the end of its next turn. If the result of the reroll is an even number, add +5 to the result of the reroll.

SECRET FACE

Not all creatures touched by the Far Realm bear physical signs. Some require a catalyst, such as pain, to reveal them. Soldiers and skirmishers are strong choices for this power.

◀ **Secret Face** (free, when this creature is first bloodied; encounter) ♦ **Fear, Polymorph**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; level + 3 vs. Will; the target is pushed 2 squares, and it grants combat advantage (save ends).

SHIFTING MASS

Transformative energy can rob creatures of their normal forms, reducing them to quivering masses of jellied flesh.

Shifting Mass (move; at-will)
If the creature is marked, end this condition. This creature then shifts 2 squares.

UNPREDICTABLE MIND

Girded by the Far Realm's influence, many mutants react strangely when struck by psychic attacks.

Unpredictable Mind (no action, when this creature takes psychic damage from an attack; at-will) ♦ **Psychic**
Roll a d6 to determine the effect.
1: This creature is stunned until the start of its next turn.
2: This creature is dazed until the start of its next turn.
3: This creature gains vulnerable 10 psychic (save ends).
4: This creature gains resist 10 psychic until the end of its next turn.
5: This creature gains 5 temporary hit points per tier.
6: This creature gains a +5 bonus to damage rolls until the end of its next turn.

WARPED SPACE

A mutant with this power disrupts reality in such a way it can move across distances in the blink of an eye. This power is a great escape mechanism for controllers or can broaden mobility options for skirmishers.

Warped Space (move; at-will) ♦ Teleportation

This creature teleports 1d6 squares.

MINOR MODIFICATIONS

In addition to the powers described above, you can apply minor modifications to creatures. Consider changing melee damage types to acid, and change ranged, close, and area damage types to psychic or force. As aberrants, mutants should, but not always, have darkvision or another improved (though limited) sense such as blindsight 2 (the creature should also gain blind in this case) or tremorsense 2. Adding swim and climb speeds don't unbalance these monsters, but add them only if appropriate. If you give a creature a fly speed, it should also have (clumsy). Finally, if the creature has a resistance or vulnerability, consider swapping out the damage type for acid, force, or psychic to reinforce the theme's story elements.

EXAMPLE: MUTANT BEAR

The mutated cave bear was in the wrong place at the wrong time when strange energy washed up from the Underdark and into its den. The transformation reduced the bear to a quivering mass of fur, claws, and fangs, and it now vents its wrath on any creatures that draw near.

Mutant Bear	Level 6 Elite Brute
Medium aberrant beast	XP 500
Initiative +4	Senses Perception +5; darkvision
HP 170; Bloodied 85	
AC 20; Fortitude 21, Reflex 17, Will 18	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
⊕ Claw (standard; at-will)	+10 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.
↶ Cave Bear Frenzy (standard; recharge ☼ ☼)	Close burst 1; targets enemies; +10 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.
↶ Hideous Aggression (no action, when the bear bloodies or drops an enemy to 0 hit points; encounter) ♦ Fear	Close burst 3; targets enemies; +9 vs. Will; the target is pushed 1 square, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all attack rolls on attacks that include the bear as a target (save ends).
Shifting Mass (move; at-will)	If the bear is marked, end this condition. The bear then shifts 2 squares.
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Skills Endurance +10, Insight +10, Intimidate +9	
Str 20 (+8)	Dex 13 (+4) Wis 14 (+5)
Con 15 (+5)	Int 2 (-1) Cha 12 (+4)

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying game titles for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®, Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, A Song of Ice and Fire roleplaying game, STAR WARS Roleplaying Game, and the d20 System. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast is in *Player's Handbook*® 3, *Martial Power*™ 2, and *Draconomicon*™ 2: *Metallic Dragons*. In addition, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon*® and *Dungeon*® magazines. Robert lives, works, and will probably die in Tennessee.

CAMPAIGN WORKBOOK:

