

ISSUE 179 | JUNE 2010

DUNGEON

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT



3 EDITORIAL

By Steve Winter

“There’s a new sheriff in town, and he’s not entirely sane.”

4 FAARLUNG’S ALGORITHM

By Syd Thurston

Kelphin Green suffers from a life-threatening condition arising from his experiments in arcane elemental energies—elemental discorporeation—that is slowly reducing him to dust. To save himself, Kelphin looks to retrieve the *Faarlung Algorithm*. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 16th-level characters.

24 CHAOS SCAR: THE HAMMER FALLS

By Corwin Riddle

In “The Hammer Falls,” characters enter an abandoned metalworking refinery under the control of a clan of duergar who have given their souls to infernal forces in exchange for power. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 2nd-level characters.

36 CHAOS SCAR: THE SPLINTERED SPRING

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

As part of a search for missing magical items, the heroes must make their way to a scarred landscape where a shattered spring fills a misty lake. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 3rd-level characters.

49 SIDE TREK: THE DEN OF DREUS

By Logan Bonner

The conclusion of HS1: *The Slaying Stone* suggests possible future adventures the heroes might undertake. This side trek lets characters of around 2nd level who completed the quest to find and destroy the slaying stone follow up by pursuing Dreus Matrand.

61 EYE ON DARK SUN

By Rodney Thompson

Sunwarped flats are areas where the blazing rays of the red sun interact with the remnants of powerful defiling magic to create pockets of highly unstable terrain where everything from the land to creatures to magic quickly mutates.

65 EYE ON THE REALMS

By Ed Greenwood

Wizards beyond counting died in the Spellplague. What makes Ondal memorable is not his wizardry. He is remembered for the wine he’d bottled but hadn’t yet sold when the Spellplague struck.

68 SAVE MY GAME

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

The difference between a good DM and a great DM is the ability to say, yes. But we’re going to let you in on a little secret. Sometimes it is OK to say no.

71 DUNGEONCRAFT

By James Wyatt

James spreads clues and quests for the fledgling characters to gather and which will guide their adventuring careers.



ON THE COVER
Illustration by Kekai Kotaki



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DUNGEON[®]

Editor-in-Chief	Steve Winter
Senior Art Director	Jon Schindehette
Web Production	Bart Carroll
Contributing Authors	Logan Bonner, Scott Fitzgerald Gray, Ed Greenwood, Stephan Rodney-MacFarland, Corwin Riddle, Rodney Thompson, Syd Thurston, James Wyatt
Developers	Jeremy Crawford, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Rodney Thompson
Editors	Miranda Horner
Cover Artist	Kekai Kotaki
Contributing Artists	Sam Burley, Slawomir Maniak, William O'Connor, Ryan Pancoast, Ben Wooten
Cartographers	Jason A. Engle, Mike Schley
Publishing Production Specialists	Angelika Lokotz, Erin Dorries, Christopher Tardiff
Web Development	Mark A. Jindra
D&D Creative Manager	Christopher Perkins
Executive Producer, D&D Insider	Christopher Perkins
Director of RPG R&D	Bill Slavicsek
Special Thanks	Richard Baker, Greg Bilsland, Michele Carter, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, Andy Collins, Bruce R. Cordell, Jeremy Crawford, Peter Lee, Mike Mearls, Kim Mohan, Cal Moore, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Matthew Sernett, Rodney Thompson, James Wyatt

INTRODUCTIONS, AGAIN

"There's a new sheriff in town, and he's not entirely sane."

That's how Chris Perkins summed up the change on the magazines in our team meeting a few weeks ago, and I rather like it. Not because I agree on the sanity thing—I'm completely normal, from my perspective—but because a unique strain of insanity is needed to tackle a job like editor-in-chief over *Dragon* and *Dungeon* Magazines. In that light, I see Chris's pronouncement as a testimonial to a certain *qualification* for the job.

D&D has been my career, and I've been around long enough for that to mean something, I suppose. After a short stint as a newspaper reporter, I started working at TSR as an editor in 1981, and I've been publishing D&D one way or another ever since as an editor, developer, designer, lead editor, managing editor, and creative director.

Of the countless projects I worked on at TSR, the ones I'm most proud of are AD&D 2nd Edition (as one of three leads, alongside Dave "Zeb" Cook and Jon Pickens); *Marvel Super Heroes* (as co-creator with designer Jeff Grubb); the original *Oriental Adventures* and *Spelljammer* (as editor/developer); epic adventures such as *Night Below* and *Dragon Mountain*, and two of the best campaign settings ever, *Al Qadim* and *DARK SUN™* (as creative director).

When TSR moved to Seattle, it was finally time for me to move on to something new. It turned out to be website production . . . which led me right back to Wizards of the Coast as a web consultant for the Harry Potter card game, Avalon Hill games, *D&D Miniatures*, and—wait for it—D&D.

So aside from a few years off in the late '90s when I was learning a new craft, I've been up to my pauldrons in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS toil. I've been honored to work with some of the top talents this industry has to offer, and the current crew, I'm happy to say, is among the best of the best.

One of the few things I've never done in those 29 years of D&D is publish *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. It must be true that all good things come to those who wait.

Over the last several years, I've had a blast working with and learning the magazine business from Messrs. Youngs and Perkins. Thanks to Chris Youngs, the magazines are a smoothly-purring machine pointed up an exciting road. Happily, I'll get to continue working with Chris and Chris even when they're not involved in day-to-day magazine production.

For that, I'll still be laboring alongside Bart Carroll and Jon Schindehette, two of the best teammates a guy could want. Then there are our regular contributors, a stable of up-and-coming writers, the whole RPG R&D crew, and typesetters and illustrators and cartographers. *Dragon* and *Dungeon* couldn't happen without a host of people pulling together, and I'm every bit as thrilled to be one of them now as I was when I walked through TSR's front door in 1981.

FAARLUNG'S ALGORITHM

An adventure for 16th-level characters

By Syd Thurston

illustration by William O'Connor ♦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

Kelphin Green suffers from a life-threatening condition arising from his experiments in arcane elemental energies—elemental discorporation—and it is slowly reducing him to dust. To save himself, Kelphin Green hired Xixix, a reputable mercenary acquisitionist, to retrieve *Faarlung's Algorithm*. Green wisely forbade Xixix from using the device. Unfortunately, Xixix's search drew him into a deadly predicament within the Elemental Chaos and, in an act of desperation, he activated the *Algorithm* to escape. The device allowed Xixix to flee back into the Material Plane—by ripping a hole in the fabric of reality. Xixix managed to position the tear in a farmhouse near the town of Fitherton

(where his delivery was to take place), but the chaotic power of the device destroyed his mind and left him a raving lunatic wandering the roads at night.

At the same time, a sinister plot was beginning to unfold, for word of Xixix and the *Algorithm* had reached the ears of a sect of Mual-Tar cultists. The sect's leader, an undead wizard named Lygis, realized that the *Algorithm's* energy could destabilize the chains binding the thunder serpent to his prison. Lygis and his subordinates traveled to the rumored exchange point in the hope of catching Xixix off guard and absconding with the *Algorithm*. Instead, they found only Kelphin Green, who had arrived at the now-ruined meeting point to await his

friend Xixix. Lygis captured Green, but the only sign of Xixix was his abandoned ledger. The cultists split into three groups to widen their search: Lygis traveled to his old crypt with Green in tow to establish a base of operations, a small group stayed behind at the farm in anticipation of Xixix's arrival, and four or five others were dispatched to Fitherton to learn more of Xixix's plight, chiefly by abducting and murdering townspeople.

As it turns out, the shattered and confused Xixix had wandered toward Fitherton, where he was found ranting and raving in the night. The mercenary was no stranger to Fitherton, but he had never been seen in such a wretched and agitated state. The lord mayor had Xixix secured by the town guard and brought to an inn for safety while a cure for his madness was sought.

Meanwhile, the *Algorithm's* activation had released arcane energy which echoed throughout the Elemental Chaos and acted as a beacon to those with a natural attunement to the chaotic power there—entities such as the slaads. Unbeknownst to any of the involved parties, a third entity emerged from the Elemental Chaos in search of the *Algorithm*. Attracted by the artifact's awakening power, slaads were drawn through the rift and out of the dark, dangerous places of the world to spread and spawn like a plague throughout the surrounding countryside and neighboring cities. Before long, Fitherton found itself a flickering light amidst a dark sea of deadly monsters and disease. It is at this juncture—with a growing panic spreading through the town and a plague of bloodshed descending upon the world—that the characters are brought into the situation and tasked with quelling the malignant, slumbering *Algorithm*.

SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins with the party entering and spending the night in Fitherton. In the night, they receive a summons from the lord mayor to Frank's Loft, an inn that was closed and guarded by town militia when they first arrived. (See encounter FA1, Meeting the Mayor.) The mayor tells the adventurers of the events surrounding Xixix's arrival and his strange parcel. He believes the parcel to be the cause of the troubles surrounding Fitherton and beseeches them to deliver it to its intended recipient. After gleaned what clues they can from the lord mayor and Xixix's insane ramblings and leaving the inn, the party is immediately beset by a vicious group of slaads who have infiltrated the town in their search for *Faarlung's Algorithm*. (See encounter FA2, Terror in the Streets.)

The next morning, the heroes must seek out additional information about the plague, Xixix, or the *Algorithm* to guide their next course of action. (See encounter FA3, Return to Sender.) All signs point toward a small farm a day's walk from Fitherton where Xixix was to deliver the *Algorithm* to Kelphin Green. There they find the ruinous results of Xixix's arrival from the Elemental Chaos. Several cultists of Mual-Tar are lying in wait and attack the party to seize the parcel. At the same time, in a stroke of misfortune, slaads step through the rift and a three-way battle for the *Algorithm* ensues. (See encounter FA4, The Ravaged Farm.) The cultists' belongings indicate that they took Kelphin Green to their base in an old graveyard.

At the graveyard, the characters encounter the undead mage Lygis. He gives them one last opportunity to surrender the artifact. If the characters refuse to give up the *Algorithm*, Lygis summons a pair of

hulking elementals to murder them outright. (See encounter FA5, The Crypt.) Lygis's defeat heralds the arrival of a much more dangerous foe: an aspect of Mual-Tar. To get to the bottom of the mystery surrounding Xixix and the *Algorithm*, the heroes must venture into Lygis's crypt, defeat the rest of the cultists, and battle the Fury of Mual-Tar before rescuing Kelphin Green from the cult's clutches and putting an end to the nightmare once and for all ... perhaps. (See encounter FA6, The Fury of Mual-Tar.)

PLOT HOOKS

Dark Wanderings: During a battle with other cultists of Mual-Tar (as part of an earlier adventure or a random encounter), the characters find a note which mentions something of interest happening in the town of Fitherton. Part of the sect (led by "The Black Cloud") has recently traveled to the area to investigate.

The Spreading Plague: While traveling, the characters come upon a town that has been wracked with devastation. The entire town has been evacuated with only a few sites of fighting and bloodshed as clues. If the characters investigate the matter later in an inhabited settlement, they will be told of a mysterious plague that has been spreading across the countryside. (The "plague" is not a disease but the handiwork of rampaging slaads.) The maddening, fatal disease seems to surround the crossroads town of Fitherton, which has closed its walls to anyone trying to enter or leave.

Woden's Request: While Xixix handles most of his clients directly, first contact is made through his handler, a kindly old man named Woden who once traveled with Xixix on his adventures. While the party is in a town, they are contacted by Woden

and asked to seek out Xixix, who was supposed to report back some time ago after completing a mission. Woden will explain that the heroes may find clues as to Xixix's whereabouts in the town of Fitherton, where he was planning on stopping en route home.

Fame and Glory: By late paragon tier, the adventurers will likely have an accomplished reputation. Using this hook, the party's heroic actions and skills draw the lord mayor's attention, and he sends a very haggard, frightened-looking envoy to deliver a message while they are in the area:

The lord mayor of Fitherton requests your presence in a matter of utmost urgency. Hundreds are dead—maybe more. Our town is trapped and there is little time before the townspeople begin to panic. If it isn't stopped, it will surely spread.

I beg of you, please come quickly.

-Archibald Forimer

If the envoy is questioned, he can tell the party little save for the rumors that all of the outlying communities and towns surrounding Fitherton have fallen silent. He rode as quickly as possible to make it to the characters' current location safely.

ENTERING FITHERTON

The town of Fitherton is under a strict quarantine to keep the rumored plague out. The townspeople have mostly locked themselves away inside their homes, and the majority of those who walk the streets anymore are wandering merchants who either fled to Fitherton or simply found themselves trapped when the trouble started. When the party arrives, Fitherton is a town amidst a rising panic in the streets.

FITHERTON

Fitherton was first established as a trading outpost between several nearby townships and cities and has served as a touchstone in the wilderness for passing caravans looking to resupply. In the years that followed, Fitherton developed into a thriving town in its own right. Several farms sprang up in its shadow, selling their wares to Fitherton and, by proxy, to the many travelers who visited the town. Fitherton is bordered by a large, gated wall that protects it and its citizens from the dangers of the wilds.

Population: Upward of 4,000 with another 500 or so living in the farming communities surrounding it. The majority of residents are humans descended from the town's original inhabitants. As a trading post, there is a smattering of most other races present as well.

Government: Archibald Forimer is the town's lord mayor. The position was originally bestowed by a

noble leader, but it is now filled by democratic election. The internal government maintains a relatively *laissez faire* economic system. Taxes on trade goods fund the town's small militia, which enforces the laws.

Defense: A small garrison of 30 soldiers serves as a police force for the town. Fitherton is small enough that an unofficial citizens' watch is sufficient to prevent common criminals from preying on the townspeople.

Inns: Frank's Loft and The Long March Tavern are the only true inns. Most citizens who have spare rooms offer them as lodging to travelers for a fee.

Taverns: The Long March Tavern, The Groggy Ale
Supplies: Many trading shops and merchant wagons throughout the city.

Temple: There's no temple within town, but many houses have small shrines and there are several public shrines to Avandra and Pelor.

When the party approaches the town, read:

For the last ten miles, not a soul has passed you on the road. As you draw nearer to Fitherton, rather than a town, you find yourself looking upon a makeshift fort. A large wooden wall blocks your view of the town itself, and an oppressive-looking gate seals off the entrance. At the top of the wall stands a guard, peering at you anxiously.

If the characters were invited to Fitherton as part of the plot hook, they will have little trouble gaining access to the city. If they simply arrived and want to help, the DM may wish to roleplay an encounter with the town guard. He will resolutely hold his position at first, as much for his own safety as for the town's. He looks on strangers with paranoia until the party makes a good case to enter. Despite his understandable caution, he and his fellow townspeople are desperate for help in this time of need and will ultimately acquiesce to the party's request.

When the heroes enter the town, read:

The heavy wooden walls slowly part, allowing you to enter single file, before slamming shut once more. The streets of Fitherton are all but empty. Only a few tired-looking merchants sit at their street-side shops. As you walk on, eyes peer out at you from within the windows of the houses you pass, watching your every movement with suspicion and malice.

If the characters offer their services to help the town, they will be directed to a town guard who will speak to the lord mayor and let him know that they have arrived. Should they ask, the characters are told that the lord mayor is at the inn called Frank's Loft and has given orders not to be disturbed. If the party wants a place to rest for the night, the Long March Tavern will be recommended. Later that night, they receive a summons to Frank's Loft from the lord mayor, beseeching their help. At that point, begin encounter FA1, Meeting the Mayor.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Kelphin Green is a clever wizard with undeniable power that is matched only by his curiosity. Unfortunately, that curiosity isn't tempered with caution, and he frequently gets himself into more trouble than he can handle. When the characters find Green, he is already in the advanced stages of elemental discorporation. His left arm is missing and he has a hard time walking on his disintegrating legs. With a DC 20 Perception check, a character notices grains of sand or dust falling from Green's empty sleeve as his body crumbles away.

Despite his predicament, Green is quite grateful for the party's help. He offers his assistance with the

caveat that he isn't capable of much, thanks to his condition. Green volunteers the following information:

- ◆ He has been searching for an artifact that could reverse his condition.
- ◆ Xixix is an old friend who offered to help Green try and reverse his elemental discorporation. He will be sad to learn of his friend's madness, and swears to help him if at all possible.
- ◆ Knowing what he does about the *Algorithm*, Green infers that the slaads came through the tear in the planar boundary that Xixix created when he used the device to return from the Elemental Chaos. In his research, Green learned that the slaads are drawn to the chaotic energy of the artifact itself and most likely followed it here to reclaim it.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Once characters have cleared the burial chamber and rescued Kelphin Green, you choose whether or not to extend the adventure. Several threads can take the plot in new directions:

The Plague Unchecked: Kelphin Green uses the artifact to close the rift and takes the artifact with him (or cures himself then and there and returns the *Algorithm* to the party immediately), but the slaads remain, terrorizing the countryside. The party is left with the quest to stop the plague of slaads before they destroy the territory.

The Madness Continues: Though he possesses the *Algorithm*, Kelphin Green cannot make it work in the way he needs. Whether additional components are needed to halt the progression of his condition or the *Algorithm* itself refuses to bend to his will, the party must seek out additional com-

ponents or knowledge to close the rift and save the wizard's life before it's too late.

The Only Way to Be Sure: It becomes apparent that the only way to defeat the slaads and keep the artifact from falling into the wrong hands is to destroy it. Future adventures may include seeking out secret knowledge about the *Algorithm*'s creation, tracking down the archwizard Faarlung, or even magically entering the maddening, labyrinthine passages of the *Algorithm* itself.

Freedom At Hand: Though they've suffered a minor setback, Mual-Tar's devoted followers continue to seek the *Algorithm* to weaken the chains binding their primordial master. They attack anyone who is close to the characters and find ways to bring the full might of the thunder serpent to bear against their new enemies. Clues may even suggest that this is all a diversion to draw attention away from another secret mechanism to effect Mual-Tar's escape.