KAIUS DANTUS

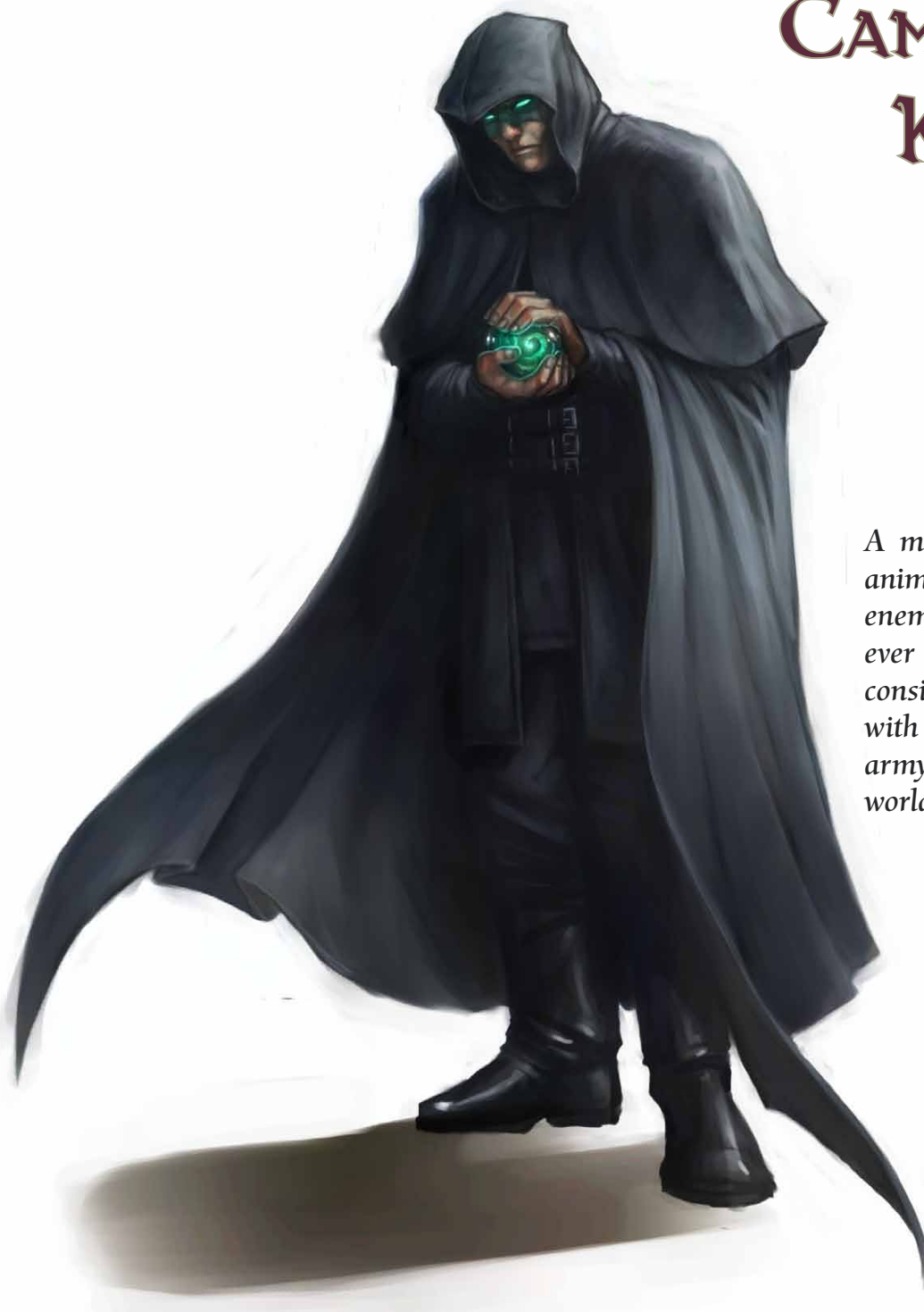
NECROMANCER OF THE BEYOND

By Peter Schaefer

illustration by Tyler Walpole

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A master of death and undeath, Kaius Dantus chooses not to animate bones and flesh in the pursuit of worldly power. Cowing his enemies with decaying muscles pulling taut over bones that grow ever more fragile is frivolous and unworthy of his effort. Dantus considers himself an explorer in the realm of necromancy—an artist with the animus—and he has greater designs than marching an army of the slain across the mortal continents. He looks outside the world for his goals.



All things die, Dantus reasons. Immortal things must die, because the universe contains infinite dangers, and any creature that does not age naturally must look forward to a death more violent than pleasant. Dantus has had more than a few conversations with creatures that do not believe their death is inevitable, and he quietly scorns them for the limits of their imaginations and reason. Dantus wants to empower these creatures to live on after their deaths, and over his career he has given unives to greater and greater creatures from beyond the limits of the world.

As Kaius Dantus improves his skill, he strives for what he considers the pinnacle of his self-made art: the reanimation of a dead god or primordial. Dantus isn't a fanatic worshiper of any creature or cause. He doesn't seek the return of a terrible majesty from before the gods or the resurrection of an evil deity. When Dantus achieves his goal of granting such a creature unlife, he will have proven himself the greatest master of necromantic magic of all time while creating an undead servant of such vast power that the worlds will be his to rule. This goal in mind, Dantus strides forward in his research.

Dantus prefers to go unnoticed, and so he wears plain undyed traveler's garb, including a hooded cloak. The hood conceals his eyes, which have acquired a faint luminescence due to significant exposure to the energy of the Astral Sea.

AMARTA KEEP

Amarta Keep is Kaius Dantus's home, his library, the laboratory where he performs his research, and the base from which he makes his forays into the other planes for raw materials. Amarta is a small castle, but proud: Its three minarets stand tall in the white stone of which the castle is made, and it stands on the eastern slope of a steep hill so the sun's first rays cause it to shine a glorious pearlescent white. The exiled angel that once owned the keep no longer troubles Dantus.

Each of Amarta's three minarets looks out from a single window onto a different plane. From the first, one looks upon the steep hills of the natural world where the castle was built. The view from the second shows Amarta Keep on a heap of crumbling stone in the Elemental Chaos, lost among the thousands of motes of earth slowly spiraling into the Abyss. The last minaret looks out upon an idyllic green field adjoining a lush forest under a gentle, unchanging sun—an abandoned astral dominion forgotten by all but the strange creatures that inhabit it, and they stay out of Kaius Dantus's way. The keep sits in all three planes at once, and its master can enter from any location and walk out to any other location. Anyone not master of the castle must negotiate a cunning maze in the cellar to enter the Elemental Chaos or must solve a series of riddles in the proper tower to access the astral dominion.

Beneath the keep, also contained within the maze that can lead into the Elemental Chaos, Dantus keeps a group of monstrosities: corpses of angels animated with the souls of demons, and vice versa. The nature of the undead spirits has warped the dead, immortal flesh they wear, and they are one of Kaius Dantus's ongoing experiments. Some are mad, and some have displayed powers not seen in either breed of creature alone.

STORY HOOKS

Every ten years, the people of Pinehaven make an offering of the decade's accomplishments and achievements at the local shrine. This year has been the first time in living memory that Pinehaven's guardian angel has not appeared to thank and acknowledge their efforts. When they begged help from a band of passing adventurers, those so-called heroes fled the shrine—all the terrified townsfolk could see was a dwindling portal, through which a dark-eyed, black-haloed angel stood over one of the routed party. The people of the town fear that the guardian angel that has kept them safe from the dangerous world for so long might turn from them, and they need *real* heroes to win its allegiance back. How will Pinehaven survive now that its guardian is animated by Kaius Dantus?

Astriuch is a minor demon lord whose soldiers have been the favored victims of Dantus's experiments. His forces are dwindling, and if he is to retain his authority and territory, he needs outside aid to ward off Kaius Dantus's depredations. The demon lord is willing to promise access to its wealth and future favors for aid now, and it is willing to seal its bargain with a binding oath. Kaius Dantus also contacts the party, inviting them to accept Astriuch's bargain in bad faith. It would put the heroes in a position where they can betray the minor lord and place most of its host in Dantus's hands. Whom does the party aid, or can they find a way to disadvantage both parties?

Kaius Dantus **Level 17 Elite Controller (leader)**
 Medium natural humanoid, human XP 3,200

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +19

The Eternal Undead (Healing) aura 3; each undead creature that starts its turn within the aura regains 5 hit points.

HP 320; **Bloodied** 160
AC 31; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 31
Resist 10 necrotic, 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Necromantic Touch** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Necrotic**
 +21 vs. Fortitude; 4d6 + 11 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Dantus's next turn.

⊕ **Necromantic Gesture** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Necrotic**
 Ranged 10; targets one or two creatures; +21 vs. Reflex; 4d10 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed until the end of Dantus's next turn.

✂ **Reanimation of the Gods** (immediate reaction, when an undead creature drops to 0 hit points; at-will) ◆ **Healing**
 Ranged 10; targets triggering creature; the target regains 1 hit point.

⚡ **Mortals' Curse of Age** (standard; encounter) ◆ **Radiant**
 Close burst 2; targets enemies; +21 vs. Will; 4d8 + 7 radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends). *Miss*: Half damage and all creatures have concealment from the target (save ends).

✂ **Gods' Last Breath** (standard; recharge ☞ ☞) ◆ **Necrotic, Radiant**
 Area burst 2 within 10; targets enemies; +21 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 4 necrotic and radiant damage. The target grants combat advantage and takes ongoing 10 necrotic and radiant damage (save ends both).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Primordial, Supernal

Skills Arcana +20, Dungeoneering +19, Heal +19, Religion +20
Str 12 (+9) **Dex** 15 (+10) **Wis** 22 (+14)
Con 16 (+11) **Int** 24 (+15) **Cha** 20 (+13)

Equipment robe, wand

KAIUS DANTUS

Wielding great power over life and death, Dantus commands a flawlessly loyal group of immortal and elemental undead. When they are not enough to achieve his goals, he applies that power directly to his foes.

KAIUS DANTUS TACTICS

Dantus prefers to resolve his conflicts with words and bargains, since experience tells him that combat drains more of his resources than reaching a compromise. For times when that cannot be, Dantus is never without support from his various undead creations, whom he calls into battle as he opens with *gods' last breath*. He uses *reanimation of the gods* at every opportunity and stays near his servants so his energy can replenish them. When cornered, he resorts to *mortals' curse of age* and his *necromantic touch*.

ANGEL OF VALOROUS DEATH

Kaius has turned legions of angels into shadows of their former selves in an effort to perfect the process. He sends them out on minor errands that are nonetheless too challenging for the undead lesser demons he controls.

Angel of Valorous Death **Level 16 Minion Soldier**
 Medium immortal humanoid (angel, undead) XP 350

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 32; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Immune fear; **Resist** 10 fire, 10 necrotic, 10 radiant
Speed 6, fly 9 (hover)

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Fire, Necrotic**
 +21 vs. AC; 12 fire and necrotic damage and the target is marked until the end of the angel of valorous death's next turn.

⊕ **Valorous Punishment** (immediate reaction, when a creature marked by the angel makes an attack that does not include the ally; at-will) ◆ **Teleport**
 The angel of valorous death teleports 6 squares to a square adjacent to the triggering creature and makes a *greatsword* attack against it.

Alignment Evil	Languages Supernal	
Str 26 (+16)	Dex 18 (+12)	Wis 16 (+11)
Con 22 (+14)	Int 12 (+9)	Cha 10 (+8)

Equipment chainmail, greatsword

ANGEL OF VALOROUS DEATH TACTICS

As any good minion should, the angel of valorous death draws danger away from its master, using its greatsword and *valorous punishment* to keep attention on it.

ANGEL OF ETERNAL PROTECTION

An angel of protection brought to death and back again, the angel of eternal protection is an effective personal guardian. Where it once upheld its god's will through the defense of another, it now has only one objective: to tirelessly defend the creatures its new master names its ward. Dantus uses them as his own personal guard, and he makes rare gifts of them to allies or to nobles as bribes.

ANGEL OF ETERNAL PROTECTION TACTICS

The angel of eternal protection stays near its ward so it can use *ward in undeath* to keep its master alive. It gives anything to keep its ward alive, so it does not hesitate to use *burning the black candle*. When its ward is in mortal danger, the angel tries to avoid conditions that prevent it from using immediate actions.

Angel of Eternal Protection		Level 16 Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (angel, undead)		XP 1,400
Initiative +12	Senses Perception +17	
Angelic Shield aura 5; while the angel is within 5 squares of its ward, each enemy treats the area within the aura as difficult terrain.		
HP 159; Bloodied 79		
AC 31; Fortitude 29, Reflex 25, Will 28		
Immune fear; Resist 10 necrotic, 10 radiant		
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)		
⚔ Greatsword (standard; at-will) ♦ Necrotic, Radiant +21 vs. AC; 2d10 + 3 damage plus 10 necrotic and radiant damage.		
✂ Ward in Undeath (minor 1/round; at-will) Ranged 5; one ally; the angel designates the target as its ward until it designates a new creature as its ward. While the angel is within 5 squares of its ward, the ward takes only half damage from melee and ranged attacks; the angel takes the other half of that damage. While the angel is adjacent to its ward, the ward gains a +2 bonus to AC. A creature can be the ward of only one angel at a time.		
Burning the Black Candle (immediate interrupt, when the angel of eternal protection's ward drops to 0 hit points and is within 5 squares of the angel) The angel of eternal protection's ward regains 30 hit points and can teleport 10 squares (no action). The angel of eternal protection then dies.		
Angelic Presence (while not bloodied) Any attack against the angel of eternal protection takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Supernal	
Skills Insight +17		
Str 22 (+14)	Dex 15 (+10)	Wis 19 (+12)
Con 23 (+14)	Int 12 (+9)	Cha 10 (+8)
Equipment greatsword, plate armor		



BALOR HUSK

When a captive balor hovers near death, a ritual can free the Abyssal energy that gives it power and strength while pinning the animus in place. It becomes an animate husk of a balor—a corpse walking with just enough power to crush its master’s enemies. It remembers the might it wielded before it was reduced to this form, and it bends its efforts toward stealing life energy from other creatures to return to its former strength. The master of such a creature must take care to siphon off the energy the balor husk collects, or it breaks free of its binding and take its vengeance. Dantus keeps the husks to himself, since he needs to study them, but at least one has escaped Amarta Keep into the world.

BALOR HUSK TACTICS

The balor husk wants to steal creatures’ energy most of all. It is bound to obey its master, but within the confines of its orders it uses its *soul-draining sword* and *steal vitality* frequently. If it has the opportunity, it leaves victims alive so they can recover and continue to fuel its return to full power.