FAI, MEETING THE MAYOR

Encounter Level 16 (7,000 XP)

This encounter begins when the characters make their way toward Frank's Loft, to which they have been summoned.

As the party travels to Frank's Loft, read:

At night, the streets of Fitherton are deserted. The only souls you see traveling along the shadowy roads are a few town guards. Frank's Loft is large, dark, and still. A single guard is posted at the doorway, barring entry. You can see a flickering light through the second-storey window and faintly hear the sounds of someone screaming from within.

The guard knows little about the situation but seems nervous when the party talks to him or asks questions about the screaming. He defers all questions to the mayor, who is waiting upstairs for the characters.

When the characters enter Frank's Loft, read:

The interior of the inn appears to have been hastily vacated. A few pitchers of ale and plates of half-finished, spoiling food lie on the tavern tables and the air is stale and foreboding. As you ascend the creaking stairs, the screams grow louder, dropping now and then to a manic muttering before rising once more to a feverish pitch.

When the characters enter Xixix's room, read:

The opening door reveals a discordant scene: A strangely-dressed man has been bound to a bed. His face is contorted in horrific glee while he raves uncontrollably and writhes against the ropes. His attendant, a grim-faced cleric, is doing all he can to calm the lunatic by administering a healing

salve of some sort, seemingly to no effect. Watching over all of this is an elderly, thin-faced man with beads of sweat on his brow who is pacing back and forth nervously. When he notices you at the open door, he breathes a sigh of relief.

"My name is Archibald Forimer," he says, proffering his hand. "You have come just in time."

ROLEPLAYING MAYOR FORIMER

The mayor of Fitherton is a competent leader who generally rises to meet the situation, but now he finds himself very much in over his head and in need of help. He has done all he can to staunch rumors of the plague and the monster attacks which have swept across the outlying communities while also dealing with the growing number of mysterious disappearances within town. He believes that Xixix is at the heart of whatever is going on. The mayor is nervous and stressed which may cause him to overreact at times, but he soon regains his composure. Truly, his greatest concern is the welfare of his fellow townspeople, and any assistance the party can offer will be greatly appreciated.

WHAT FORIMER KNOWS

The mayor can give the party the following information:

- ◆ The man on the bed is Xixix, a mercenary who calls himself an "acquisitionist;" he locates and retrieves specific items of value for pay. He has frequented Fitherton in the past as a place to rest and resupply, but his current condition has the lord mayor baffled.
- ◆ A few weeks ago, Xixix stumbled into town, raving like a lunatic, carrying nothing on his person save a parcel that now sits on the table.

The lord mayor sequestered Xixix in this inn to try and help him, but nothing seems to be bringing him out of this madness.

- ◆ Three days after Xixix's arrival, rumors of a plague began spreading through the countryside. Whole towns and cities around Fitherton were falling silent. Around the same time, people began disappearing without a trace from within the town. The lord mayor ordered the town's gates sealed. The heroes are the first outsiders to be allowed past the wall since.
- ◆ The mayor has kept as many people from leaving as possible and doubled the guard, but the citizens are getting anxious. He worries about the townspeople panicking at such a dangerous juncture.
- ◆ The mayor suspects that Xixix's parcel has something to do with all this. He wants the heroes to deliver it to its intended recipient as soon as possible, if only to get it away from Fitherton.
- ◆ The mayor has gathered from Xixix's ravings that the delivery was to occur somewhere in or around Fitherton, but he has not been able to learn the specific location.

The mayor will grant to the characters whatever authority they need to to resolve the crisis, but he asks that they act discreetly in order to keep the citizenry from becoming any more panicked than they already are. He recommends that they learn more about Xixix's mission from the townspeople of Fitherton in the morning; Xixix was well known and well liked around town, and he may have told someone about his plans. The party may also receive additional information if they inquire further:

Insight (DC 13): Neither the mayor nor anyone else has opened the parcel since it was found on Xixix's person. It's apparent that everyone is a little scared of it—whatever "it" is.

Insight (DC 20): No one knows what happened to the missing townspeople. Some are believed to have fled the town to take their chances on the outside. Others, however, have simply vanished without a trace, leaving behind their homes and their belongings.

Diplomacy (DC 13): Xixix was a mercenary but basically a good man. He often turned down job offers from clients who, in the course of his investigation, turned out to be disreputable or who wanted his services for ill intent.

Diplomacy (DC 20): Little is known within town about the plague. Most rumors say that it is fatal. Some say that horrific monsters appear around those who are afflicted, though most people have discounted these tales as just stories. More might be learned if the characters ask around town in the morning.

Heal (DC 20): The balms and salves which are being applied to Xixix are rather potent at removing diseases, curses, and afflictions. If those are the cause of his raving, then they should be working, yet they seem to have no effect whatever.

If the characters open the parcel, read:

In the small cloth bag is an ornately decorated metal sphere. Its surface gleams like gold, save where intricately etched symbols and arcane geometric patterns have been inscribed. Several of the glyphs and patterns do not line up properly, as if the surface of the device can be manipulated in some way and is currently misaligned. When its surface is touched, an electric tingle is felt in one's fingers.

FAARLUNG'S ALGORITHM

The *Algorithm* is appropriate for paragon-level characters.

Faarlung's Algorithm Paragon Level

Created by the archwizard Faarlung, the Algorithm consists of an ever-shifting, mathematically derived arcane formula which contains the power to unravel the fabric of reality. It appears as a metal orb covered with nearly invisible sliding mechanisms and plates. The surface of the orb is inscribed with runes and arcane geometric diagrams that glow as the Algorithm is solved.

Faarlung's Algorithm is a +4 magic orb with the following properties and powers.

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +4d6 damage

Property: You gain a +2 item bonus on Arcana checks.

Property: When a party first obtains the *Algorithm* and at the end of each extended rest, *Faarlung's Algorithm* re-attunes itself to a random damage type: 1-Lightning, 2-Thunder, 3-Fire, 4-Cold, 5-Acid, 6-Force. All the *Algorithm's* attacks and its critical bonus damage deal damage of this type.

Property: You gain resist 5 to the damage type selected by the *Algorithm's* random property.

Power (Encounter ♦ Varies): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit with an attack. *Effect:* The triggering attack deals damage of the type selected by the *Algorithm's* random property instead of the damage type it normally deals and deals 2d6 extra damage. In addition, the attack ignores damage resistance.

Power (Daily ♦ Arcane, Implement): Standard Action. You can use *dispel magic* (wizard 6). You can use Charisma or Wisdom in place of Intelligence for this power.

GOALS OF FAARLUNG'S ALGORITHM

- ♦ Dissolve definitions of boundary and form within the world and within the mind.
- ♦ Uncover new arcane knowledge pertaining to the Elemental Chaos.
- ♦ Anything that interferes with one's work must be eliminated.

ROLEPLAYING FAARLUNG'S ALGORITHM

While the *Algorithm* does not possess anything that a sane mind might call sentience, it is infused with the same cold logic and chaotic will that its creator possessed. *Faarlung's Algorithm* influences its bearer's emotions and transmits vague, almost subconscious suggestions at the forces hidden within, keeping any dangers a secret, especially from those who attain a high level of concordance with the artifact. Always there is a tingling sensation that, if the character can just solve the *Algorithm* a little more, even greater powers will be unlocked.

CONCORDANCE

Starting Score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner spends time solving the Algorithm	see below*
Another player or NPC attempts to solve the Algorithm	-1
Owner does not attempt to solve the Algorithm at least once between two extended rests	-2

* A character bearing the *Algorithm* can attempt to solve it once per day during a short rest. The character attempting to solve the *Algorithm* makes a DC 24 Intelligence check. On a success, add 2 to that character's concordance and add an additional 1 to

his or her concordance for every 5 by which the character's check exceeds the DC (gaining 3 concordance for rolling a 29, 4 for rolling a 34, and so on). On a failure, subtract 1 from the character's concordance with the *Algorithm*. Whenever another character attempts to solve the *Algorithm*, the previous bearer's concordance decreases; each solution is unique to that bearer's mind. To anyone new attempting to solve it, the previous bearer was working it incorrectly.

Pleased (16-19)

"I am close now—so close—just a little more..."

Property: The *Algorithm* becomes a +5 magic orb and its critical deals +5d6 elemental damage.

Property: You gain resist 15 to the damage type selected by the *Algorithm*'s random property.

Power (Daily): Minor Action. Randomly change the element to which the *Algorithm* is attuned as though you had completed an extended rest.

Power (Daily ♦ Arcane, Implement, Teleportation, Varies): Standard Action. Ranged 5; the target is removed from play to a location in the Elemental Chaos and takes 2d8 + 7 damage of the type selected by the *Algorithm*'s random property at the start of each of its turns (save ends both). On a successful save, the target reappears in the same square it left (or as close to it as possible) and is weakened (save ends).

Property: If you reach 20 concordance with the *Algorithm*, you can use the following power once. At the end of the encounter after you do, the *Algorithm* immediately moves on.

Power (Daily ♦ Arcane, Implement, Summoning, Varies): Minor Action; Ranged 20; You summon a Large elemental creature in an unoccupied 2-square-by-2-square space within range until the end of the encounter. The summoned creature has speed 6, a +4 bonus to AC, and gains additional benefits based on the element to which the *Algorithm* is attuned at the time the elemental is summoned:

Acid: +4 bonus to Fortitude, and when the elemental hits with an attack, its target takes ongoing 10 acid damage (save ends).

Cold: +4 bonus to Will, and when the elemental hits with an attack, its target is immobilized (save ends).

Fire: +4 bonus to Reflex, and the elemental gains an aura 2; any creature that enters or ends its turn within the aura takes 10 fire damage.

Force: +4 bonus to Fortitude, and when the elemental hits with an attack, it can slide the target up to 2 squares.

Lightning: +4 bonus to Reflex, and you can command the elemental to shift up to 4 squares as a minor action.

Thunder: +4 bonus to Will, and the elemental's standard action attack can also be made as a close burst 1 that targets all creatures in the burst.

You cannot dismiss the elemental. If the elemental is alive at the end of the encounter, it remains in the world and gains free will. You can give the summoned elemental creature the following special commands:

- ♦ Standard Action: Melee 2; targets one creature; Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 elemental damage.
- ♦ Opportunity Attack: Melee 2; targets one creature; Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 elemental damage.

Satisfied (12-15)

"Energy courses through me, yet more remains hidden within!"

Property: You gain resist 10 to the damage type selected by the *Algorithm*'s random property.

Property: The *Algorithm*'s item bonus to Arcana checks increases to +4

Power (Encounter ♦ Arcane, Implement, Teleportation, Varies): Standard Action. Ranged 10; Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom vs. Will; 2d10 + 5 damage of the type selected by the *Algorithm*'s random property, the target is dazed (save ends), and you teleport to swap places with the target.

Normal (5-11)

"I understand now; this knowledge IS power."

The *Algorithm* weighs heavily on its owner's mind, continually tugging on his or her attention.

Unsatisfied (1-4)

"Its secrets remain a mystery to me."

Property: You take a -2 penalty to Arcana checks.

Property: You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against creatures with the elemental origin.

Angered (0 or lower)

"Such disturbing patterns ... my thoughts have become ..."

Property: You gain vulnerability 5 against the damage type selected by the *Algorithm*'s random property.

Special: Once per encounter when you make an attack roll, skill check, or ability check, the *Algorithm* can warp your subconscious understanding of reality and cause an action to fail, subtracting 1d10 from the triggering roll.

Moving On

"I will spend no more time on this puzzle."

The *Algorithm* seeks to be solved by others, so it moves on. If the *Algorithm* is satisfied or pleased, it leaves behind a +5 magic orb for its bearer and grants its bearer a +1 bonus to Intelligence. If the *Algorithm* is angered, it instead takes away a point of Intelligence as it goes. Either way, it finds its way into the possession of an intelligent, curious creature.

FA2, TERROR IN THE STREETS

Encounter Level 17 (7,600 XP)

SETUP

- 3 red slaads (R)
- 1 green slaad spawner (G)

The encounter begins when the characters step out of Frank's Rest Inn. The guard that was posted out front has wandered down the road a short way and is looking into the shadows and behind the stands in the now-abandoned market. The slaads in this encounter are hidden across the map. A green slaad is atop the house in the bottom right corner, a red slaad is atop the inn, and a second red slaad is in the alley in the bottom left corner (make a stealth check for each of these three before the encounter begins). The third red slaad is lurking in the shadows behind the shop stands and will become plainly visible once the encounter begins. Any hidden slaads that the party fails to notice act on a surprise round at the start of combat. The red slaad that leaps out of the shadows does not get a surprise round.

When the party steps into the street, read:

As you step out of the inn, the door is closed and locked behind you by a guardsman. A chill wind blows through the empty streets. In the dim light ahead, you can see the guard who was posted in front of the inn peering nervously into the shadows. "Hello," he calls out. "I-i-is someone there?"

Green Slaad Spawner (G) Level 18 Elite Controller (Curse Slaad)	
Large elemental humanoid	XP 4,000
HP 173; Bloodied 86	Initiative +11
AC 32, Fortitude 30, Reflex 29, Will 31	Perception +17
Speed 6, teleport 6	Low-light vision
Immune chaos phage	
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claws (disease) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +23 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage, and the slaad makes a secondary attack against the same target.	
Secondary Attack: +21 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target contracts chaos phage.	
⚡ Chaos Bolt ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Will	
Hit: 1d20 + 4 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the slaad's next turn.	
↔ Transpose Target (teleportation) ♦ Recharge [1]	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target teleports 10 squares to an unoccupied space of the slaad's choosing (and in its line of sight).	
↩ Croak of Chaos ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Close burst 4 (enemies in burst); +21 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target slides 4 squares.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Spawn Slaad ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: The slaad is hit by an attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): A slaad spawn appears in a space adjacent to the green slaad spawner. It takes its turn in the initiative order after the slaad spawner. PCs do not earn experience points for killing slaad spawns created by this power.	
Skills Athletics +17, Bluff +18, Intimidate +18, Stealth +16	
Str 17 (+12)	Dex 14 (+11) Wis 17 (+12)
Con 21 (+14)	Int 15 (+11) Cha 18 (+13)
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Primordial

If the party approaches the guard or turns to leave, read:

A shrill scream pierces the night air as an enormous, crimson shape leaps out of the shadows at the guard, crushing the life out of him and rending him to pieces with wet, crooked claws. The humanoid, froglike creature sniffs the air and, spying its next victims, issues a low, throaty croak.

3 Red Slaads (R) Level 15 Soldier	
Large elemental humanoid	XP 1,200 each
HP 146; Bloodied 73	Initiative +13
AC 29; Fortitude 28, Reflex 29, Will 25	Perception +8
Speed 8, teleport 4	Low-light vision
Immune chaos phage	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Bite ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8+6 damage.	
⚔ Claw (disease) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2; +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6+3 damage, and the red slaad makes a secondary attack against the same target.	
Secondary Attack: Melee 1; +19 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target contracts chaos phage.	
⚡ Leaping Pounce ♦ Recharge [2] [1]	
Effect: The red slaad shifts 4 squares and makes two claw attacks. If either claw attack hits, the target is marked until the end of the red slaad's next turn..	
↩ Horrid Croak (fear) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Close blast 5 (one creature in blast); +19 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target is immobilized until the end of the red slaad's next turn.	
Skills Athletics +15, Stealth +16	
Str 17 (+10)	Dex 19 (+11) Wis 12 (+8)
Con 18 (+11)	Int 11 (+7) Cha 15 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil	Languages Primordial

TACTICS

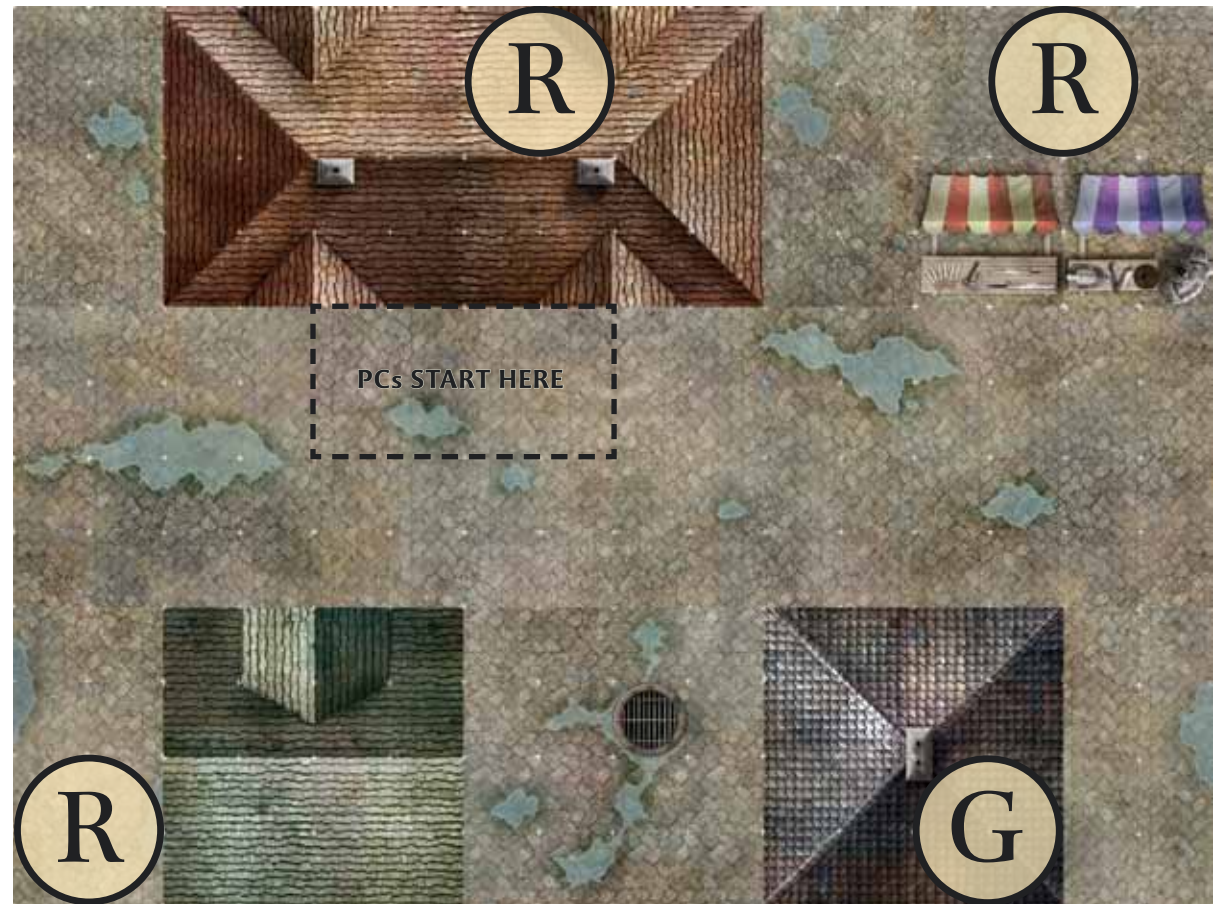
The red slaads move into melee as soon as possible, using *leaping pounce* to close the gap and spreading out their *horrid croaks*. The green slaad stays atop the building and rains down ranged attacks, allowing its slaad spawn to serve as shields and a secondary offensive line against being targeted by attacks. Particularly cruel DMs can use the green slaad's *transpose target* power to launch characters high into the air followed by a bone-breaking tumble to the ground.