Balor Husk		Level 17 Elite Brute
Huge elemental humanoid (demon, undead)		XP 3,200
Initiative +10	Senses Perception +18	
Energy Theft (Cold) aura 3; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 10 cold damage.		
HP 424; Bloodied 212		
AC 29; Fortitude 31, Reflex 30, Will 26		
Immune fear; Resist 20 fire, 15 variable (1/encounter); Vulnerable 15 radiant		
Saving Throws +2		
Speed 8, fly 12 (clumsy)		
Action Points 1		
⊕ Soul-Draining Sword (standard; at-will) ♦ Necrotic		
Reach 3; +22 vs. AC; 4d10 + 10 necrotic damage (crit 60 necrotic damage).		
⊕ Soul-Burning Whip (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire		
Reach 5; +20 vs. Fortitude; 6d6 + 10 fire damage, and the balor husk pulls the target 5 squares.		
⊕ Double Attack (standard; at-will)		
The balor husk makes a <i>soul-burning whip</i> attack and a <i>soul-draining sword</i> attack.		
⊕ Steal Vitality (standard; at-will) ♦ Cold		
Ranged 5; +20 vs. Will; 4d8 + 9 cold damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the balor husk’s next turn.		
⚡ Death Implosion (when reduced to 0 hit points) ♦ Cold, Necrotic		
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +20 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 5 cold damage plus 1d10 + 5 necrotic damage. Miss: Half damage.		
⚡ Demonic Inhalation (immediate interrupt, when the balor husk is bloodied; encounter) ♦ Cold		
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +22 vs. Fortitude; 4d10 + 9 cold damage. Effect: The balor husk gains 5 temporary hit points for each target this attack hits.		
Rage of the Reaved (while bloodied)		
The balor husk gains a +4 bonus to damage rolls.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Abyssal, Common	
Skills Athletics +23, Endurance +24		
Str 30 (+18)	Dex 15 (+10)	Wis 21 (+13)
Con 32 (+19)	Int 8 (+7)	Cha 10 (+8)

About the Author

Peter Schaefer lives on an invisible space station geostationary over Brazil. All his needs are met by cybernetically enhanced and programmed lemurs, who also perform routine maintenance on his home. When needs dictate that Peter participates in matters at work, he transfers his consciousness into his Earth-based clone for the duration, and later resynchronizes his two brains as he deactivates the clone. This process is entirely safe and allows him to work on as an RPG developer on books such as *Adventurer’s Vault™ 2*, *Divine Power™*, and many *D&D Insider™* articles. He made the vast fortune that allows him this lifestyle by repairing and restoring photostat machines and gramophones to museum quality for public and private interests.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S EYE ON THE REALMS

THE HOUSE OF NAERHAND: FAMILY GAMES OF POWER

by Ed Greenwood ♦ illustration by Christine MacTernan

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Many lands in the Realms have hereditary noble families. Their high rank has, over the years, usually made them powerful, wealthy, haughty—and hated. They enjoy privileges denied to those not of noble houses. They are often highly visible in the social life of their realms, frequently sparking gossip, setting or changing fashions, and swaggering about in public.

Yet the strength of a ruling body in the Realms lies not in a strong nobility, but in trade. Behind many

rulers stand successful merchant families whose wealth has bought them influence nobles regard as rightfully theirs. It follows that nobles tend to hate and envy rising merchant families, even if they themselves were among the newly successful merchant elite only a generation or so ago.

Some nobles strike out at such upthrust pretenders, openly or covertly, while others find themselves in need of funds and are forced to make alliances

with these wealthy commoners. Usually, wealthy merchants seek to join the ranks of the nobility, and the nobles want to keep them out. A few wealthy merchant families, however, see the wisdom of *not* being ennobled or striving to become nobles. They prefer to avoid such attention, enmity, feuds, and duties by keeping lower profiles, and influencing matters where they work and dwell without assuming the burdens of rulership, court service, or a title.

One such family, the Naerhands, even have a saying for their chosen lives and operations: “Avoid the gilded target.”

In recent years the Naerhands have flourished by working busily—and unscrupulously—behind the scenes. Today, they are wealthier than the largest city guilds and have more daily influence over life in the Sword Coast and western Sea of Fallen Stars lands than many rulers.

THE HOUSE OF THE BLACK TEAR

The badge of the Naerhands—worn by many of their thousand-some employees and marked on countless crates, casks, and wagons—is a lone staring black eye from which descends a single black teardrop. However, under the previous and current matriarchs of the house, Velarra Naerhand and Janszeene Naerhand, respectively, the Naerhands have taken to hiding much of their wealth and ownership behind companies that bear other names than their own. Their control of various fortified warehouses along major trade routes and dozens of leased shops and residences in Waterdeep, Suzail, Saerloon, Athkatla, as well as a dozen smaller settlements, is concealed from all but the most diligent investigators. These front companies are known to include the Brightrise Coster, Horlandus Trading, Mauromeir Fine Goods, the Farfarer Fleet, and Goldwheel Wagons.

Under instructions from the matriarch, several of the most active travelers among the family customarily use aliases rather than the family surname. The most experienced of these traveling traders are veteran adventurers in all but name. They include sour, old

Ozrin Naerhand, who currently uses such names as Baerinth of Westgate, Corlar Tarflorlun, and Daern Valambar. He is short, sword-scarred, has a many-times-broken nose, and a short, white jaw-fringe beard.

Another undercover agent of the house is tall and one-eyed Ilnur Naerhand. A generation younger than Ozrin, and now a ruthless, well-connected swindler and brigand, he’s an expert at playing various costers and guilds, as well as various noble factions, against one another. Ilnur has been known to use such false names as Asmur Calanthus, Brace Haelkon, Felneth Olondar, and Samdaer Tallowmar.

A third Naerhand to distinguish himself in this capacity is the young, ambitious, and agile sneak-thief Sarvin. Short and slender, he frequently employs disguises in his work, and he is even adept at pretending to be female. He has a wealth of established characters he can slip into at a moment’s notice, although one name he often uses is Hasper Wendlond.

THE FAMILY HIERARCHY

A family matriarch has always ruled the Naerhands. These women have nearly always been reared in the family from childhood, rather than marrying into the clan. A matriarch operates with the advice of three to five family elders. A few matriarchs have lashed out against family members for selfish reasons, or consistently ignored the advice of the elders or the wants of the majority of the family (currently forty-six strong, including children). They have, to a one, been found dead of mysterious “falls” from various high places in family residences.

One of the reasons the Naerhands have been so successful in recent decades is the wisdom and farsightedness of both Velarra “Old Crow” and her daughter Janszeene. The latter is known as “the

Mouth of Doom” behind her back, and “High Lady” to her face, except to the three male elders she’s closest to, who call her “Jan” or simply by her given name.

Janszeene’s four most trusted elders include her sister Malarrla and her brothers Taerult, Dhankosk, and Pelrar. Malarrla is considered too spiteful to become matriarch, and closely watched by her kin for any signs she’s planning a coup or betrayal of the family. Pelrar is a master forger, engraver, artist, and hatcher-of-schemes who makes it his business to know laws and trade regulations everywhere the family operates. His two elder brothers both had long and successful careers as traveling traders, and have now established themselves as moneylenders and coster-sponsors in Waterdeep and Suzail.

Married couples within the family rear, train, and discipline their own children. However, the matriarch steps in when teenaged younglings become restless. She assigns them to established traveling traders among the family, to keep them busy, but also to take the younglings out of the reach and influence of their parents and thus lessen loyalties within an individual branch of the family. Any family member has the right of audience and appeal to the matriarch, though wise Naerhands go to elders instead, and let them in turn treat with the matriarch.

The current general mood in the family is of deep trust and loyalty to “Mother” Janszeene. She is believed (rightly) to take an interest in the doings and successes of every family member; to be always open to new goods, trade practices, and political stances; and to have family members watching over each other more for backup and rescue purposes than out of spying or suspicion.

WHAT THE NAERHANDS ARE UP TO

For years, the Naerhands worked to dominate the making and repair of wagon-team harnesses, as well as control of key watering holes and wayside rest and reprovisioning stops along trade routes. This they largely achieved, and then relinquished some of the least profitable or strategically located to others, as they turned their attention to the acquisition of properties in major trading cities without being noticed.

Right now, they have managed to achieve effective control over—through various shell companies—about a dozen small and middling overland trading companies and dockside warehousing concerns. Every month, the Naerhands take in (through various intermediaries) about seventy monthly rents in Suzail, several hundred in Athkatla and in Waterdeep, some forty in Saerloon, and over three hundred more scattered across the Realms. They try to have a tenant in almost every family property, such as cobblers and sundries-sellers in most of their wayside reprovisioning stops.

They have already placed spies in many noble households in Waterdeep and Cormyr, and are seeking to work those spies higher into the hierarchies of the courts, aiming to reach the law-drafting, contract-awarding, and policy enforcement levels.

In Waterdeep, the Naerhands work (through intermediaries, and never using the family name) to take over guilds and achieve strong influence over various individual Lords of Waterdeep—without letting any Lord become aware that any other Lord is being potentially influenced.

IF YOU SWINDLE OR TAKE DOWN A NAERHAND

The House of the Black Tear is actively involved in mercantile trade every day; they understand and expect losses, being outhustled or swindled, and losing deals. In most cases, letting such things go unavenged—and so avoiding drawing attention to themselves—is their response. However, they don't forgive and forget. Rather, they take careful note of anyone who crosses or thwarts them several times, and start to devise ways of taking care of such thorns, usually by manipulating rivals, but sometimes by framing the troublemakers.

Someone who murders a Naerhand is identified, tracked down, and made to pay—in a manner that won't attract attention to the family. So a slain, maimed, vanished, or imprisoned family member will be avenged, but the payback may take some considerable time and come from an unexpected source.

In wilder areas, the family usually has an experienced adventuring band as direct employees, and hires mercenary muscle if monster raids or lawlessness becomes a local problem. They never trust mercenaries, and always try to covertly hire a second mercenary band to spy on—and take down if a betrayal seems imminent—their first set of sword-hirelings.

The Naerhands try never to cross wizards or other spell-slingers, but rather to establish themselves as useful friends to such individuals, in hopes that they can be recruited as willing, paid allies in emergencies. And the family will only try such hirings in emergencies.

As per Mother Janszeene's standing orders, every family member regularly reports to others (and agents who act as message drops), and is shadowed by another family member. If a Naerhand is captured, killed, or even just assaulted, a backup will know about it swiftly and seek to identify who did the harm, and where they go.

The family moves swiftly and ruthlessly against anyone who starts trying to learn who owns their various front companies, or to trace family relationships and uncover real names.

As for the matriarch herself: She serves poisoned wine, and throws poisoned daggers with swift accuracy, when dealing with foes. She has dosed herself for years to attain practical immunity to the poisons she uses. She's also building an arsenal of magic items to win battles with hired spellcasters, if need be. Unknown to Janszeene, her elders are also secretly assembling personal magic item collections.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the FORGOTTEN REALMS® on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

SPLIT THE PARTY . . . WISELY

By Mike Mearls

illustration by Raven Mimura

In last month's column, I talked about using a skill challenge as a convenient way to handle the action when the characters separate. While one character looks for information on Bane and his clerics in the royal library, another character hunts down a thief who broke into the temple of Bane. Using skill challenges to break out such action allows each character to stand in the spotlight and lets you cover a number of separate actions at once. This month's column presents a sample skill challenge in that vein.

This skill challenge is based on a classic adventure from *Dungeon* magazine called *A Hot Day in L'Trel*. Written by Ted James Thomas Zuvich, that adventure thrust the characters into the role of firefighters as an inferno raced through the titular city. The adventure also delved into the aftermath of the fire, as the characters helped rebuild L'Trel. This skill challenge focuses on the fire and tracking down the responsible party.

SETTING UP

One hot day in Fallcrest (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 198), fire elementals descend upon the city to spread flames and chaos. The elementals were accidentally summoned by a halfling wizard named Bairden O'Kennon. Bairden uncovered an old, ruined tower in the woods to the southeast of town. While inspecting runes carved into the tower's cellar, he accidentally called forth a number of elementals that the tower's previous owner had imprisoned within a series of mystical wards. A horde of fire spirits, wispy flames with the barest level of sentience, emerged from the tower and headed to Fallcrest to spread mayhem.



This skill challenge serves as an unexpected challenge to the characters as they go about their business in town. It's the perfect way to shake up what might be a typical shopping excursion or investigation.

The skill challenge is broken into four parts. You can use as many or as few of its pieces as desired. Each is an independent skill challenge or encounter aimed at one character. Each of the individual challenges depicts a situation or obstacle the character faces as the action unfolds.



If you have more than four characters, you can use the first challenge for several of them. The fires are spread across town and call for different efforts to battle them.

When running this skill challenge, refer back to [last month's article](#) in this series for advice.

CHALLENGE #1: FIRE

This challenge is ideal for any cleric, warlord, or a charismatic character trained in Diplomacy and Intimidate.

The character involved in this challenge witnesses the first outbreak of the fire and must coordinate efforts to bring it under control. This is a complexity 1 skill challenge, requiring four successes before three failures.

The Setup: As one of the characters goes about his business in town, a nearby warehouse suddenly bursts into flame. The commoners in the area and a few guardsmen on patrol stand and gape at the fire, paralyzed with surprise. The character must rally the townsfolk to fight the fire before it spreads.

Actions: There are a few things a character might try to do. Each failure wastes precious time. As the fire spreads from the warehouse to nearby buildings, time lost to mistakes leads to more damage. The character can use each skill once with the moderate DCs.

Organize a Response: Using Diplomacy, the character can convince the nearby folk to leap to action and fight the fire.

Supply the Bucket Brigade: With Streetwise, a character can identify the nearest source of buckets, water, and other supplies needed to fight the fire.

Inspire Bravery: An Intimidate check can inspire bravery in those who might otherwise choose to flee the scene.

Magic: With an Arcana check, the character can use a water- or cold-based power to fight the fire.