The slaads are powerfully drawn toward the artifact. They will target the bearer and try to draw him or her away from the group to get at the artifact. If the characters notice that a single character is being targeted, they can try a DC 20 Insight check to determine that the slaads seem drawn to the artifact. Should the slaads grab the *Algorithm*, they will be content to simply attack the rest of the party as they wish.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Buildings: The inn is four squares high, and the smaller houses are two squares high. All three buildings are boarded up and locked against intrusion.

Merchant Stands: Each stand is one square high and grants cover to anyone standing behind it.



Chaos Phage

Level 16 Disease

Endurance improve DC 25, maintain DC 20, worsen DC 19 or lower

The target is cured.

❏ **Initial Effect:** A slaad embryo is implanted in the target.

❏ **The target takes a -2 penalty to Will. While bloodied, the target succumbs to madness and attacks the nearest creature.**

❏ **Final State:** The target dies, and a slaad tadpole burrows out of its skull.

FA3, RETURN TO SENDER

Encounter Level 16 (1,400 XP)

SETUP

Though the party has been tasked with the completion of Xixix's last delivery, they have little information to go on. Several courses of inquiry present themselves: Xixix's dealings within the town prior to his previous departure, his mysterious parcel, and the plague ravaging the countryside.

If the characters ask around town for information about Xixix, his recent activities, or where he might have been headed, run this skill challenge.

Complexity 4 (10 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Diplomacy, History, Intimidate, Streetwise

Other Skills: Heal, Insight

Special—Outbreak: If the characters max out their successes for Heal, they learn that the plague spreading across the countryside seems to be associated with more of the froglike creatures that attacked the party in Encounter FA1. The frog creatures first appeared around the same time that Xixix reappeared in town, and they have been rapidly increasing in number ever since. If the characters succeed in the skill challenge, they also learn that the plague seems to be spreading outward from the same farmhouse where Xixix was supposed to meet his client.

Special—Faarlung's Algorithm: If the party maxes out the number of successes for Arcana and/or History, they learn that the object they carry is *Faarlung's*

Algorithm, an artifact with ties to the Elemental Chaos. They also learn that the true powers of the *Algorithm* can be unlocked by solving the formulae etched into its surface.

Special—Inquiring Within: Each success in solving the *Algorithm* (see *Faarlung's Algorithm*, pp 9-10) also counts as a success in Arcana for this skill challenge and applies toward the maximum number of successes for Arcana and History. A party member can attempt to solve the *Algorithm* without knowing what it really is.

Arcana (DC 20; 1 success per successful check; 4 maximum successes between Arcana and History): The parcel must be opened before Arcana checks can be attempted. After earning four successes between Arcana and History, those skills can't be used anymore but the heroes gain a +2 bonus on further skill checks for the challenge. *By studying the object's intricate tracings and referencing some obscure tomes, the character begins deciphering its purpose.*

Heal (DC 22; 1 success per successful check; 4 maximum successes): *With a keen ear for detail, the character ferrets out clues that begin to point toward the true source of the plague.*

History (DC 20; 1 success per successful check; 4 maximum successes between Arcana and History): The parcel must be opened before History checks can be attempted. After earning four successes between Arcana and History, those skills can't be used anymore but the heroes gain a +2 bonus on further skill checks for the challenge. *The character recalls several tales of old which make vague reference to an object such as this. Names and places are associated with it, granting the character further footholds in her investigation.*

Streetwise (DC 22; 1 success per successful check; 3 maximum successes): *The word on the street guides the hero's investigation in a more productive direction.*

Insight (DC 20; 0 successes per successful check; no maximum): A success grants a +2 bonus on the next Intimidate or Diplomacy check made by a character in this skill challenge. *A nervous laugh, an errant glance, a tightening or slackness of body posture—you keep your senses attuned to such tells and detect an opening in the conversation that your allies can exploit.*

Diplomacy (DC 24; 1 success per successful check; 4 maximum successes): *The adventurer maneuvers the conversation skillfully in the direction of Xixix and his quarry, thereby uncovering more pieces to the puzzle.*

Intimidate (DC 21; 1 success per successful check; 3 maximum successes): Achieving the maximum number of successes with Intimidate causes the townspeople to become distrustful and frightened of the party members. This results in a -2 penalty on all Diplomacy and Streetwise checks for the rest of the skill challenge. *Through force of will (and perhaps a tightened fist or flashed blade), the character inspires a fearful blab where less aggressive means might have failed.*

Success: The party learns of a farmhouse a day's journey away from Fitherton where Xixix was to meet his client for the delivery.

Failure: Wait for the next successful skill check and then tell the party that they learn of an individual at the town gate who had recent dealings with Xixix; he might be able to help them. When the party arrives, they find a furtive, paranoid-looking man who tells the party that he knows the man who Xixix was meant to deliver his parcel to and that he is waiting for the party at a farmhouse (see Encounter FA3). This man is a cultist of Mual-Tar who immediately flees and helps set up the ambush for Encounter FA3.

FA4, THE RAVAGED FARM

Encounter Level 19 (12,000 XP)

SETUP

- 4 cultists of Mual-Tar (M)
- 2 enraged cultists (C)
- Dire servant of Mual-Tar (D)
- 1 black slaad
- 3 blue slaads

The slaads are not on the map when the encounter begins. They will emerge from the portal in the presence of the artifact once the combat with the cultists has begun.

The cultists are inside the barn. If the party failed the skill challenge in Encounter FA3, one of the cultists will invite the party inside while the rest hide in ambush: Roll a Bluff check for the cultist at the door and Stealth checks for the rest of the cultists. If the characters didn't fail their skill challenge, the cultists attack as soon as the party moves close enough to the house to assault them or when the party moves to investigate the rift. Either way, the characters' questioning in Encounter FA3 has reached the ears of the cultists and they are prepared to fight when the characters arrive. The characters begin along the road leading toward the farm.

When the characters arrive at the farm house, read:

The directions received in Fitherton seem to point toward this farm, where a grisly scene awaits. Decaying bodies litter the ground. The only structure left standing is a barn which appears to have been barricaded against attack. The modest farmhouse to the east has been completely blasted apart, leaving only charred stones and bloodied corpses in its rubble. A brightly flickering, red and white light emanates from within the devastated farmhouse.

If the party examines the farmhouse, read:

As you draw closer to the farmhouse, you can smell smoke and ozone. A pair of doors lies charred and smoldering on the ground. Beyond what was once the threshold of the house is a brilliantly luminous portal. Its edges are rimmed with tongues of flame and lightning. At its center, you can barely make out humanoid, moving shapes on the other side. Suddenly, from behind you, you hear a door open. Several haggard-looking individuals with blades in their hands and murder in their eyes rush out from the barn. Their leader shouts, "They have the Algorithm! Take their heads for the glory of Mual-Tar!"

If the characters failed their skill challenge and they head for the barn, read:

As you draw closer to the barn, you see that its exterior has been viciously gouged and splintered by blades or claws. Blood is spattered across the exterior walls, and several decomposing human corpses lie outside. Suddenly, the door opens and a haggard-looking man waves to you: "Quickly! Inside! It's not safe out there! Not safe!"

If the characters follow the man's advice and duck inside the barn, they'll be ambushed as noted above.

If the party succeeded on the skill challenge and heads for the barn, read:

The door to the barn is thrown open and several cloaked figures run out, brandishing blades. As they charge forward, their leader shouts, "They have the Algorithm! Take their heads for the glory of Mual-Tar!"

After the first round of combat, read:

As the battle rages, the air seems to grow heavy and oppressive. The cultists throw nervous glances toward the glowing portal in the ruined farmhouse. The edges of the rift ripple violently and several large, froglike creatures spill out, clashing their claws and howling in bloody fury. The cultist leader grits his teeth and calls out, "Slaads!! Kill them quickly and seize the artifact before it's too late!"

CULTIST TACTICS

The cultists will attack the party as a whole. None of them know who holds the artifact, so they fight until they can spot and retrieve it. After the slaads arrive, the cultists split their attacks between defending themselves against the slaads and trying to murder the heroes. Generally, the cultists behave intelligently; they move into flanking positions and use the terrain to their advantage.

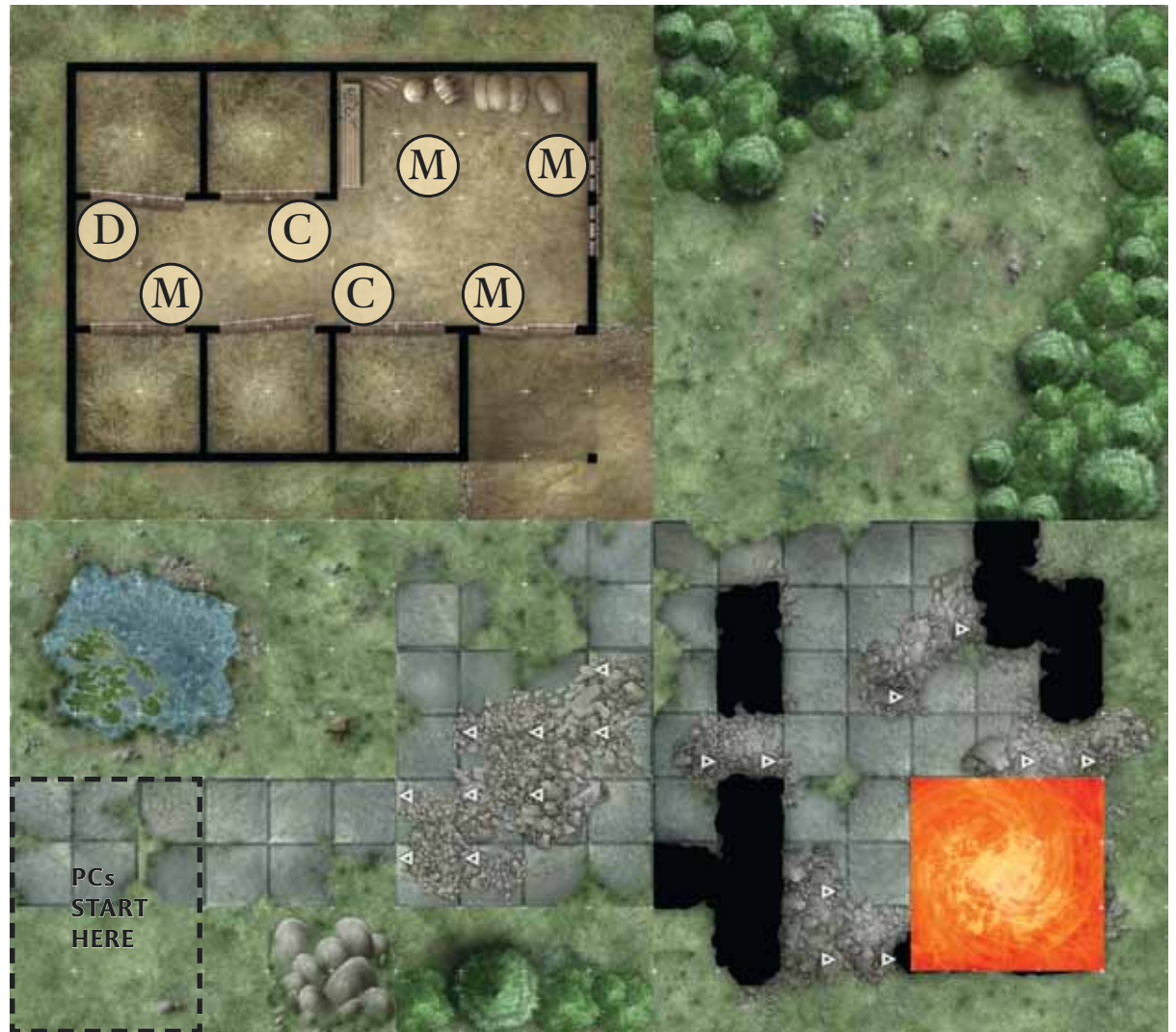
Negotiating with the Cultists: The cultists will refuse any alliance unless the characters agree to surrender the artifact immediately, even before the slaads are defeated. If the party hands over the Algorithm, a few cultists will escape to Encounter 5 with the artifact while the rest stay behind to fight the slaads. Once the slaads are dealt with, the cultists turn against the characters anyway. The note and ledger described below will be found on the body of one of the cultists who stayed behind.

SLAAD TACTICS

The slaads begin spilling out of the rift on the second full (non-surprise) round of combat. The three blue slaads emerge first. The black slaad appears on the following round. They rush into combat against the nearest figures without regard for who's on which side; they attack everyone indiscriminately. On the black slaad's second round on the scene, it can identify the character who bears the artifact and will direct the blue slaads to concentrate their attacks against that character. They don't focus on that character exclusively; they still intend to slaughter as many people as possible. But the character (or NPC) holding the artifact will always be their first choice, where a choice exists.

DEVELOPMENTS

After the fight ends, a DC 18 Perception check reveals that the clothes of the cultists are old and smell heavily of decay, as though they were stolen from dead corpses. A search of their bodies will uncover a ledger and a note. The ledger, which appears to have belonged to Xixix, outlines the various clients and items of interest that he has procured over the past few years. The last item mentioned in the ledger is the *Algorithm*, which was to be delivered to a man named Kelphin Green. Green's name has been circled in the ledger by another's hand. A hastily scrawled note tucked into the ledger gives orders for the cultists to wait at the farmhouse until Xixix arrives with his delivery and then to kill him, secure the *Algorithm*, and hasten to a graveyard about half a day's journey away. Directions to the graveyard are included, and a specific crypt within it is indicated.



FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: If the party arrives during the night, the rift provides bright illumination within 6 squares and dim illumination beyond that. There is no other lighting.

Barn: The barn has been reinforced. The doors are closed and locked (AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, 60 HP; can be smashed open with a DC 23 Strength check). Furthermore, all other apertures have been covered and sealed to cut off line-of-sight and prevent the slaads (or anyone else) from teleporting inside.

Extraplanar Rift: This is a tear in the fabric of reality leading to the Elemental Plane. Any creature stepping onto a square occupied by the rift is teleported to a square adjacent to the rift on the Elemental Chaos. Creatures stepping through the rift take 3d10 + 6 damage of a random elemental type when they enter or start their turn within the Elemental Chaos (1=fire, 2=cold, 3=lightning, 4=thunder). A portal of the same size and shape exists on the Elemental Chaos, and stepping into it returns the creature to a square adjacent to the rift on the Material Plane. Slaads are immune to the elemental damage effect.

Pond: The shallow pond is difficult terrain.

Rocks: The rocks are 5 feet high. Any square containing stone outcroppings is difficult terrain and requires a DC 18 Acrobatics check to enter. On a failed check, the creature trying to enter the square falls prone in the last square(s) it occupied.

Trees: Trees are difficult terrain and provide cover to anyone standing within them. Creatures with two squares between themselves and their opponent have total cover and concealment.