Healing: A Heal check allows the character to treat firefighters for smoke inhalation and minor injuries, keeping them active and helping to sustain the effort against the fire.

Resolution: If the character succeeds at the skill challenge, the damage is limited to a few buildings. Otherwise, the townsfolk eventually overcome the fire but not before several important buildings are burned to the ground.

CHALLENGE #2: LOOTERS

This challenge is aimed at fighters, paladins, and other characters who like to mix it up in melee.

When the fires erupt across town, a few unsavory characters decide that this is the perfect chance to make some cash. The character that faces this challenge must defeat a group of looters and help prevent chaos from overwhelming Fallcrest.

The Setup: The character sees signs of the fire on the other side of town. Panicked groups of townsfolk flee the city, some with burns, smoke-stained clothes, or other signs of the disaster. As the character searches for his friends or rushes to help fight the fire, he comes across a merchant defending his shop from a gang of toughs.

The Encounter: Two humans pin a shopkeeper, a human named Korrek, to the ground while a halfling kicks him in the ribs. A lumbering half-orc inside Korrek's shop is ransacking it for valuables that he throws into a sack.

The character faces two human rabble, a halfling stout, and an orc drudge (representing the half-orc). The half-orc is named Vank, and he is well known in town as a thug and troublemaker. Vank orders the two humans to attack the character. The halfling, Boren, is Vank's toady and an unrepentant sycophant. He uses his sling from short range. Vank only moves to attack once the character has disposed of the human rabble.

Resolution: If the character defeats the thugs, Korrek thanks them and offers the character a treasure parcel of your choice as a reward. The guard arrives to arrest the thugs and maintain order. The character's actions serve as a warning to other criminals, helping maintain order.

If the character is defeated, other criminals are emboldened by Vank's actions and set to looting shops across town. Even if the city escapes damage from the fire, many shops are stripped bare of goods and their owners forced into poverty.

CHALLENGE #3: THE RESCUE

This challenge is a good match for a rogue, monk, or similar character with high Dexterity or training in Acrobatics. It requires quick feet and good balance. It also works well for a paladin or other heroic character.

This is a complexity 1 skill challenge, requiring four successes before three failures. Use the moderate DCs for the skill checks.

The Setup: When the fires break out, this character is near a boardinghouse that has caught fire. It is a three-story structure with rooms on each floor. Most of the tenants rush out of the building, but three people are trapped on the top floor. Someone must spring into action to save them!

The three people trapped in the building are an elderly dwarf, Varl Stonespike; a young halfling named Glarra who is bedridden with the flu; and a human named Ferrin who is trapped by flames that have raced up to his room. The entire eastern half of the building is aflame.

Actions: There are a number of actions and plans a character can try to rescue each of the trapped people.

Gain Access to the Third Floor: An Athletics or Acrobatics check allows a character to climb and jump to the top of the building.

Varl: Getting Varl out of the building is a tough challenge. He is half-deaf, cranky, and terrified of leaving behind his prized possession, a 200-pound stone statue of a dragon. A Thievery check and a coil of rope allows a character to rig a simple pulley to drop the statue and Varl out of the building. An Intimidate check can also shock Varl into scuttling out the window, but then his statue is destroyed.

Glarra: Shepherding the sick and barely conscious Glarra out of the building requires a careful touch. Otherwise, the character risks hurting her. A Heal check allows a character to awaken her long enough to lead her to safety. An Athletics check allows a character to carry her out without harming her.

Ferrin: Ferrin is trapped in his room and surrounded by flames. An Acrobatics check allows a character to leap over the flames and reach him.

Magic: A cold or water-based power along with a successful Arcana check allows a character to beat back the flames long enough to save Glarra or Varl.

Recruit Help: Diplomacy or Intimidate allows a character to recruit help from onlookers gathered around the fire. This does not give the character a success, but it does provide a +2 bonus to all remaining checks in this skill challenge.

Resolution: If the character succeeds, he saves each of the three trapped people. Otherwise, with the last failure, the building collapses and kills any NPC still inside. If the character is in the building, he loses 1d4 healing surges and is knocked unconscious for 1d4 hours.

CHALLENGE #4: SEALING THE PORTAL

This skill challenge is ideal for a wizard, a bard, or any other character with a high Intelligence or training in Arcana.

The character involved in this challenge spots the elementals that emerge from the ruined tower and spread fires across Fallcrest. By tracking them back to their source, the character can seal the portal and destroy the spirits.

This is a complexity 1 skill challenge, requiring four successes before three failures. Use the moderate DCs for the skill checks.

The Setup: The character involved in this challenge spots several streaking spheres of flame, each about the size of a soccer ball, swirl through the air and into the town. Whenever the spheres of flame touch a building, they disappear and the building catches fire. From the forests southeast of town, more and more spheres appear.

Actions: The character must track the spheres of fire and cut them off at their source. It should be clear that simply fighting the fires or spending time trying to gather allies won't ultimately save the town. The spheres increase in number with each passing minute.

Track the Spheres: This check must be made before any other. Perception, Nature, or Arcana allow a character to track the spheres back to their source, which is a ruined tower not far from town. On a failed check, the character took a poor route to the tower and gains one failure for the delay. This check can be made only once.



The tower is a crumbled ruin, but it is apparent that someone cleared rubble from a stone staircase leading to the basement. The basement is a single, 20-foot-wide chamber. In the middle of the room is a glowing sigil in midair, a rune of fire from which the fiery spirits emerge. The charred body of a halfling, the wizard Bairden, is sprawled on the floor.

The following actions can generate a maximum of one success each but any number of failures for repeated attempts.

Inspecting the Corpse: A Heal, Perception, or Arcana check allows a character to determine that the corpse was slain by the fiery activation of the rune. In addition, the corpse clutches a charred, wooden wand in one of its hands.

Inspecting the Runes: A History or Religion check reveals that the rune is linked to Imix, Prince of Elemental Fire. The fiery spirits are drawn from the elemental chaos and into the world. Spellcasters use these runes to bind elementals for use in experiments and research.

Using the Wand: If the character finds the wand, an Arcana check allows the character to determine that the wand has a lingering aura of anti-magic that could be discharged to weaken the rune. Bairden used the wand to dispel magical traps.

Magic: A cold or water-based power, along with a successful Arcana check, allows a character to weaken the rune's power, slowing the flow of fire spirits.

Resolution: If the character succeeds, he dispels the rune and stops the flow of spirits. If he fails, the rune detonates from the magic flowing through it. If the character is in the cellar when it explodes, he takes damage equal to his bloodied value and loses 1d4 healing surges.