4 Cultists of Mual-Tar (M) Level 13 Minion Soldier	
Medium natural humanoid	XP 200 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	Initiative +8
AC 29, Fortitude 26, Reflex 25, Will 24	Perception +6
Speed 6	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ Longsword ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 10 damage.	
Skills Arcana +19	
Str 17 (+9)	Dex 12 (+7) Wis 11 (+6)
Con 11 (+6)	Int 15 (+8) Cha 13 (+7)
Alignment evil Languages Common, Primordial	
Equipment longsword	

2 Enraged Cultists of Mual-Tar (C) Level 16 Brute	
Medium natural humanoid	XP 1,400 each
HP 188; Bloodied 94	Initiative +9
AC 28, Fortitude 30, Reflex 25, Will 29	Perception +8
Speed 6	
Resist 5 thunder	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ Slam ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 7 damage	
↓ Thunderfist (thunder) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 4d10 + 7 thunder damage and the target is pushed 3 squares.	
↖ Shockwave (thunder) ♦ Encounter	
Requirement: The cultist must be bloodied.	
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in burst); +15 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d10 + 6 thunder damage. The target is pushed 1 square and dazed until the end of the enraged cultist's next turn.	
Skills Athletics +18	
Str 21 (+13)	Dex 13 (+9) Wis 10 (+8)
Con 18 (+12)	Int 11 (+8) Cha 16 (+11)
Alignment evil Languages Common	

Dire Servant of Mual-Tar (D) Level 16 Skirmisher	
Medium natural humanoid	XP 1,600
HP 148; Bloodied 74	Initiative +15
AC 30, Fortitude 26, Reflex 30, Will 29	Perception +11
Speed 6	
Resist 5 lightning	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ Longsword ♦ At-Will	
Attack: +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage	
↖ Lightning Flash (lightning) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼	
Attack: Close burst 1 (creatures in burst); +17 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage and the target is stunned until the end of the dire servant's next turn.	
Effect: The dire servant shifts 6 squares.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Flash Step ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The dire servant shifts 2 squares.	
Skills Acrobatics +18	
Str 10 (+8)	Dex 21 (+13) Wis 16 (+11)
Con 12 (+9)	Int 15 (+10) Cha 13 (+9)
Alignment evil Languages Common, Primordial	
Equipment longsword	

3 Blue Slaads (Talon Slaad)	Level 17 Brute
Large elemental humanoid	XP 1,600 each
HP 200; Bloodied 100	Initiative +10
AC 29, Fortitude 29, Reflex 25, Will 24	Perception +14
Speed 6, teleport 2	Low-light vision
Immune chaos phage	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Claws (disease) ♦ At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Melee 2 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d10 + 10 damage, and the blue slaad makes a secondary attack against the same target.	
<i>Secondary Attack:</i> Melee 2; +18 vs. Fortitude	
<i>Hit:</i> The target contracts chaos phage.	
⬇ Fling ♦ At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Melee 2 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
<i>Hit:</i> 1d10 + 10 damage, and the target slides 2 squares and is knocked prone.	
⬅ Ravager's Fury ♦ Encounter	
<i>Requirement:</i> The blue slaad must be bloodied.	
<i>Attack:</i> Close burst 2 (creatures in burst); +20 vs. AC	
<i>Hit:</i> 1d10+10 damage, and the blue slaad gains 20 temporary hit points.	
Skills Athletics +19, Stealth +15	
Str 22 (+14)	Dex 15 (+10) Wis 13 (+9)
Con 20 (+13)	Int 9 (+7) Cha 11 (+8)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Primordial	

Black Slaad (Void Slaad)	Level 20 Skirmisher
Large elemental humanoid	XP 2800
HP 191; Bloodied 95	Initiative +10
AC 32, Fortitude 33, Reflex 30, Will 29	Perception +14
Speed 6, teleport 3	Low-light vision
Immune disease; Resist insubstantial	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Claws ♦ At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Melee 2 (one creature); +25 vs. AC	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d10 + 7 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
<i>Each Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target loses a healing surge.	
⚡ Ray of Entropy ♦ At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Ranged 20 (one creature); +23 vs. Reflex	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d10 + 3 damage, and the target is surrounded by a shroud of crackling energy (save ends). Any time the target takes damage, the shroud deals 1d10 damage to the target.	
⬅ Zone of Oblivion (zone) ♦ At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Close burst 2 (creatures in burst); +18 vs. Reflex	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d10 + 6 damage. A black void fills the zone, blocking line of sight and dealing 2d10 + 6 damage to any creature that enters or starts its turn in the area. The zone lasts until the end of the encounter.	
Skills Stealth +19	
Str 24 (+17)	Dex 18 (+14) Wis 13 (+11)
Con 23 (+16)	Int 11 (+10) Cha 17 (+13)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Primordial	

Chaos Phage	Level 16 Disease	Endurance improve DC 25, maintain DC 20, worsen DC 19 or lower
The target is cured.	◀ Initial Effect: A slaad embryo is implanted in the target.	▶▶ The target takes a -2 penalty to Will. While bloodied, the target succumbs to madness and attacks the nearest creature.
		▶ Final State: The target dies, and a slaad tadpole burrows out of its skull.

FA5, THE CRYPT

Encounter Level 16

SETUP

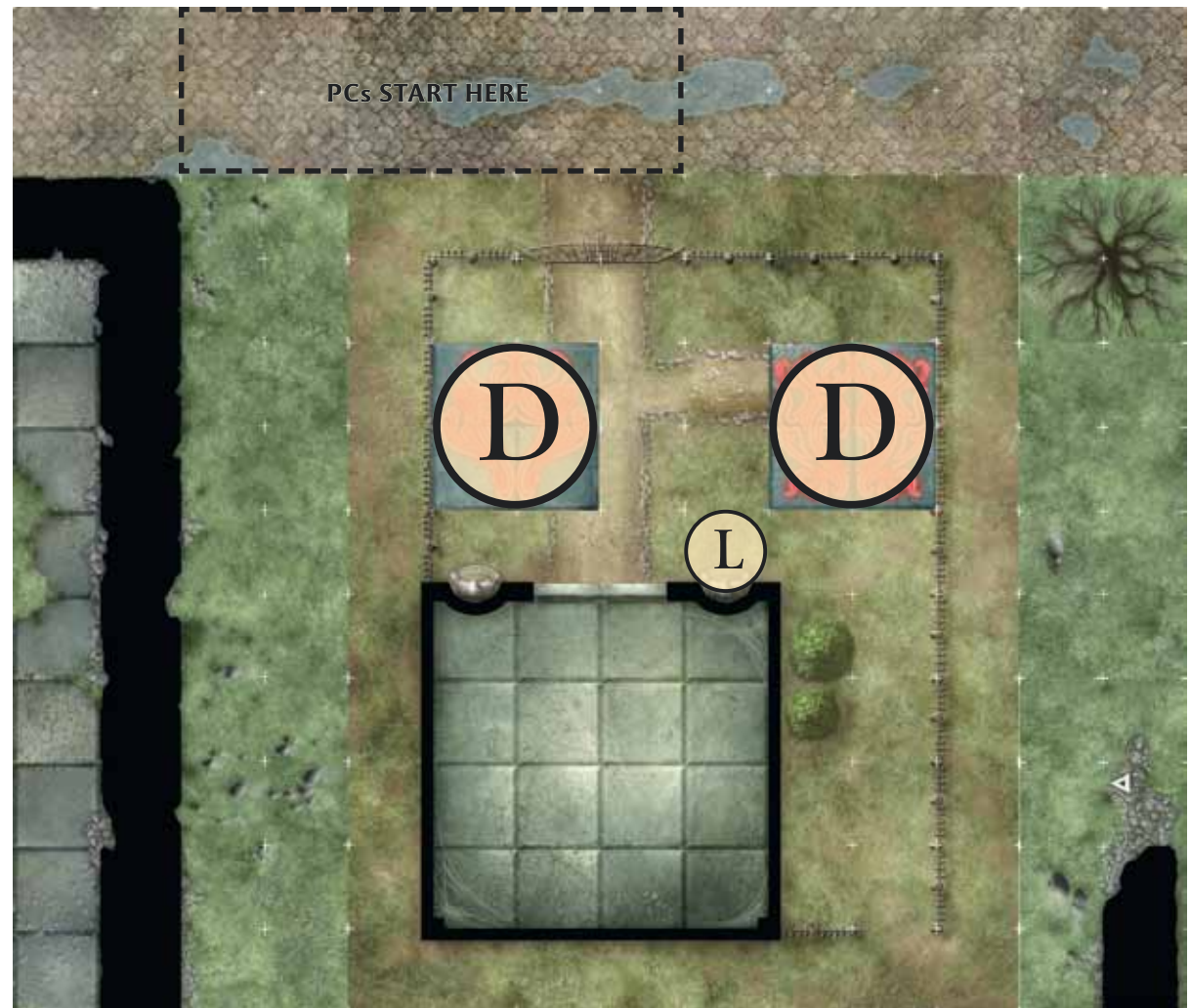
Lygis, the Black Cloud (L)
2 rockfire dreadnaughts (D)

When the encounter begins, Lygis is waiting for the characters by the crypt mentioned in the note from Encounter FA4. Using his arcane knowledge, Lygis has already sensed the approach of the *Algorithm* and now awaits its delivery. He has finished a ritual to summon two elementals; they can be called into being instantly with just a few words. His fellow cultists have retreated to the safety of the catacombs below.

When the party arrives at the graveyard, read:

This desolate-looking graveyard is long abandoned. It has been generations since any of the souls interred here had a living heart to remember them, and the ancient headstones have been left to weather and decay. The note directs you toward a narrow path winding amongst the graves, which leads to a lone, stone mausoleum atop a low rise and ringed by decaying, leaning fence. Within that area, two arcane sigils traced into the dead earth glow dully. Looming before the rusty doors is a humanoid figure, its features shrouded beneath a black cloak.

A DC 20 Arcana check confirms that the glowing sigils in the courtyard are summoning circles.



NEGOTIATIONS

Lygis does not attack immediately. He is no less evil than his cohorts, but his only concern is retrieving the *Algorithm*. If that can be accomplished by negotiating rather than fighting, he will negotiate first. Lygis's speech is formed by hundreds of worms and maggots trying to mimic human speech, which gives him a slimy, gurgling lisp. He is forthright about his intent to use the *Algorithm* to free his master. He dodges questions about Kelphin Green, saying only that he has no interest in Green's fate.

If the characters hand over the artifact, Lygis accepts it and immediately disintegrates into the soil, leaving the heroes alone. He will reappear in Encounter 6. The sigils fade and disappear.

If civilized discourse fails, Lygis issues a straightforward ultimatum without boasting or goading: if the characters don't surrender the *Algorithm* voluntarily, he must fight them for it. When that happens, he summons the two rockfire dreadnoughts and the fight is on.

If the party refuses to give up the *Algorithm*, read:

The air becomes heavy and dark clouds form overhead. A sudden wind ruffles the shadowy figure's black cloak. It throws back its hood and reveals a squirming mass of worms and maggots where a head would be. The worms mumble the last phrases of an arcane ritual, causing the glowing sigils to fade and the ground to tremble. Two hulking humanoids with bodies of stone erupt from the soil, and the cloaked creature laughs inhumanly.

Lygis, the Black Cloud (L)	Level 18 Elite Artillery
Medium natural magical beast (undead)	XP 4,000
HP 286; Bloodied 143	Initiative +14
AC 32, Fortitude 27, Reflex 30, Will 24	Perception +12
Speed 6	
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; 5 lightning, thunder; half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerable 10 radiant, 10 against close and area attacks	
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
Squeezing Swarm	
By altering its shape, Lygis can squeeze through small openings as if it were a Tiny creature.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ Corrupting Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 necrotic damage.	
⚡ Black Lightning (necrotic, thunder) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +23 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 7 lightning and necrotic damage, or 4d8 + 7 lightning and necrotic damage if the target is bloodied.	
⚡ Crushing Thunder (necrotic, thunder) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 20 (creatures in burst); +21 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 thunder and necrotic damage.	
⚡ Worm's Feast (illusion) ♦ Recharge 6	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +23 vs. Will	
Hit: 4d10 + 7 damage. If this damage doesn't reduce the target to 0 or fewer hit points, the target takes no damage but is stunned until the end of its next turn.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⚡ Horrific Visage (fear) ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Will	
Hit: The target cannot attack Lygis until the end of its next turn and is immobilized (save ends).	
Skills Arcana +23, History +23, Religion +23	
Str 14 (+12)	Dex 16 (+13) Wis 14 (+12)
Con 20 (+15)	Int 26 (+18) Cha 15 (+12)
Alignment evil	Languages Common

2 Rockfire Dreadnoughts (R)	Level 18 Soldier
Large elemental magical beast	XP 2,000 each
HP 170; Bloodied 85	Initiative +17
AC 34, Fortitude 34, Reflex 32, Will 29	Perception +12
Immune disease, poison; Resist 25 fire	
Speed 8	
TRAITS	
☼ Waves of Flame (fire) ♦ Aura 1	
Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ Fist of Flame (fire) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 fire damage.	
⚡ Brimstone Rock (fire) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +23 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, plus 5 fire damage.	
Str 27 (+17)	Dex 22 (+15) Wis 16 (+12)
Con 18 (+13)	Int 8 (+8) Cha 7 (+7)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Primordial

TACTICS

This battle is straightforward: the two dreadnoughts wade into melee while Lygis maintains its distance. Lygis remains only until bloodied. Then it retreats by burrowing underground, to reappear in Encounter 6.

If Lygis is killed, read:

Lygis staggers. Its body shrinks visibly as writhing maggots and worms melt away from its form. As it crumbles in a heap, the creature gurgles, "My death gives flesh to my master's wrath..." Then the body explodes in a blinding flash of lightning. With a deafening roar and a rush of ozone-reeking wind, something enormous erupts from the teeming mass of vermin and then, just as suddenly, it disappears into the earth without a trace.

CONCLUSION

After the fight ends, the party can explore a bit. Outside the crypt, they find expended arcane reagents where the glowing sigils were. Inside the crypt, they find a single sarcophagus. The dust around its lid has been disturbed, and opening it reveals a set of stone stairs descending into the catacombs below.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Fence: Ringing the hill is a rusting iron fence that does not provide cover but does hinder movement. Moving across the fence requires a DC 13 Athletics check or two squares of movement. Large or larger creatures can step over the fence. Lygis can squirm past it with no penalties. The gate in the fence along the road is open but can be closed by an adjacent character as a standard action; the hinges are quite rusty and stiff.

Mausoleum: The mausoleum is made of stone. Its rusting steel doors are unlocked. Against the back wall of the mausoleum is a single sarcophagus which conceals a set of steps leading into the catacombs below. The chamber is 10 feet high.

Bushes and Trees: A withered tree and a few stunted bushes stand about the mausoleum. The tree has no effect. Each bush fills the squares it occupies and acts as blocking terrain.

Walls: Several adjacent plots have been sealed off with heavy stone walls. The walls are 20 feet (4 squares) high and 5 feet thick. They can be scaled with a DC 22 Athletics check.

FA6, THE FURY OF MUAL-TAR

Encounter Level 17 (8,200 XP)

SETUP

Lygis, the Black Cloud (L)
6 cultists of Mual-Tar (C)
The Fury of Mual-Tar (F)

If Lygis died in Encounter FA5, the cultists are alert but neither party gets a surprise round. In this case, The Fury is already on its way; it appears at the beginning of round 2.

If Lygis escaped from Encounter FA5, the cultists and Lygis are hiding in the burial chamber as shown. Lygis has however many hit points he had at the end of Encounter FA5. Roll Stealth checks for the cultists and Perception checks for the characters to determine whether the cultists get a surprise round. If the characters spot the cultists and Lygis, place them on the battlemat. Read the flavor text from Encounter FA5 when Lygis dies in this encounter.

In either case, The Fury of Mual-Tar is not present when the fight begins. The tag on the map indicates where The Fury appears.

When the party first enters the catacombs from the crypt above, read:

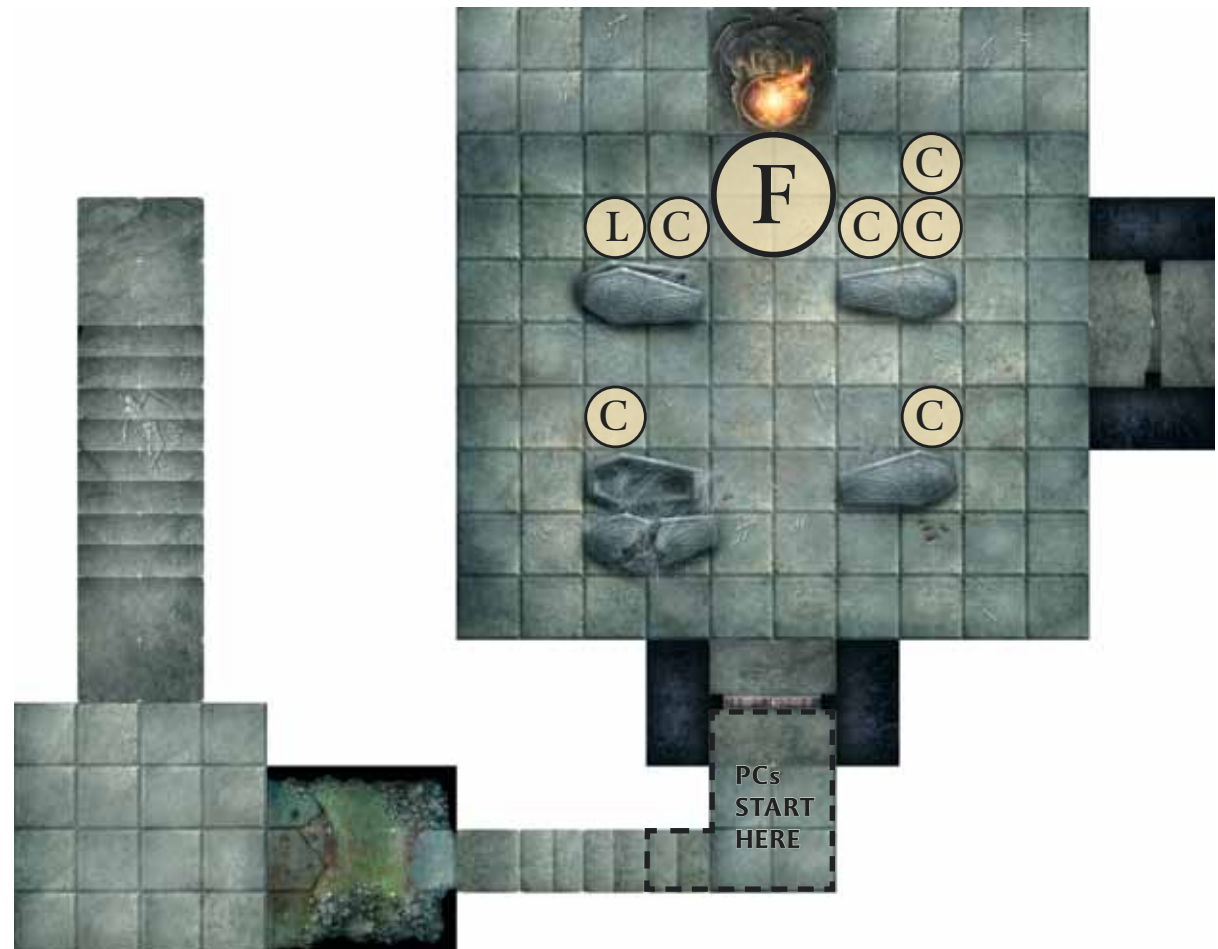
You find yourself in a small catacomb. Skeletal remains fill alcoves set into the walls. Further along, the tunnel terminates at a moldering wooden coffin containing bones and rags. The wall to the east has been smashed open, however, revealing a once-hidden passageway that stretches

deeper into the earth. Barely visible at its end is a pair of enormous stone doors.

When the characters open the doors to the burial chamber, read:

Beyond the doors lies an enormous burial chamber. The dominating feature of the room is a large stone statue set

against the north wall. It portrays a withered, cruel-looking man holding a burning brazier. Four crumbling, stone sarcophagi rest in the center of the room, and bones are stacked in dozens of alcoves along all the walls. You discern another set of closed, stone doors set into the east wall.



TACTICS

The cultists are fairly straightforward combatants. They stay spread out if at all possible. They use cover to their advantage and obey orders from Lygis. Lygis and the cultists fight to the death.

Don't protect Lygis in this battle! He throws himself into danger, knowing that only his death will bring The Fury of Mual-Tar into being. Don't tip off the players that this will happen; let them believe that killing Lygis will hasten the end of the fight.

When Lygis dies, roll initiative for The Fury of Mual-Tar. It arrives at that initiative point on the next round after Lygis's death. The Fury attacks recklessly, including cutting swaths out of its own followers if they get in the way. It, too, fights to the death.

At the end of the round of combat when Lygis is killed, read:

A peal of thunder from the storm overhead echoes ominously through the catacombs, shaking dust and rocks from the ceiling.

When The Fury arrives, read:

Amidst a deafening roar of thunder, an enormous arc of lightning bursts out of the crumbling ceiling and coalesces into a writhing, serpentine body made of white-hot lightning. Electricity arcs between it and the walls. The creature, if that's what it is, opens its toothy maw and howls like a thousand thunderstorms.

Lygis, the Black Cloud (L)		Level 18 Elite Artillery	
Medium natural magical beast (undead)		XP 4,000	
HP 286; Bloodied 143		Initiative +14	
AC 32, Fortitude 27, Reflex 30, Will 24		Perception +12	
Speed 6			
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; 5 lightning, thunder; half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerable 10 radiant, 10 against close and area attacks			
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1			
TRAITS			
Squeezing Swarm			
By altering its shape, Lygis can squeeze through small openings as if it were a Tiny creature.			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⊕ Corrupting Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. Fortitude			
Hit: 2d6 + 4 necrotic damage.			
⚡ Black Lightning (necrotic, thunder) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +23 vs. AC			
Hit: 2d8 + 7 lightning and necrotic damage, or 4d8 + 7 lightning and necrotic damage if the target is bloodied.			
⚡ Crushing Thunder (necrotic, thunder) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Area burst 1 within 20 (creatures in burst); +21 vs. Reflex			
Hit: 2d6 + 7 thunder and necrotic damage.			
⚡ Worm's Feast (illusion) ♦ Recharge 6			
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +23 vs. Will			
Hit: 4d10 + 7 damage. If this damage doesn't reduce the target to 0 or fewer hit points, the target takes no damage but is stunned until the end of its next turn.			
MINOR ACTIONS			
⚡ Horrific Visage (fear) ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞			
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Will			
Hit: The target cannot attack Lygis until the end of its next turn and is immobilized (save ends).			
Skills Arcana +23, History +23, Religion +23			
Str 14 (+12)	Dex 16 (+13)	Wis 14 (+12)	
Con 20 (+15)	Int 26 (+18)	Cha 15 (+12)	
Alignment evil		Languages Common	

6 Cultists of Mual-Tar (C)		Level 13 Minion Soldier	
Medium natural humanoid		XP 200 each	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		Initiative +8	
AC 29, Fortitude 26, Reflex 25, Will 24		Perception +6	
Speed 6			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⊕ Longsword (weapon) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC			
Hit: 10 damage.			
Skills Arcana +19			
Str 17 (+9)	Dex 12 (+7)	Wis 11 (+6)	
Con 11 (+6)	Int 15 (+8)	Cha 13 (+7)	
Alignment evil		Languages Common, Primordial	
Equipment longsword			

Fury of Mual-Tar (F)			Level 16 Solo Skirmisher		
Large elemental beast (lightning, thunder)			XP 7,000		
HP 613; Bloodied 306		Initiative +22			
AC 30, Fortitude 25, Reflex 31, Will 28		Perception +10			
Speed 6; fly 10 (hover); phasing					
Resist 15 lightning, thunder					
Saving Throws +5; Action Points 2					
TRAITS					
Unchained					
The Fury automatically succeeds on saving throws against any effects that slow, immobilize, or restrain that a save can end.					
Blood of Lightning					
When first Bloodied during an encounter, The Fury gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and an aura 1. Each enemy that enters or starts its turn within the aura takes 15 lightning damage.					
STANDARD ACTIONS					
⚔ Bite (lightning, thunder) ♦ At-Will					
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +21 vs. AC					
Hit: 2d8 + 7 lightning and thunder damage.					
⚡ Tongues of Lightning ♦ At-Will					
Effect: The fury shifts 3 squares and makes a <i>bite</i> attack, then shifts 3 squares and makes a second <i>bite</i> attack, then shifts 3 squares and makes a third <i>bite</i> attack.					
⚡ Howl of Rage (thunder) ♦ Recharge when first Bloodied					
Attack: Close burst 3 (creatures in burst); +17 vs. Fortitude					
Hit: 4d10 + 7 thunder damage and the target is knocked prone.					
MINOR ACTIONS					
⚡ Flare (lightning) ♦ Recharge ☹️					
Attack: Close burst 3 (creatures in burst); +17 vs. Reflex					
Hit: 2d8 + 7 lightning damage and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.					
Str 17 (+11)	Dex 23 (+14)	Wis 14 (+10)			
Con 15 (+10)	Int 7 (+6)	Cha 18 (+12)			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –			

FEATURES OF THE CATACOMB

Illumination: The statue holds an oil-burning brazier that provides bright illumination for the catacomb.

Statue: The statue portrays a gaunt but regally-dressed man holding a burning brazier. The statue is 10 feet high and has AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, and 80 hit points. It can be toppled off its base with a DC 28 Strength check. Breaking or toppling the statue causes the brazier to spill burning oil onto the floor: close blast 3, +16 vs. Reflex, 10 fire damage plus ongoing 5 fire (save ends). The spill creates a 3-square-by-3-square zone of burning oil that lasts until the end of the encounter. Characters or creatures that enter or begin their turn in the zone take 10 fire damage plus ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Ceiling: The ceiling is 40 feet high.

Sarcophagi: Each stone coffin occupies 2 squares and is also 2 squares (10 feet) tall. A sarcophagus can be climbed with a DC 13 Athletics check.

DEVELOPMENT

After the cultists and their monstrosity are defeated, the characters are free to explore the catacombs. The stone coffins may contain treasures to allocate to the characters.

The characters also hear a muffled cry for help from the next room. There they find the rest of the cultists' belongings (all mundane items with little value) as well as Kelphin Green, bound and gagged in a corner of the room. See "Concluding the Adventure" (page 7).

About the Author

Syd Thurston is a scheming dreamer who dwells in the nether reaches of ten years of fantasy roleplaying rules and literature, devising wicked twists and deadly threats to elicit his own amusement. His domain of vistas stretches ever onward into the imagination, led by an army of wherefores and never-weres. By reading this work, you allow him into your mind and he, inextricably, becomes a part of you and your memories: If you are reading this, it's already too late . . .



THE HAMMER FALLS

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Corwin Riddle

illustration by Slawomir Maniak

cartography by Jason A. Engle



“The Hammer Falls” is a short adventure for five 2nd-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar. The characters enter an abandoned metalworking refinery under the control of a clan of duergar who have given their souls to infernal forces in exchange for power. Inside, they work tirelessly to uncover the secrets within a river of lava corrupted by a shard from the meteorite.

Taskmaster Barulg and his duergar clan use their expertise of mining and smelting in an attempt to infuse weapons with the lava’s power, while Slead, an imp who has discovered that the corrupted lava can be twisted into powerful and obedient elemental servants, supervises the progress. The characters enter the refinery and encounter an ambush, followed by

a battle in the metalworks where they must contend with unstable furnaces and workers. Finally, the characters descend into the heart of the refinery, where Slead and Barulg await.

If you’re not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating the metalworking refinery into any existing campaign, where you can choose an alternative magical force that has altered the lava. If you use the adventure in a location other than the Chaos Scar, you’ll need to create your own reasons for the infernal interest in the duergar’s affairs.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the [Chaos Scar introduction](#) and check out the map of the entire valley.

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BACKGROUND

The malign influence and corruption found within the Chaos Scar cannot always be traced to a tangible piece of the meteorite. Though many shards remain scattered throughout the valley or claimed by its covetous denizens, some have dissipated, dissolved, melted away, or been consumed by other forces. These shards are never fully destroyed; the meteor's destructive essence endures within the power that absorbed it, slowly spreading its corruption and perverting its new incarnation with the meteorite's evil.

One such shard, separated at impact, slowly burrowed deep into an expanse of rocky terrain, where it found its way into a vein of magma. Liquidated by the intense heat, the shard—along with its corruption and essence—was absorbed into the molten rock. Over time, it rose to the surface as a river of strange lava which glows with an unnatural, bluish hue. This lava followed the channels created by older magma flows, which led it into the underbelly of a long-abandoned metalworking refinery.

Brought back to life under the cruel direction of taskmaster Barulg and his duergar clan, the refinery's metalworking resources were used to forge weapons for duergar raiding parties. However, soon after arriving and activating the furnaces, the duergar discovered that the strangely colored lava contained latent magical properties, and they began to experiment in an attempt to harness its power.

The lava is nothing if not unpredictable, and after many failed attempts—and casualties—the duergar smiths were able to use the lava to craft a single magical weapon: a monstrous warhammer imbued with a fiery essence. Barulg immediately claimed the hammer as his own, forcing the duergar to work

the furnaces night and day in hopes of creating more such armaments.

These magical experiments drew the eye of Sleed, a clever imp with a strong interest in the lava's strange properties. Sent by his master to observe the meteor's influence and effects, Sleed easily took advantage of the duergar's infernal associations to seal a pact for their souls, promising power to Barulg and his duergar when greater devils come to stake a claim in the valley. Sleed then took over the operation, bringing in other devils to help expand and escalate the experiments to create more powerful magic items.

As the experiments continued and the lava was exposed to rituals, an unexpected side effect occurred: Pieces of the lava and magma began to come alive as elemental servitors, under the control of the ritual caster—namely, Sleed. Seeing the potential in an army of fiery warriors, Sleed began to catalog his experiments, hoping to find a consistent way to create such elementals—or a way to bring even more powerful elementals into being.

SLEED

Sleed is clever, and the imp excels at surviving. If threatened, he tries to bargain for his life while planning an escape. He's installed a trap door at the bottom of the refinery—large enough only for a creature of his stature—that leads back to the surface. He has no loyalty to Barulg or his clan and won't hesitate to leave them behind.

BARULG

A cruel brute, Barulg knows little but blood and violence, and he enjoys inflicting pain and suffering on others. Believing that Sleed's masters will protect him, he becomes angered if the imp abandons him. Barulg has little to say, preferring to let his warhammer converse with the characters.

SYNOPSIS

The characters enter the refinery and are immediately met with resistance from duergar sentries who attempt to warn their allies in the adjacent metalworking room. Depending on whether a sentry escapes and how the characters enter the metalworks, they might walk into another ambush or catch the duergar smiths unaware as they work the furnaces. Bolstering their numbers are an imp and an elemental servitor.

Following the tunnel down from the metalworks brings the characters to the bottom of the refinery, a fiery pit where Sleed and Barulg wait. Once the battle begins, Sleed summons an escort of elemental servitors to assist. Depending on how the fight progresses, Sleed may attempt to escape through a tiny trap door leading to the surface, leaving Barulg and the elementals to fend for themselves. It's up to you whether he tries to flee and if the characters have a chance to pursue him.

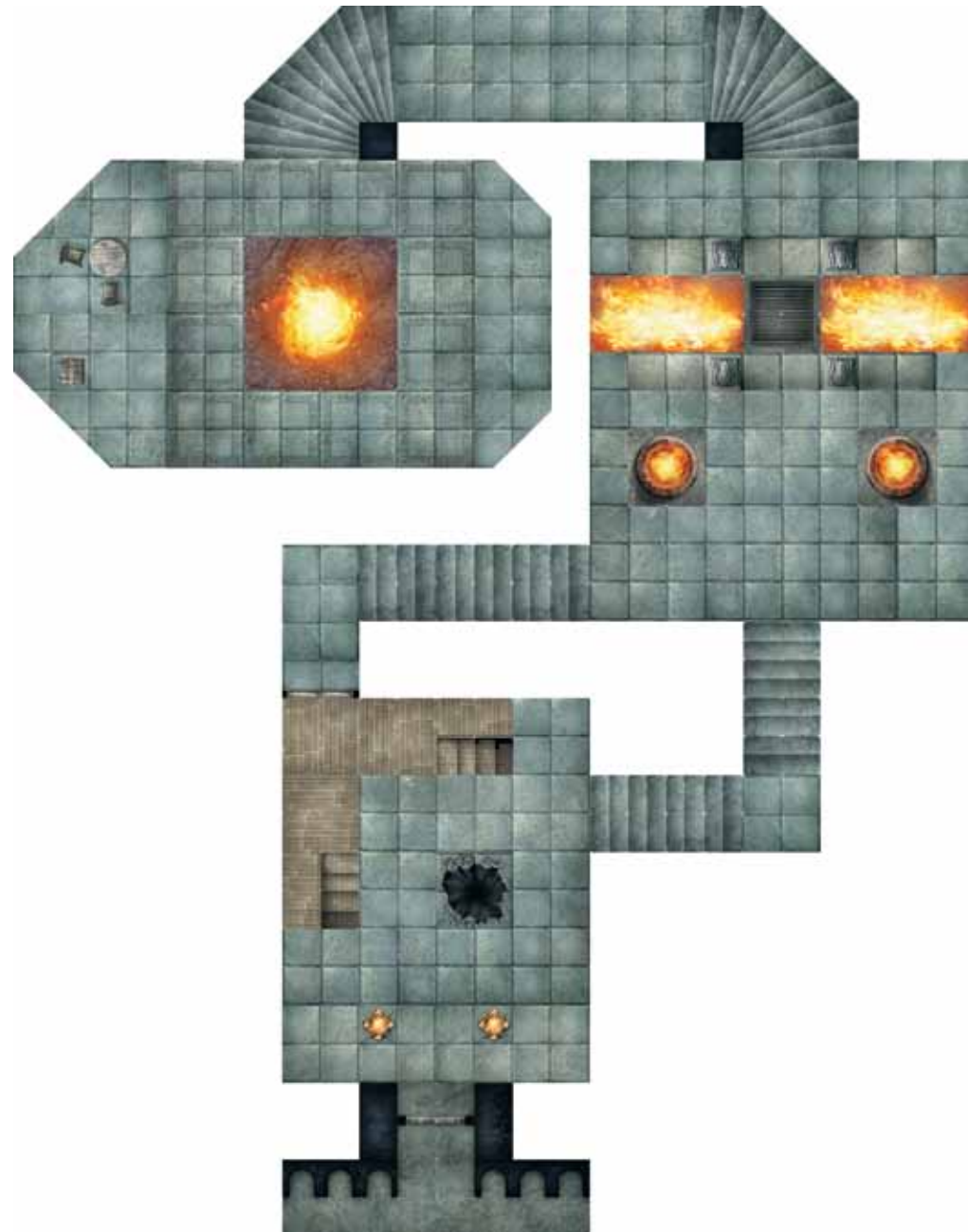
DUNGEON TILES

This adventure's map was constructed with one set each of the following D&D Dungeon Tile sets: *Arcane Corridors* (DT2), *Hidden Crypts* (DT3), and *Fane of the Forgotten Gods* (DT7). Each room can be constructed simultaneously to save time while the adventure is being played.

TREASURE

The characters should earn a total of three treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find treasure and what each parcel should contain. The magic items should come from the players' wish lists. Do not count Barulg's hammer as part of the treasure parcels.

Parcel 1: 200 gp and a <i>potion of healing</i> (carried by a duergar scout)	The Entrance
Parcel 2: One level 3 magic item (found near the furnaces)	The Metalworks
Parcel 3: 170 gp and an Enchant Magic Item ritual (found on Sleed's desk)	Sleed's Sanctum



GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

“The Hammer Falls” takes place in the Chaos Scar. The following adventure hooks provide information and motivation that could send the characters to the metalworking refinery. These hooks include minor quests that can net the characters some extra experience.

HOOK 1: BRING DOWN THE HAMMER

Lord Drysdale of Restwell Keep has tasked guardsmen Rikter Idrisil, a sturdy human bearing many scars, with maintaining the peace near a section of the King’s Wall that lies dangerously close to Barulg’s refinery. Every few nights, Barulg and his clan emerge from their hideout, cross the wall, and raid nearby settlements for food, supplies, and even slaves on occasion. Rikter and his guards have had enough of this aggression and are determined to drive the duergar completely out of the valley.

Rikter has sent several patrols into the refinery to deal with the duergar, but no progress has been made. Rikter has begun to suspect that more than duergar lurk in the caverns, but he is confident that Barulg holds them all together; killing him should disperse the rest of his clan. Lacking the proper manpower to penetrate the refinery, Rikter hires the characters to enter and kill Barulg and bring back his giant warhammer as proof of his demise.

Quest: 625 XP and 300 gp for returning with Barulg’s warhammer.

HOOK 2: NO DWARF LEFT BEHIND

A trio of dwarven brothers, miners by trade, saw smoke and steam billowing from a long-dormant metalworking refinery near the King’s Wall, and they decided to investigate. Upon entering Barulg’s refinery, they were ambushed by a group of duergar, and only one of the dwarves managed to escape. The dwarf, an obstinate and ornery fellow named Balidor Cragbottom, knows a bit about duergar and their ways, and he believes it’s possible that his brothers are being kept alive as slaves, or worse, sacrifices for one of the duergars’ infernal altars.