About the Author

MIKE MEARLS is the Lead Designer for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game. His recent credits include *Player's Handbook 3*, *Hammerfast*, and *Primal Power*.

EPISODE 26: STARTING FRESH

BY JAMES WYATT

illustration by Wayne England

This is a really exciting column for me to write. I've been tinkering around with a new campaign for a while, and I have players lined up to come to my house on Saturday to make characters and get the campaign underway. One of the things that has me really excited is that I'll be running this campaign set in my old campaign world of Aquela. (Incidentally, because every time I give out my email address I have to explain this: I pronounce it uh-KWELL-uh. It's not Spanish.)

I talked quite a bit about Aquela [a couple months ago](#), and that was the thing that got me excited to start this campaign. I started off in that column by examining the core assumptions of the D&D world outlined in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and thinking about how I might want to tweak them (or re-emphasize them!) in Aquela's latest incarnation. Then I thought about campaign themes. Since then, I've done a mix of big-picture and detail-focused thinking about the world, trying to get ready to actually start the campaign. I'm running out of time now, but that only makes me more excited!

In an effort to share some of that excitement, I'll spend this month talking through my process of getting ready for the first session.

ASSISTED BRAINSTORMING

I've done a lot of work on Aquela over the years, but none of it is material I'm going to just pick up and use whole cloth. That's partly because of edition changes—the last time I ran Aquela seriously was under the 2nd Edition AD&D rules—and partly because my sensibilities have changed—what I want out of a campaign now isn't what I was doing then. That said, a lot of old ideas are sitting around in file folders (both physical and virtual) waiting to get dusted off to new life in my new campaign. The process of sifting through those old adventures, setting descriptions, and brainstorming notes, and generating ideas for the new game is what I mean by “assisted brainstorming.”

It's the same process you might go through when you pick up a new D&D book or read an article on *D&D Insider*: you're reading ideas and weighing how you might use them in your campaign. I did the same thing reading through my old campaign notes.

Incidentally, I kept my notes throughout this process in [a wiki on the Wizards Community site](#), so you can read my notes for yourself, if you're that interested. I ended up copying chunks of text from various places: the HyperCard stack I used to store



notes for my last campaign (circa 1993–1997), adventures I ran during that period, and some older notes. I included notes on the source of any text I copied in, to remind me that it was old material that would need an update pass later.

Fundamentally, this process came down to, “What cool stuff is in here?” Anything that struck me as cool, I’d make a note of. It turned out there was more of that than I might have guessed! I had written about [the aquatic caravans of the jann](#) (I’m not sure what the jann are in the 4th edition cosmology—they might be genasi, now that I think about it—but I like the tent-ships description.) A long time ago, I had the idea for [a ruined elven capital called Kelleniaristi](#), inhabited by mad elves. And I built my last campaign, heavily influenced by *Ravenloft*, on the idea of an ancient lich-queen (this was long before Blizzard’s lich-king appeared in any Warcraft game . . .) who sparked the events of the campaign by returning from her exile to the Domains of Dread. The lich-queen, Killesti, will probably be a major villain in the new campaign, but not the major driver I envisioned before.

Besides all my old notes, I spent some time browsing through other sources as well. I pulled out a list of classic and more recent adventures that would fit easily into a waterborne setting, from Bruce Cordell’s 2nd Edition sahuagin trilogy (*Evil Tide*, *Night of the Shark*, and *Sea of Blood*) and the 1st-Edition classic *Shrine of the Kuo-Toa* to my own 2nd-Edition *Dungeon* adventures “The Sunken Shadow” and “Maze of the Morkoth.” I also got the idea of using *Dwellers of the Forbidden City* (which I have talked about extensively in [this column](#) as well as in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*) as a centerpiece of the campaign, weaving it in with the story elements I craft for this campaign.

UPDATING THE OLD STUFF

It’s probably a good thing that I haven’t run a campaign set in Aquela in at least twelve years. That distance allowed me to take a much more objective stance toward all my old material and freed me to toss out huge chunks of it that were no longer useful to me. For example, inspired by the work of Professor Tolkien, I put a fair amount of effort in my youth into developing the “Common tongue” of Aquela, which I called Q’lati. That right there is what’s wrong with my language: too many Qs and apostrophes.

(For the record, I used Qs instead of Ks because there’s a Q in Aquela, and I wasn’t about to change the name of the world to Akwela. I used apostrophes for schwa sounds, because Q’lati is a perfectly rational language delivered to the people of the world by the goddess of knowledge, Q’la.)

Here I went to all the trouble of creating a perfectly logical language with immutable rules of pronunciation, and somehow the language still proved to be the most consistent barrier for my players, preventing them from getting immersed in the world. The gall of those players!

Yeah . . . so I’m scrapping the language. I think I’ll even change the names of my gods, so Eridana (the god of law and head of the pantheon) becomes Erathis, T’qan the beggar-god and trickster becomes Avandra, the paladin-god Hirus becomes Bahamut, his evil brother Arius becomes Bane, and so on.

Other than egregious errors of judgment and lapses of taste, there are other things I want to update in my new campaign as well. I’m approaching the world from a 4th Edition sensibility now, and that means looking at all this old material through the lens of the core assumptions of the D&D world outlined in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*. I ran through

those assumptions point by point [two months ago](#) and identified a number of places where, at various times in the past, I had gone too far in a different direction.

I’m not changing those directions just because the DMG tells me to, by the way. There was a time, probably when I was really into *Ravenloft* and *Masque of the Red Death*, when I wrote things like this: “Tales of other fantastic beasts are told as well, covering a range of creatures from human-like to completely alien. It is, of course, impossible to say what might be encountered on a desert island or in the depths of the ocean, but in the range of normal experience one has little to fear from these creatures of legend and myth.” I wanted my players to imagine the terror that real people who had never seen actual monsters might feel when suddenly confronted with a dragon or a grell, but in practice, I ran adventures that focused too much on interacting with people (of various races) in safe urban environments and that weren’t particularly fantastic or especially fun. So reaffirming that “Monsters are everywhere” is a helpful reminder for me to stick to what makes D&D what it is—dungeons, dragons, monsters, and fantasy adventure!

Along the same lines, I have shattered the old Empire of Ataqim and turned the scattered islands of the world into points of light. While the old magocratic bureaucracy is gone, I’ll still have most settlements governed by people capable of magic who live in towers. Other settlements have central towers where the ruling wizard used to live that are now haunted, infested with elementals run amok, patrolled by golems no longer bound to their creators’ wills, or plagued by slaads or demons drawn to the residual magical energy of the place.