Balidor is unwilling to leave his brothers to die but admits that he isn’t much of a fighter and wouldn’t get far on his own. Seeing the characters as capable adventurers, he offers them gold if they’re willing to investigate and return with any information regarding the fate of his brothers.

Quest: 125 XP and 200 gp for bringing back information about Balidor’s brothers.

HOOK 3: A SMALL SAMPLE

Ruana Lorewise, an eccentric elven wizard with an interest in geological phenomena of a magical nature, was out exploring some volcanic rock formations when she detected a trickle of strange lava which pulsed with an odd, bluish hue. Following it, she found that it led to an old refinery. Unfortunately, when nearing the building, a group of small, fiery elementals appeared, scaring her off before she could properly investigate the area.

More fascinated than ever, Ruana hires the characters to bring back a sample of lava from within the refinery, convinced that potent magic can be found at the heart of the lava flow that runs below. She offers a reward for the sample, and provides a magical vial capable of holding the lava.

Quest XP: 125 XP and 100 gp for bringing back a sample of the strange lava.

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of the hook used to get the characters into the Chaos Scar, **read or paraphrase the following when they reach the metalworking refinery:**

An overpowering stench of sulfur lingers in the air as you approach the refinery. It’s evident from the decay and debris that the facility has not been used in many years. One of the upper walls has collapsed, and rusty tools lie scattered around the entrance, yet steam and smoke billow out from the broken chimneys, rising above the faint sound of hammers on anvils that echo within the broken walls.

AREA 1: THE ENTRANCE

Encounter level 2 (XP 700)

The only room at ground level, the entryway shows the age of the building; its walls are crumbling and partially collapsed, and with the debris scattered on the floor, each step is uncertain. The duergar intentionally leave the room dark, extinguishing the only two braziers when the scouts spot potential intruders. They prefer to capture any intruders to use as slaves, but their first priority is to deny entrance to the lower levels of the refinery.

SETUP

- 2 duergar guards (G)
- 2 duergar scouts (S)

The duergar scouts start on the top of the wooden balcony at opposite sides, hiding in the shadows. Do not place them on the map until they attack or a character notices them (see below).

When the characters enter the refinery, read:

As you make your way down a gentle ramp, the air becomes warm and thick and the taste of ash settles on your tongue. A tunnel at the far end of the room glows a pale orange, carrying light and the rhythmic tempo of pounding hammers into the room. Light from the tunnel leaves the walls and corners ominously dark. You can make out a rickety wooden balcony near the rear of the room, which overlooks an uneven stone floor covered with debris and holes.

2 Duergar Guards (G)	Level 4 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (devil)	XP 175 each
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +4; darkvision
HP 58; Bloodied 29	
AC 21; Fortitude 17, Reflex 15, Will 15	
Immune illusion; Resist 5 fire, 5 poison	
Speed 5	
⊕ Warhammer (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+11 vs. AC; 1d10+3 damage.	
✂ Beard Quills (minor, encounter) ♦ Poison	
Ranged 3; +11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 2 poison damage and -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).	
Infernal Anger (minor; recharge ☼ ☼) ♦ Fire	
Until the start of the duergar guard's next turn, it deals an extra 4 fire damage when its melee attacks hit, and if an adjacent enemy moves or shifts during this period, the duergar guard can shift 1 square as an immediate reaction.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Skills Dungeoneering +9	
Str 14 (+4)	Dex 15 (+4) Wis 15 (+4)
Con 18 (+6)	Int 10 (+2) Cha 8 (+1)
Equipment chainmail, warhammer	

Though prepared for intruders, it is possible for the characters to sneak into the room and detect the duergar's presence before being seen. The scouts have passive Perception of 19; if the characters beat it with their Stealth checks, they can enter the room unnoticed. If the characters bring a light source, they are noticed immediately. If they are discovered, the duergar scouts and guards attempt to sneak into advantageous positions (make Stealth checks for each duergar and compare them to the characters' passive Perception checks).

The Perception check results below assume that the duergar are aware of the characters' approach and have extinguished the braziers accordingly. If that isn't the case, the braziers are still lit (see the read-aloud text below the Perception check results).

2 Duergar Scouts (S)	Level 4 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid (devil)	XP 175 each
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +9; darkvision
HP 48; Bloodied 24	
AC 18; Fortitude 18, Reflex 16, Will 16	
Immune illusion; Resist 5 fire, 5 poison	
Speed 5	
⊕ Warhammer (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+8 vs. AC; 1d10 + 2 damage.	
✂ Crossbow (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 15/30; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.	
✂ Infernal Quills (minor, encounter) ♦ Poison	
Ranged 3; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).	
Shadow Attack	
A duergar scout's attacks deal 2d6 extra damage while the scout is invisible.	
Underdark Sneak (minor; while in dim light or darkness and adjacent to an object or a wall that occupies at least 1 square; at-will)	
The duergar scout becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until after it hits or misses with an attack.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Skills Dungeoneering +9, Stealth +9	
Str 15 (+4)	Dex 17 (+5) Wis 14 (+4)
Con 18 (+6)	Int 10 (+2) Cha 7 (0)
Equipment chainmail, crossbow, crossbow bolt x10, warhammer	

Perception DC 10

The two braziers flanking the entrance are unlit, but the coals within are slightly warm and glow a faint red—the fires were recently extinguished.

Perception DC 15

Between the clanging sounds of metal on metal, you hear the soft, subtle creak of weight on wooden boards. Glancing toward the source of the noise, you see a shadowy figure atop the balcony and the glint of metal in its hand.

If the characters successfully sneak into the room, read:

As the rear hallway flickers with fiery light, you can make out the silhouettes of two stout figures standing just inside, their shadows flowing into the room. They don't seem to be looking in your direction.

TACTICS

The duergar start the encounter with two goals in mind: take live prisoners, and keep intruders away from the inner workings of the refinery. They start the fight looking to weaken and capture the characters, but attempt to kill them as soon as they realize the heroes are a significant threat.

Once combat begins, the duergar guards move into range and use *beard quills* to weaken the characters, following up with *warhammer* attacks and making use of *infernal anger* whenever possible. The guards do their best to keep the characters in the center of the room, allowing the duergar scouts a clear line of sight for their ranged attacks.

If still unnoticed, the duergar scouts enter combat a round later, hoping to surprise any characters that have already entered the room. Since the scouts should be hiding in darkness, they can make immediate use of *shadow attack*. If the characters start to focus on the scouts, they will fade into the darkness atop the balcony, using *underdark sneak* to change location while preparing another *shadow attack*. When a character first closes the distance, the scout uses *infernal quills*.

If the battle is going poorly for the duergar and only two remain, at or near their bloodied values, one of the duergar attempts to flee the room through a secret door atop the balcony, hoping to warn their

allies in the adjacent room. If a duergar does make it out alive, add him to the next encounter.

DEVELOPMENT

If a duergar managed to escape, he runs ahead to alert his allies in the next room, joining them in the second encounter. The escaping duergar assumes that the characters will not be able to find the secret door into the metalworks, and he has set an ambush near the main stairway entrance. The characters can surprise or disorient the ambushers if they take the secret tunnel or split up and approach via both entrances.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

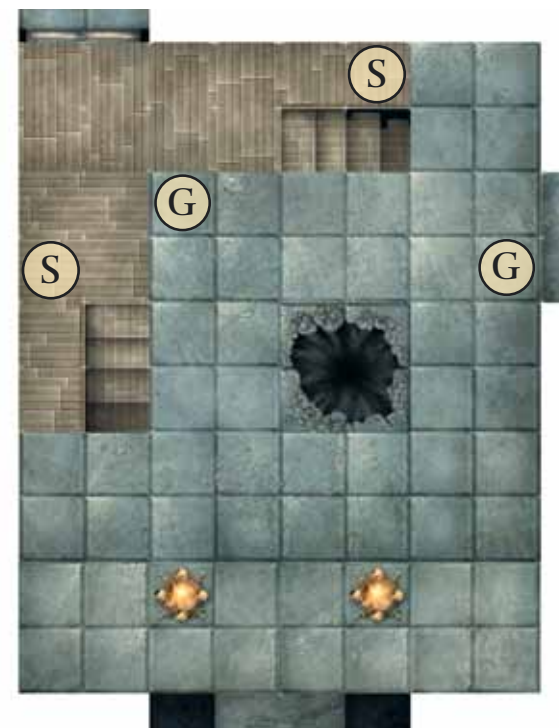
Braziers: The braziers can be tipped over with a DC 5 Athletics check, spilling the coals onto an adjacent square and dealing 1d6 fire damage to any creatures within a close burst 1.

Giant Hole: A creature stepping onto the square drops 10 feet and is knocked prone.

Hidden Door: Located atop the wooden balcony, the door opens into a tunnel leading to the metalworks. A character can discover the door with a DC 15 Perception check.

Illumination: The bottom floor is lit by light escaping from the furnace room, which qualifies as dim light. The wooden balcony and most corners are shrouded in darkness.

Wooden Balcony: Elevated 15 feet above the floor, the balcony is sturdy enough to support a lot of weight and any climbing on its sides, but could be brought down if two or more supports are broken, dropping anyone on the balcony to the ground and knocking them prone. Each support has 25 hp, AC 2, and Fortitude 12.



If a character finds the secret door atop the wooden balcony, read:

Cleverly disguised as a ventilation shaft, the small door slides open. Peering inside reveals a narrow tunnel, filled with the familiar glow of the nearby furnace room.

TREASURE

If the characters light the braziers, either during or after the fight, they can easily spot some gold and a *potion of healing* dropped by one of the duergar; otherwise, finding them in the dark requires a DC 10 Perception check.

AREA 2: THE METALWORKS

Encounter level 2 (XP 650)

The corrupted lava flows into this room, where the weapons are created and the bulk of the experiments performed. Several duergar work the furnaces with one of Slead's imps, preparing another attempt at creating a lava-infused magical weapon. With the noise from hammers, steam, and the roaring furnaces, it's difficult for them to hear anyone approaching. They expect the sentries to alert them to any potential problems.

SETUP

- 1 duergar guard (G)
- 3 duergar miners (M)
- 1 imp (I)
- 1 magma hurler (H)

The magma hurler starts hidden in the river of lava until its allies are in trouble. Do not place it on the map until it attacks.

ANOTHER AMBUSH

If the characters prevented the duergar from escaping the previous room, the entire party gains a surprise round, regardless of which entrance they take; none of the workers are expecting company, and with the level of noise, it's almost impossible for them to hear the characters arrive. The guard is relaxed and inattentive, while the miners and the imp are focused on the furnaces. Enemies should be set up as shown on the map.

If one of the duergar managed to escape from the previous encounter and warn his allies in the metalworks, the characters could be walking into a second ambush. The escaped duergar—along with the guard, miners, and imp—will hide behind the furnaces and on either side of the main door, expecting the characters to use the main hallway entrance. Readjust their setup positions to reflect the situation. Characters entering from the hidden doorway will likely enter unnoticed in this scenario, gaining a surprise round.

If a duergar escaped to the metalworks from the previous encounter, read the following as they near the room:

The always-constant sound of hammers on anvils comes to an abrupt stop, leaving an eerie silence that is soon replaced by loud chatter.

Regardless of their entrance, read the following when the characters enter the metalworks:

As you descend deeper into the refinery, you are met with a sudden wall of hot air and ash. The hallway opens up into a giant metalworking facility, which is in surprisingly good condition compared to the rest of the refinery. Stretching toward a tall ceiling of stonework and rock, two giant iron furnaces spout fire and shake violently. Many discarded weapons are scattered around the floor, warped and melted beyond recognition. Near the back of the room is a river of lava, but of a bluish hue, glowing and surging with energy.

If the characters enter the metalworks unnoticed, read the following:

Several small duergar surround the furnaces, adjusting valves and heating a large sword. An imp rests nearby, floating casually while looking bored. A stout guard leans against one of the walls, his helmet pulled down over his eyes—he looks to be asleep.

Perception DC 10

The furnaces seem dangerously erratic, spouting fire and the blue lava onto the floor nearby.

Perception DC 15

The lava flow near the back of the room erupts and splashes with volatile waves. What seems to be a head of molten rock rises above the lava for a second, glaring with fiery eyes before falling back into the channel.

When the magma hurler appears, read:

Emerging from the river of lava is an elemental of magma and smoldering rock.

When a furnace spews lava, read:

The furnaces shake violently, their metal walls and grates screeching as they strain to hold together. A geyser of lava erupts from inside, throwing flaming slag and magma in every direction.

TACTICS

Regardless of how the battle begins, the imp immediately vanishes and attempts to hide until it sees a good opportunity to attack with *tail sting* or *bite*, preferring to flank when possible. If caught in a dangerous position, the imp gives priority to using *vanish* and retreating rather than attacking. The imp will not hesitate to hover over the lava flow to stay out of a melee character's reach.

The guard and miners try to corner the characters near the furnaces, hoping to inflict as much fire damage as possible as the furnaces erupt each turn. The miners have no real tactical prowess but do their best to surround and flank characters when able. The guard uses *infernal anger* immediately and upon each recharge, saving *beard quills* for a character who has moved beyond reach.

Appearing in the most advantageous part of the lava flow, the magma hurler enters combat when either the imp or duergar guard is bloodied or when all three duergar miners are killed, whichever comes first. The magma hurler can stay within the lava flow if within range of the characters but is likely to move out to use *magma ball* against any characters in a clump.

Duergar Guard (G)		Level 4 Soldier	
Medium natural humanoid (devil)		XP 175	
Initiative +6 Senses Perception +4; darkvision			
HP 58; Bloodied 29			
AC 21; Fortitude 17, Reflex 15, Will 15			
Immune illusion; Resist 5 fire, 5 poison			
Speed 5			
⊕ Warhammer (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon			
+11 vs. AC; 1d10+3 damage.			
✂ Beard Quills (minor, encounter) ♦ Poison			
Ranged 3; +11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 2 poison damage and -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).			
⚡ Infernal Anger (minor; recharge ☞ ☞) ♦ Fire			
Until the start of the duergar guard's next turn, it deals an extra 4 fire damage when its melee attacks hit, and if an adjacent enemy moves or shifts during this period, the duergar guard can shift 1 square as an immediate reaction.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven		
Skills Dungeoneering +9			
Str 14 (+4)	Dex 15 (+4)	Wis 15 (+4)	
Con 18 (+6)	Int 10 (+2)	Cha 8 (+1)	
Equipment chainmail, warhammer			

3 Duergar Miners (M)		Level 5 Minion	
Medium natural humanoid (devil)		XP 50 each	
Initiative +5 Senses Perception +4; darkvision			
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.			
AC 20; Fortitude 17, Reflex 14, Will 17			
Immune illusion; Resist 10 fire, 10 poison			
Speed 5			
⊕ Warhammer (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon			
+3 vs. AC; 4 damage.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven		
Skills Dungeoneering +11			
Str 17 (+5)	Dex 13 (+3)	Wis 14 (+4)	
Con 20 (+7)	Int 10 (+2)	Cha 7 (0)	
Equipment chainmail, warhammer			

Imp (I)		Level 3 Lurker	
Tiny immortal humanoid (devil)		XP 150	
Initiative +8 Senses Perception +8; darkvision			
HP 40; Bloodied 20			
AC 17; Fortitude 15, Reflex 15, Will 15			
Resist 15 fire			
Speed 4, fly 6 (hover)			
⊕ Bite (standard, at-will)			
Reach 0; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage.			
⬇ Tail Sting (standard, encounter; recharges when the imp uses <i>vanish</i>) ♦ Poison			
Reach 0; +8 vs. AC; 1d8+3 damage, and the imp makes a secondary attack against the same target. <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +5 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and a -2 penalty to Will defense (save ends both).			
Vanish (standard; at-will) ♦ Illusion			
The imp becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until it attacks.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Supernal		
Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +9, Stealth +9			
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 14 (+3)	
Con 16 (+4)	Int 16 (+4)	Cha 16 (+4)	

Magma Hurler (H)		Level 4 Artillery	
Medium elemental humanoid (earth, fire)		XP 175	
Initiative +8 Senses Perception +4			
HP 41; Bloodied 20			
AC 18; Fortitude 15, Reflex 17, Will 13			
Immune petrification; Resist 10 fire; Vulnerable cold (a magma hurler that takes cold damage is slowed until the end of its next turn)			
Speed 4			
⊕ Slam (standard, at-will)			
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.			
✂ Magma Ball (standard, at-will) ♦ Fire			
Ranged 15; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d6+6 fire damage. <i>Miss</i> : Creatures adjacent to the target take 1d6 fire damage.			
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial		
Skills Endurance +7			
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 22 (+8)	Wis 14 (+4)	
Con 11 (+2)	Int 5 (-1)	Cha 8 (+1)	

DEVELOPMENT

After a quick search of the metalworks, the characters find many piles of warped and useless weapons—remnants of failed experiments—though they can also find the treasure noted below. A DC 12 Arcana check reveals that the bluish lava contains strong magical properties and almost appears to have a life of its own. If the characters are looking for a sample of lava for Ruana, they can obtain it here; Balidor's brothers, however, are nowhere to be found.

Although the characters might think they have the element of surprise as they continue, a small fire elemental from the lava flow in the metalworks has already seen and reported the intruders to Slead, who has started gathering his notes and summoning elemental servitors in preparation for a battle and possible escape.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The room is well lit by the furnaces and lava, pulsing with red and blue hues.

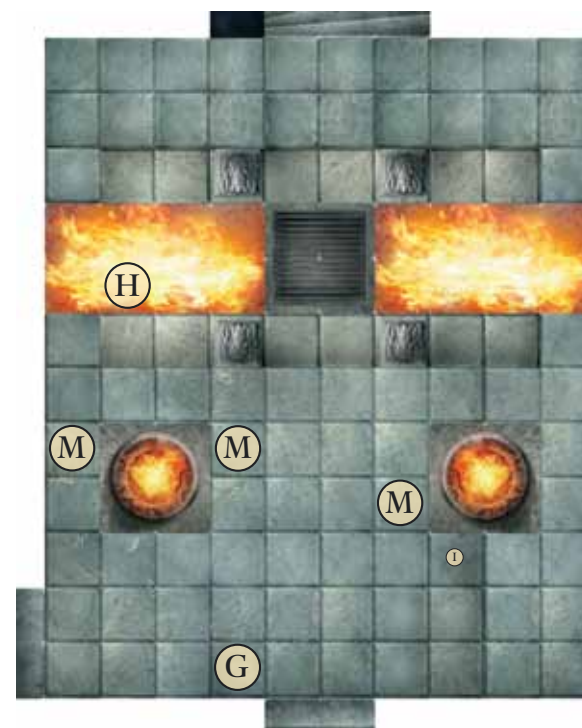
Elevation: The ceiling is 30 feet high, made of stonework built into the underside of the rocky terrain.

Furnaces: Each furnace is 10 feet tall, and deals 1d6 fire damage to any creature that enters or begins its turn in one of its squares. At the end of each round, the furnace spews flames and lava, dealing 1d4 fire damage to any creature adjacent to it, which also gains vulnerable 5 fire until the end of its next turn.

Lava Flow: The lava flow is a combination of rock, lava, and magma slowly flowing from the west through a slightly recessed stone channel 5 feet below the floor. A creature falling into the lava takes 1d6 fire damage upon falling in and 1d6 fire damage when starting its next turn in the lava.

TREASURE

Scattered among all the worthless items on the floor of the metalworks is one intact level 3 magic weapon.



AREA 3: SLEED'S SANCTUM

Encounter level 3 (XP 725)

The characters continue down another set of stairs and hallways, finally reaching the bottom of the refinery and Sleed's den, where the corrupted lava broke through the ground and the magical potency is at its peak. Here, Sleed works to perfect his process while Barulg stays nearby to protect him. They have been expecting intruders after hearing the commotion above and have summoned three elemental servitors to assist them in battle.

SETUP

Sleed, imp (S)

Barulg, duergar theurge (B)

3 magma runners (R)

When the characters enter Sleed's sanctum, read:

The sheer heat of this room tells you that you've reached the heart of the refinery. Much of the floor's stonework has been removed, revealing a small fissure. Inside, the strange bluish lava seeps out of the rocks, pulsing as it flows through the channel below into the metalworks. Near the chasm is a trio of small magma elementals, smoldering as they await an order from their master.

The corner of the room hides a small imp, who eyes you suspiciously before nodding to a duergar, who approaches carrying an enormous warhammer. Waves of the corrupted lava seem to flow beneath the metal surface of the hammer, which glows and pulses with a familiar blue hue. "I assume you've come for this," he mocks, gesturing to his weapon. "Don't worry, you shall have it."

Perception DC 15

Some of the stones have been removed from the floor near the rear of the chamber and been replaced with a small wooden trap door.

Arcana DC 15

The chasm here emanates the strongest magical aura in the refinery and appears to be the source of the lava flow.

Sleed, Imp (S)		Level 3 Lurker
Tiny immortal humanoid (devil)		XP 150
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +8; darkvision	
HP 40; Bloodied 20		
AC 17; Fortitude 15, Reflex 15, Will 15		
Resist 15 fire		
Speed 4, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ Bite (standard, at-will)		
Reach 0; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage.		
‡ Tail Sting (standard, encounter; recharges when the imp uses vanish) ♦ Poison		
Reach 0; +8 vs. AC; 1d8+3 damage, and the imp makes a secondary attack against the same target. <i>Secondary Attack:</i> +5 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and a -2 penalty to Will defense (save ends both).		
Vanish (standard; at-will) ♦ Illusion		
The imp becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until it attacks.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Supernal	
Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +9, Stealth +9		
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 14 (+3)
Con 16 (+4)	Int 16 (+4)	Cha 16 (+4)

Barulg, Duergar Theurge (B)		Level 5 Controller
Medium natural humanoid (devil)		XP 200
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +11; darkvision	
HP 63; Bloodied 31		
AC 19; Fortitude 16, Reflex 16, Will 18		
Immune illusion; Resist 5 fire, 5 poison		
Speed 5		
⊕ Warhammer (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+10 vs. AC; 1d10 + 1 damage.		
↘ Hellbolt (standard, at-will) ♦ Fire		
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 fire damage.		
↘ Infernal Quills (minor, encounter) ♦ Poison		
Ranged 3; +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 2 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).		
↙ Wave of Despair (standard, encounter) ♦ Psychic		
Close blast 5; +9 vs. Will; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is slowed and dazed (save ends both).		
✱ Brimstone Hail (standard, recharge ☹️ ☹️) ♦ Fire		
Area burst 2 within 15; +9 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 fire damage, and the target is knocked prone.		
↙ Hammer Strike (standard, recharge ☹️ ☹️ ☹️) ♦ Fire		
Close burst 1; +9 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 5 fire damage, and each creature in the burst is pushed 1 square.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven	
Skills Arcana +7, Dungeoneering +13, Religion +7		
Str 13 (+3)	Dex 12 (+3)	Wis 18 (+6)
Con 16 (+5)	Int 15 (+4)	Cha 11 (+2)
Equipment warhammer		

3 Magma Runners (R) **Level 2 Skirmisher**

Small elemental humanoid (earth, fire) XP 125

Initiative +6**Senses Perception** +3**HP** 37; **Bloodied** 18**AC** 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14

Immune petrification; **Resist** 5 fire (a magma runner that takes fire damage gains +2 speed until the end of its next turn); **Vulnerable** cold (a magma runner that takes cold damage is slowed until the end of its next turn)

Speed 8⬇ **Slam** (standard, at-will) ⬆ **Fire**

+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage plus 1d6 fire damage.

⬇ **Molten Rush** (standard, recharge 2) ⬆ **Fire**

The magma runner moves at half speed, and can make a *slam* attack against each creature it moves adjacent to. Any creature that attacks the magma runner during this movement takes 5 fire damage.

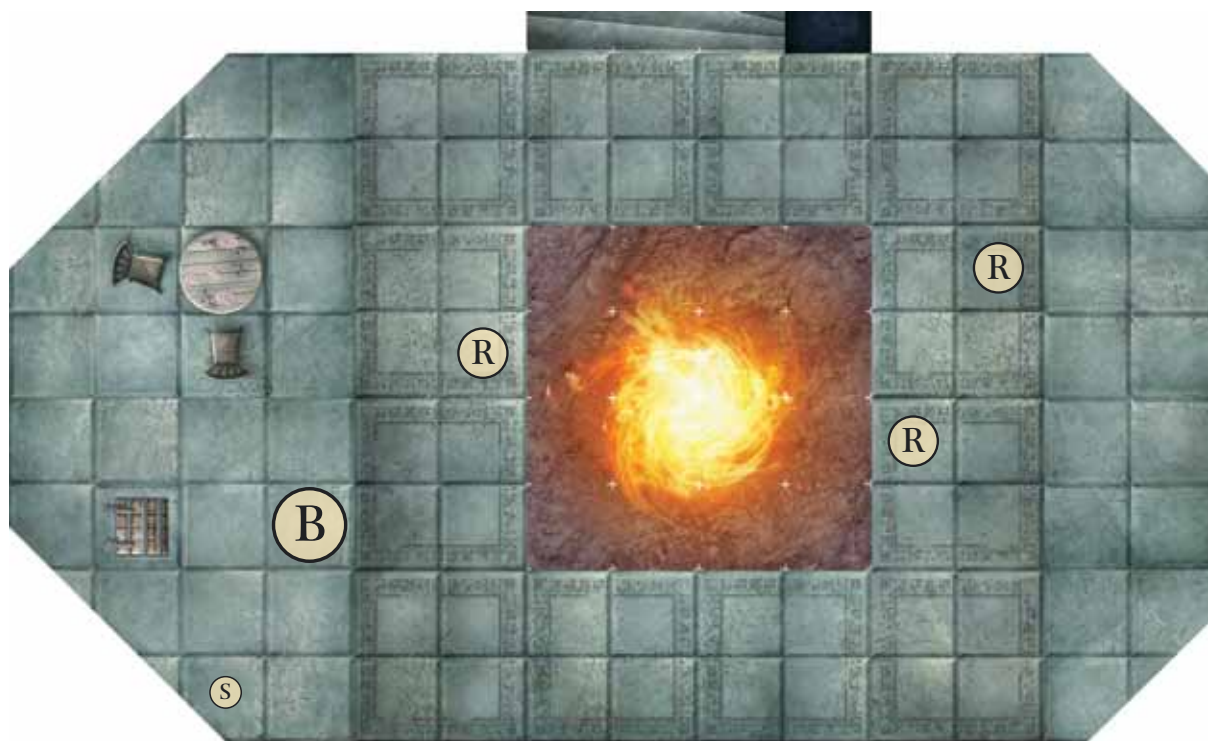
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Primordial**Skills** Acrobatics +9, Athletics +6**Str** 10 (+1)**Dex** 17 (+4)**Wis** 14 (+3)**Con** 13 (+2)**Int** 6 (-1)**Cha** 8 (0)

TACTICS

With their shared fire resistance, Slead, Barulg, and the magma runners will not hesitate to use the lava chasm to their advantage, running over it and attempting to keep the characters on the other side of it when possible.

The magma runners have been summoned by Slead as protection, so they engage any character that damages or threatens the imp. They intentionally walk in and out of the lava to take fire damage, giving them a speed boost to make maximum use of *molten rush*, charging through the characters' party in the small room. If Slead tries to escape, all remaining magma runners move between the imp and the party to intercept the characters and buy him some time.

Barulg begins combat by using *infernal quills* on the first character to deal a significant amount of damage to him, otherwise using *hellbolt* or *warhammer* against



whichever character he believes to be the biggest threat. Although not extremely intelligent, Barulg is a capable fighter and excels in combat. He will always look to flank targets with the elementals while keeping excellent position. The room is quite small and Barulg has several area attacks which he will use when characters bunch up and provide multiple targets. Barulg prefers to save *hammer strike* for when he is surrounded and needs to reposition, but if it's possible to damage any of the magma runners with this or *brimstone hail* while also hurting the characters, he does so.

Slead's first priority is to stay alive. He uses *vanish* immediately and whenever engaged. He uses *bite* or *tail sting* only when he has a tactical advantage and

room to move. Otherwise, he prefers to hover invisibly above the lava pit and make Arcana checks to trigger the lava's attack when a character gets too close. Slead isn't certain that the characters are strong enough to defeat Barulg and his elementals and won't stick around to find out if things look bad. He flees immediately when Barulg dies or when all three elementals are defeated. Slead is clever and will not announce his escape; the imp simply turns invisible and makes a run for it when the characters are disabled or distracted. It's possible the party won't notice the devil is gone until after the battle. Slead intends on using the trap door, but if the characters are aware and seem to be guarding it, the imp heads up the stairs and out of the refinery through the metalworks.

DEVELOPMENT

If Slead escapes, the characters find charred remnants of notes made in Infernal, which could lead to a future adventure in the Chaos Scar. If decrypted, the notes detail a process for creating powerful elemental servitors even more powerful than the magma hurler and magma runners.

If Slead is captured, he attempts to bargain with the characters for his release. He's unwilling to give up any information about his masters and their plans but will freely talk about the strange lava and Barulg's clan. Though the devil in charge is never mentioned, it should be clear that for Slead and his masters, the refinery was merely a test.

Found on Slead's desk is the treasure. If the characters take time to explore the rest of the chamber, they will discover broken mining picks and light armor bearing the Cragbottom name. The brothers themselves are not here, possibly sacrificed, burned to a crisp, or transferred to another location. That's up to you to decide. The question of their fate could launch another adventure..

Barulg's hammer is still intact and can be taken by the characters. Although guardsman Rikter wants to see the weapon as proof of the duergar's demise, he doesn't want it, and actually prefers that the characters take it far away.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The room is well-lit by lava and torches, but the corners are dim with shadows.

Ceiling: The room has a 10-foot-high ceiling of solid rock.

Lava Chasm: The 4 squares at the center of the chasm contain lava. The surface of the lava is 5 feet below the level of the floor. The 1-square-wide perimeter of rock surrounding the lava is rough stone which acts as difficult terrain. A creature falling into the lava takes 1d6 fire damage upon falling in and 1d10 fire damage when starting its turn in the lava.

The lava itself can be controlled by nearby creatures and used against enemies as a terrain power (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, page 62). Slead already understands how to use the Lava Pit terrain power and attacks with it whenever possible. Characters who see the pit used to attack can make Arcana checks as indicated to figure out

Trap Door: A trap door, barely big enough for an imp, leads up to the surface.

Slead's Desk: This small wooden desk is covered with charred papers.

Lava Pit At-Will Terrain

A fiery blob of lava launches itself at a nearby target.

Minor Action

Requirement: You must be trained in Arcana and must have seen a creature be attacked with this terrain power.

Check: Arcana check (DC 13) to understand how to control and attack with the Lava Pit.

Success: You can use this terrain power automatically until the end of the encounter. Each use counts as a standard action. You must be within 3 squares of the lava to trigger the attack.

Target: One creature within 3 squares of the lava pit.

Attack: +6 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d4 fire damage plus ongoing 3 fire damage (save ends).

TREASURE

A small amount of gold and the Enchant Magic Item ritual can be found on Slead's desk.

APPENDIX: NEW MAGIC ITEM

Magma Hammer Level 4+

This hammer shifts slowly, as though its surface were gently flowing lava.

Lvl 4	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 19	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 24	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Hammer

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 fire damage per plus, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Level 14 or 19: Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Level 24 or 29: Ongoing 15 fire damage (save ends).

Power (Daily, Fire): Free Action. Use when you hit a target with the weapon. Each creature adjacent to you takes 5 fire damage, and you push the target 1 square.

Level 14 or 19: 10 fire damage.

Level 24 or 29: 15 fire damage.

About the Author

Corwin Riddle hails from the sunny streets of Austin, Texas, where he works as a freelance writer and freelance dreamer. *The Hammer Falls* is his first published article for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game but certainly not the last.

THE SPLINTERED SPRING

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

illustration by Ben Wootten ♦ cartography by Mike Schley

An adventure for 3rd-level characters

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HEROIC

1-10



“The Splintered Spring” is a short adventure for five 3rd-level characters, taking place in and around a connected pair of aboveground and underground lakes. A plague of ghostly spiders is responsible for the theft of magic items in the lands around the King’s Wall. As the characters investigate, they discover a force of dolgaunt-led foulspawn holed up in a dark lair—the outpost of an aberrant cult drawn to the Chaos Scar.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the [Chaos Scar Introduction](#) and check out the map of the entire valley.

If you’re not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating it into any existing campaign situated near a wilderness area. The sinkhole of the splintered spring can be the result of an earthquake, an ancient Underdark site, or whatever else suits your campaign. The foulspawn cult will appear again in later adventures set deeper in the ruined valley.

BACKGROUND

When the great meteor fell, a fragmenting cloud of deadly debris tore countless rifts and sinkholes into the earth at the mouth of the Chaos Scar. As one such fragment cut its way through the surrounding landscape, it tore open an underground spring and carved a deep chasm beneath it. That spring now forms an unusual lake on the surface which conceals a pair of connected caverns below. Aberrant energy fills these caverns as a result of the meteor’s destructive passage.

A foulspawn cult has been drawn to this area of the Chaos Scar. Their center of power is deeper in the valley, but a group of low-level foulspawn dolgaunts,

dolgrims, and dolgarrs has been driven out of that sanctum and into exile.

The dolgaunt monk leader of this exile band dreams of returning to the cult in triumph. To that end, he has used his aberrant power to take control of a pack of phase spiders he and his cohorts discovered beneath the splintered spring. These phase spiders have begun roaming the countryside around the King’s Wall in search of magic items—valuable relics with which the dolgaunt monk hopes to buy his way back into the cult’s good graces.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

As part of a search for missing magical items, the characters make their way to a scarred landscape where a shattered spring fills a misty lake. The heroes fight their way past water serpents ridden by foulspawn guardians before crossing the lake and discovering that its center is a crater plunging down into darkness.

The characters’ descent leads them through two large caverns. The first of these is a noxious elemental mire where the main foulspawn encampment is set. Beneath that is a black lake that is the lair of the phase spiders and the foulspawn monk that controls them.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

You can use one of the hooks below to get the characters into the adventure, whether they are entering the Chaos Scar for the first time or have had previous adventures in the area. Each of these hooks has an accompanying minor quest with bonus XP.

Hook 1

A religious relic has been stolen from a temple in a town east of the King’s Wall, or from a group of wandering priests on a pilgrimage if the adventurers are already in the area of the Chaos Scar. Those who witnessed the theft speak of a swarm of ghostly spiders that entered the temple (or the priest’s camp) past armed guards. These spiders targeted and stole the relic with almost humanoid cunning.

Quest XP: 150 XP for returning the relic.

Hook 2

A noble named Megoras recently purchased an expensive ritual book in a distant city for research purposes. While being brought to his estate east of the King’s Wall by well-armed couriers, the book was stolen. One wounded courier crawled to the nearest village, where he spoke only of being swarmed by “ghost spiders, spawned of the underworld,” before dying. Megoras offers a reward of 100 gp to anyone who can find and return the book.

Quest XP: 150 XP for returning the ritual book to Megoras.

Hook 3

The town of Rhya lies along a trade road a few leagues east of the King’s Wall. The folk there are living in fear after a pack of monstrous “ghost spiders” swarmed the town a few days before. A retired adventurer named Ulrika stood against them and was killed, and they hauled off her body in the dead of night.

Quest XP: 150 XP for finding and properly burying Ulrika’s remains, then returning to Rhya with word that the threat of the spiders is ended. The characters are given a description of a unique amulet worn by Ulrika.

TREASURE PREPARATION

The characters gain three level-2 treasure parcels in this adventure; parcels 2, 3, and 7, shuffled around a bit.