THE STORIES

I've already identified one big theme to highlight in the campaign this time around: Primordial Threat, as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Though I've put a new spin on it, that theme goes back to my very earliest work on Aquela, when I decided that the conflict between good and evil in this world would not be as important as the conflict between law and chaos. I think I did that just to be different when I was a teenager, but it works surprisingly well in my new campaign and in 4th Edition.

It's going to be a long time before my players reach the point where they'll be directly confronting a primordial. The larger idea behind this theme is the threat of Chaos (with a capital C). Chaos is embodied in the primordials and demon princes that threaten the foundations of the world, and I'll make good use of them and their servants throughout the campaign. I'm also planning to ensure that monsters such as elementals, slaads, and demons are regular features at all levels in the campaign, as concrete reminders of the threats of Chaos.

There are three stories related to that larger theme that I intend to weave together in the campaign. I'm going to use the various devotees of Mual-Tar the Thunder Serpent I outlined in my [Lords of Chaos article](#), starting early on. Their goal as described in the article is to free their primordial master, but individual cult leaders have more short-term goals that can keep the campaign moving through every tier of play.

I'm also going to give a prominent role to the demon prince Dagon, though he's presented in *Monster Manual 2* as more or less subservient to Demogorgon. As Lord of the Depths, Dagon is a great fit for my water world. I'm going to use him as the driving force behind a secretive pirate brotherhood I used to call the Morkoth Clan. (Who knows? If I can come up with an interesting take on the morkoth, perhaps turning them into demonic servitors of Dagon, maybe I'll let the name stand.) These pirates are known for their bloodthirstiness, which is a natural result of the fact that they gain magical power by sacrificing their victims to Dagon. The Morkoth Clan pirate Korthos Blooddrinker is a name that my wife might even remember from my last campaign, which is a plus.

Finally, I'm going to develop a sect within the Temple Cult that is devoted to the destruction of the four Elementals—the primordials who joined Erathis in the Dawn War and helped bring about the gods' conclusive victory. Officially, the members of this sect are devoted to the gods and believe that the Elementals are primordial spies within the pantheon who can't be trusted. Many followers of other primordials have joined this sect, however, hoping to either destroy the gods' most powerful allies so that the remaining primordials can overthrow the gods, or turn the Elementals against the gods. I think this group has some interesting potential to be both villains and allies at various times in the campaign.

Aside from those three forces tied to the Primordial Threat theme, I have a couple of other villains and patrons I can put into play to drive adventures.

Killesti the lich-queen is one. Long ago, she united the archipelago under her iron-fisted rule, and now she seeks to restore her ancient kingdom. Maybe she

has been trapped in a Shadowfell Domain of Dread, or maybe she was slain and has only recently been restored through her phylactery. In any event, she's now back on the scene and looking to rule the world.

Wizards both malevolent and benign seek to restore some of the magical infrastructure that supported the fallen empire: repairing teleportation circles, placing sending stones, retrieving powerful magic items, and manipulating ley lines or similar fonts of magical energy. Though this is mostly about restoring law and order in the wake of the empire's fall, some of these wizards have ulterior motives that are not so laudable, so characters might end up helping some wizards and hindering others over the course of their adventures.

The Temple Cult is all about protecting and expanding civilization. In the wake of the empire's fall, that is a high priority. Adventurers are needed to rebuild forces of civilization (I might draw on the notion of the Champions of Argent from *Revenge of the Giants* a bit here) and stand against the forces of Chaos. This is fundamentally about giving characters who have religious ties some motivation to pursue their adventuring careers.

GETTING STARTED

Over the course of this week, I have to figure out how to take a large group of very inexperienced players and introduce them to this campaign, help them make characters, and get them playing.

I really liked Stephen Radney-MacFarland's *Save My Game* column called "[Roleplaying, Hook, Line, and Sinker](#)" (which is why I picked it up in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*). I'm thinking I want to do something similar to help get the players invested in their characters and in the campaign as quickly as possible.

I don't think this particular group will have much trouble getting into the roleplaying aspect of the game (the players are all friends I've met doing theater), but I think giving them solid background ties will help my campaign in the long term.

I've started outlining these character background elements. In addition to sketching some part of a character's history, each of these backgrounds gives the player a concrete reason for being on a ship at the start of the campaign. Here are a few examples:

- ◆ *Agent of Civilization.* A pious member of the Temple Cult, you're on a mission from god (Erathis) to rebuild civilization. You're traveling on a ship bound for the town of Haven in order to help rebuild the Haven Guard. (I lifted that pretty much directly from the background of the paladin I'm playing in Bill Slavicsek's Thursday night game.)
- ◆ *Arcane Apprentice.* You serve a powerful wizard who might be a little crazy but generally means well. He sent you to Haven to retrieve some minor artifact from the tower at the heart of the nearby Bloodwhisper Forest.
- ◆ *Merchant.* You're a member of the Dragon Turtle Consortium, and you're carrying a very valuable cargo to Haven.
- ◆ *Refugee.* You come from a village at the edge of the Blackwing Swamp, which was recently destroyed by lizardfolk. The last survivors of your village are all aboard this ship, bound for the town of Haven.
- ◆ *Aspirant Knight.* You're traveling to Haven to meet a Knight of the Green Flame, in hopes of joining that elite order of knights. (The Order of the Green Flame is another name from Aquela's ancient history. I like the name, but I've never really attached anything to it that I'm particularly fond of.)
- ◆ *Secret.* You have a secret, something the other adventurers don't know. You can choose whether it's a dark secret or something relatively benign. If a player chooses this background, I'll take the player aside and provide the appropriate secret. Either the character is a member of the relatively benign Hammer and Chisel society, whose inner circle—unbeknownst to the character or the player—are devotees of Mual-Tar, or the character belongs to the more overtly malign Rites of the Moon, a cult that is secretly a pawn of the lich-queen Killesti. In either case, the character is en route to Haven to meet another member of the secret society.

And so on. Each of these backgrounds either ties in to a story element I plan to use in the campaign—a villain or a patron—or it points directly to one of the adventure locales I plan to use in the first five levels of play (Bloodwhisper Forest, Blackwing Swamp). Each of them puts the character on a ship bound for Haven at the start of the campaign.

I think I might facilitate character creation by attaching character archetypes to these backgrounds as well. A player who chooses the Agent of Civilization background is probably (but not necessarily) a human with a divine class. An Aspirant Knight will probably be a defender. These archetypes should help me guide the players through character creation a little more smoothly—which is my biggest concern about how Saturday's game is going to go.

Next time, I'll report on how it went, then talk more about my approach to sketching out the sandbox in which these characters will play.

About the Author

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