Parcel A: The Foul Mire	One <i>potion of healing</i>
Parcel B: The Black Lake	One level 4 magic item
Parcel C: The Black Lake	One level 5 magic item, 20 gp, 100 gp gem

The relic or ritual book is also found at the black lake if the heroes are looking for it. The other magic items were stolen by the spiders on previous raids, and the characters can claim them with no consequences. (If you are using adventure hook 3, one of these items was worn by the adventurer Ulrika, inspiring the spiders to drag her body back to the foulspawn.)

If you have used adventure hook 2, the 100 gp gem (or its cash equivalent) noted above is the reward promised by Megoras, payable when the characters return the ritual book to him.

THE SPLINTERED SPRING

Whichever adventure hook you use to get the characters into the adventure, the party is taken to the last place the spiders were seen by witnesses. From there, the creatures' trail can be followed easily, either over the King's Wall or within the area of the Chaos Scar.

When the characters pick up the trail, read:

Even with the time that's passed, the distinct tracks of the so-called "ghost spiders" are easy to follow on the open ground. Every ten paces or so, huge clusters of spiked footprints slash the ground. You estimate the number of creatures at a dozen or more, but their impossibly long stride defies easy explanation.

The phase spiders use their teleport speed to move on the run, touching down only every 30 feet.

When the characters follow the spiders' trail to a dry streambed that leads to the splintered spring, read:

A twisting course cuts its way through wild grass and scrub trees rustling in the wind. This was a streambed once, but no trace of water runs between its overgrown banks now. Its course breaks slowly to the southwest, and the tracks continue along it.

An hour's walk brings the characters within sight of the splintered spring. When they arrive, read:

The breeze from ahead carries the faint scent of water. Spikes of upthrust rock surround the streambed on all sides, providing cover as you advance to within sight of a hissing haze of mist. A powerful underground spring bursts from the surface of the ground, surrounded by shards of splintered stone that stand like a crown around it. The spring which once fed the stream has been forcefully redirected into a small lake. The lake is dotted by islets of rock rising just a few feet above the surface. The tracks of the spiders point straight toward the closest of these islets before disappearing.

The rocky islets form a maze across the surface of the lake, each 15 to 20 feet across and 20 to 30 feet apart. The phase spiders teleport from rock to rock when they cross the lake. The heroes are free to explore the shores of the lake. They can judge its size as approximately 500 feet in diameter.

The fractured network of chasms that have filled to become the lake was caused by a fragment of the meteor tearing through this area, as was the upheaval that caused the spring to be rerouted. If the characters circumnavigate the lake completely, they notice that although the spring flows into it at a fast rate, there is no sign of where it flows out again. Moreover, the center of the lake remains shrouded in mist at all times.

The characters need to cross the lake to pursue the spiders. Swimming is an option, but adventurers who circumnavigate the lake find a crudely built but sturdy raft with six poorly carved paddles on the far shore. The foulspawn use this and a matching raft currently at the center of the lake to cross the water.

As the characters approach the center of the lake, go to Encounter S1.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the threat of the foulspawn is ended, the characters can investigate the black lake cavern to discover its secrets.

At the farthest corner of the ledge, a foul nest of muck and bones is the dolgaunt monk's lair. The same unearthly sigils seen in the cavern above cover the walls here, scribed in filth and dried blood. From beneath a pile of cracked and well-gnawed bones comes the gleam of gold.

The symbols here have the same effect on a character that studies them as those in encounter S2. They have meaning only to the aberrant minds of the foulspawn, but anyone who looks at them for more than a few seconds feels noticeably uneasy. A character who insists on studying them or trying to read the symbols takes a -2 penalty to Will which lasts until the party takes an extended rest.

In addition to treasure parcel C, the dolgaunt has cast aside the gear of the creatures whose magic it has stolen, including a fragment of an adventurer's map. The map shows part of a series of caverns and is annotated with cramped handwriting.

This cryptic introduction to a wider foulspawn cult worshipping the power at the heart of the Chaos Scar connects to upcoming adventures.

(FRAGMENT)

(illegible)

the foulspawn's cults. They worship the power that lingers in the heart of the Chaos Scar, and

(illegible)

their madness is increased. The unholy site they seek to build

(illegible)

Those they seize are transformed

(illegible)

voices of the damned and the dead. I seek the monk cast out from the enclave of Night's Heart, the one they call master of spiders. He is greedy for magic, they say, hoping to buy his way back to the cult's good graces. His plots are the first step"

(fragment ends)

SI. SERPENT STRIKE

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

SETUP

- 2 dolgaunt dark-hailers (D)
- 2 blackwater serpents (S)
- 1 water dervish

The first half of the characters' passage across the lake is uneventful. **When they cross, read:**

The wind scatters waves through the narrow channels between rubble-strewn islets but does nothing to clear the roiling mist at the center of the lake. No sign of the bottom can be seen, though dark schools of fish dart past occasionally. As you approach the mist, a distant hissing can be heard.

When the characters reach the halfway point represented by the tactical map, read:

Suddenly a keening wail rises from ahead. The dark shapes of two enormous water serpents race out into the channel beyond a distant islet, a pair of foul and howling humanoids riding them. The skin has been flensed from their glistening bodies. Their sightless eyes and the tentacles writhing from their backs and shoulders seem to seek for you.

It takes 2 rounds from the time the serpents and their dolgaunt riders appear until they reach the top of the tactical map. The party has time to put in the raft at one of the rocky islets if they do not wish to fight from the raft or on the water.

The water dervish is not allied with the foulspawn, but it has learned to fear their power and to feed on their leavings. It lurks unseen beneath the water. It attacks in the fourth round of combat.

2 Dolgaunt Dark-Hailers (D)		Level 3 Artillery
Medium aberrant humanoid		XP 150 each
Initiative +5		Senses Perception +2; blindsight 20
HP 34; Bloodied 17		
AC 17; Fortitude 15, Reflex 17, Will 14		
Speed 6		
☹ Foul Lash (standard; at-will)		
Ranged 10; +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage and the target is slowed until the end of the dolgaunt's next turn.		
☹ Dark Hail (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic		
Ranged 10; targets a slowed creature; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.		
☹ Flensing Hail (standard; recharge ☹ ☹)		
Area burst 1 within 20; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is slowed (save ends both).		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 18 (+5)	Wis 13 (+2)
Con 10 (+1)	Int 12 (+2)	Cha 8 (+0)

2 Blackwater Serpents (S)		Level 3 Brute
Large natural beast (aquatic, mount)		XP 150 each
Initiative +3		Senses Perception +2
HP 53; Bloodied 26		
AC 15; Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 14		
Speed 5, swim 10		
☹ Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison		
Melee 2; +8 vs. AC; 2d8 damage, and the serpent makes a secondary attack against the same target.		
Secondary Attack: +6 vs. Fortitude; 2d4 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).		
☹ Tail Slap (immediate reaction, when the serpent is hit by an attack; encounter)		
Melee 2; +8 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.		
Waterborn		
While in water, the serpent gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against creatures without a swim speed.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Str 17 (+4)	Dex 14 (+3)	Wis 13 (+2)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 9 (+0)

Water Dervish		Level 3 Skirmisher
Small elemental magical beast (air, earth)		XP 150
Initiative +7		Senses Perception +1
HP 46; Bloodied 23		
AC 17; Fortitude 14, Reflex 16, Will 14		
Immune disease, poison		
Speed 8		
☹ Waterspout (standard; at-will)		
Melee 1; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 damage.		
☹ Fury of the Storm (move; recharge ☹ ☹)		
The water dervish shifts 5 squares and attacks each enemy it moves adjacent to during the movement: +8 vs. Fortitude, and the dervish slides the target 2 squares and knocks it prone. A creature in the water when it is knocked prone takes 10 damage instead.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial	
Skills Stealth +10		
Str 10 (+1)	Dex 18 (+5)	Wis 10 (+1)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 5 (-2)	Cha 14 (+3)

TACTICS

The first round after the dolgaunts appear, they are 30 squares away from the edge of the tactical map, too far to use their attacks. In round 2, the dolgaunts are 10 squares away and use *flensing hail* against any heroes on the top half of the tactical map. The characters can return fire in either round. All creatures attacking at this distance take a -2 penalty to attack rolls for the cover of the islets.

Once the dolgaunts appear on the tactical map, they and the serpents break for the characters. The blackwater serpents swim alongside adventurers on the raft, on an islet, or in the water, making charge attacks with reach. A dolgaunt makes *foul lash* or *dark hail* attacks at the same time, sending a horrid shower of its own flensed flesh against the target. It uses *flensing hail* each time that power recharges. The dolgaunts stay on the serpents to remain safely out of melee.

The water dervish enters combat 2 rounds after the other combatants appear on the tactical map. It rises from the water in the midst of the characters to make a *fury of the storm* attack, then uses *waterspout* while *fury* recharges. It slides foes off an islet or the raft whenever it can, leaving them for the serpents.

The dolgaunts and the serpents fight until destroyed. The water dervish flees if reduced to 10 hit points or fewer.

INTO THE MIST

Once the guardian creatures are disposed of, the characters can continue on into the mist. **At that point, read:**

The hissing sound grows louder; the mist wraps around you as you approach. Visibility is cut to nothing and a damp gloom settles across the scene. Suddenly, a wall of black rock looms ahead, curving away to vanish into the mist to the left and right.

There is no shore here, but the heroes can easily lash the raft to the 15-foot-high rock wall. The wall can be climbed with a DC 7 Athletics check, revealing a remarkable sight beyond.

When the heroes reach the top of the rocks, read:

Even through the mist, you can see that the sheer rock wall encloses the center of the lake in a rough circle. This is no island but a crater approximately 50 feet across. You stand on the rim, which extends only 5 feet before plunging down again. A quarter of the way along the crater's edge, a deep gash in the rock allows the water of the lake to pour over in a misty torrent, then disappear into a dark rift below.

This waterfall is the outflow that balances the splintered spring. Characters who spend any time exploring the area can see clear signs where the spiders alighted along the rim of the crater, then climbed down alongside the hissing falls. If the characters circumnavigate the entire crater wall, they find another raft lashed to the rock on the far side.

The crater wall is rough and easily climbable (Athletics DC 9), but the rift is dark beyond 20 feet down. The adventurers see no sign of other creatures as they descend.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Bright during daytime; dark at night.

Raft: The characters' raft is 3 squares on a side and moves at a rate of 1 square per round per character paddling. The raft is sturdy enough that it cannot be attacked. It floats in place if no one is paddling it.

Deep Water: The lake is approximately 30 feet deep. Creatures in deep water must use Athletics skill to move (DC 10; move at half speed; *Player's Handbook* page 183). Creatures in deep water gain cover except against attacks from submerged enemies. Fighting in the water imposes a -2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows, and powers that have the fire keyword take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

A creature in the water can move onto a rocky islet or onto the raft by spending 1 extra square of movement.

Rocky Islet: The small islets that break the surface of the water are the tops of sheer pinnacles of rock plunging straight down. The islets are spread across the entire surface of the lake, each 15 to 20 feet across and 20 to 30 feet apart. (The phase spiders teleport from rock to rock when they cross the lake.)

The rubble-strewn surface of an islet is difficult terrain. A creature that moves off the islet goes into the deep water.



S2. THE FOUL MIRE

Encounter Level 4 (XP 950)

SETUP

- 1 **dolgarr berserker** (B)
- 3 **dolgrim warriors** (W)
- 1 **mud lasher** (M)

The characters descend 60 feet into a rough chasm punched into the earth by a fragment of the great meteor. **As they climb down, read:**

The chasm walls narrow as they slope slowly inward. Damp mist rises from the the waterfall crashing past. Rough handholds make the climbing easy despite the damp stone. A broad cavern opens up below; the falling water has worn a wide stream through it. Patches of glowing fungi dot the walls and give rise to a pungent scent of decay.

There is no illumination in the shaft above, and any light carried by the party alerts the creatures here. The dolgarr berserker is anxious to fight, so it continually peers out from its hiding place. It can be spotted with a DC 13 Perception check. The dolgrim keep much better hidden. If the characters are not carrying illumination and they pause to let their sight adjust to the dim light, they spot the dolgrim with a DC 18 Perception check. If they carry lights or rush into the gloom, the Perception DC is 23.

If the characters see the dolgrim, read:

A grotesque creature lurks in the shadows of the cavern below. Its face is split by two gaping maws that slaver soundlessly, and four arms extend from its squat torso. Its body is slathered in black mud that all but hides it in the shadows.

When the characters descend to the cavern floor, read:

Blackened scrub trees clutch at the rocky walls and floor of the cavern, inexplicably growing despite the lack of light. A foul mire of rotting muck spreads in patches across the floor. The wide stream surges through it, then plunges over the edge of a sinkhole at the center of the cavern.

The heroes start in any squares along the start area marked on the map. Any creatures that the characters did not spot will attack with surprise. The foulspawn have a rough alliance with the mud lasher that inhabited this cavern before they arrived.

TACTICS

If the creatures here have surprise, the dolgarr charges the nearest adventurer. The mud lasher uses *mud ball* while the dolgrims make crossbow attacks from behind cover.

Once combat begins in earnest, the dolgarr berserker wades into combat, targeting heavily armored foes with both of its *foe-hurler* attacks. While that power recharges, it makes *club* or *meaty fist* attacks against lightly armored foes.

The dolgrim warriors snipe with their crossbows from behind cover for as long as possible, making *double action* attacks and trying to force foes through foul muck to reach them.

The mud lasher uses its *drowning slam* early, then alternates its *slam* against nearby foes with *mud ball* attacks against characters targeting it from range.

All these creatures fight until destroyed. When either dolgrim is bloodied, it begins shrieking a warning that will be heard by the dolgaunt monk in the cavern below.

Dolgarr Berserker (B)		Level 6 Brute
Large aberrant humanoid		XP 250
Initiative +5	Senses Perception +6; low-light vision	
HP 86; Bloodied 43		
AC 18; Fortitude 19, Reflex 16, Will 17		
Immune fear		
Speed 6		
⬇ Club (standard; at-will) ⬆ Weapon		
+9 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.		
⬇ Meaty Fist (standard; at-will)		
Melee 2; +7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage.		
⬇ Foe-Hurler (standard; recharge [1/1])		
Melee 2; +8 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the dolgarr berserker pushes the target 3 squares and knocks it prone; the berserker slams the target to the ground and then throws the target at another creature, making a secondary attack against an enemy adjacent to the primary target after the push.		
<i>Secondary Attack:</i> +7 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 5 damage.		
⬇ Berserk Rage (free, when first bloodied, encounter)		
The dolgarr berserker gains 5 temporary hit points and makes a <i>club</i> attack and a <i>meaty fist</i> attack.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Deep Speech, Goblin	
Str 20 (+8)	Dex 14 (+5)	Wis 16 (+6)
Con 16 (+6)	Int 7 (+1)	Cha 9 (+2)
Equipment club		

DEVELOPMENT

When combat is done, the characters have a chance to investigate the cavern.

On the far side of the cavern, a wide shelf of stone holds a rough camp. A foul reek hangs over the area. Horrid nests of mud and branches mark the sleeping areas of a dozen creatures. The walls are scribed with horrific symbols in dried blood, and shattered chips of bone are set into the rock like mosaic tiles. A half-dozen humanoid bodies lie nearby, all partially eaten.

The foulspawn in the adventure represent half of the dolgaunt monk's followers. The others are scouring the countryside for food and supplies (it was their raft the heroes borrowed).

The symbols here have meaning only to the aberrant minds of the foulspawn. Anyone looking at them for more than a few seconds feels noticeably uneasy. A character who insists on making a Perception or Insight check in an attempt to decipher the symbols takes a -2 penalty to Will during the next encounter.

The bodies are of unfortunate humanoids slain and eaten by the foulspawn. If you used adventure hook 3, the characters can identify Ulrika's body by the amulet still around her neck.

The only way down from this cavern is the sinkhole into which the stream plunges. See "Features of the Area" and the next encounter for more information.

Mud Lasher (M)		Level 4 Brute	
Medium elemental magical beast (earth, water)		XP 175	
Initiative +4	Senses Perception +9; low-light vision		
HP 63; Bloodied 31			
AC 16; Fortitude 17, Reflex 15, Will 15			
Immune disease, poison			
Speed 5			
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)			
+7 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.			
↓ Drowning Slam (standard; encounter)			
+5 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). Miss: Half damage.			
↘ Mud Ball (standard; at-will)			
Ranged 10; +5 vs. Reflex; the target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).			
Amorphous Body (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; encounter)			
The mud lasher shifts 3 squares.			
Relentless Assault			
A mud lasher gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against slowed or immobilized creatures.			
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial		
Skills Stealth +9			
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 15 (+4)	Wis 15 (+4)	
Con 13 (+3)	Int 8 (+1)	Cha 11 (+2)	

3 Dolgrim Warriors (W)		Level 4 Skirmisher	
Small aberrant humanoid		XP 175 each	
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +3; low-light vision		
HP 53; Bloodied 26			
AC 18; Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 16			
Vulnerable 5 psychic			
Saving Throws +2 against charm and fear effects			
Speed 6			
⊕ Club (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon			
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.			
⊗ Crossbow (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon			
Ranged 15/30; +8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage.			
Double Actions			
At the start of combat, the dolgrim warrior makes two initiative checks. Each check corresponds to one of the warrior's brains. The warrior takes a full turn on both initiative counts. Its ability to take an immediate action refreshes on each turn.			
Dolgrim Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)			
The dolgrim warrior shifts 1 square.			
Combat Advantage			
A dolgrim warrior deals 1d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Deep Speech, Goblin		
Str 17 (+5)	Dex 15 (+4)	Wis 13 (+3)	
Con 13 (+3)	Int 9 (+1)	Cha 9 (+1)	
Equipment light shield, club, crossbow and 20 bolts			

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Phosphorescent fungus sheds dim light throughout the area.

Ceiling: 20 feet high, opening to a chasm that rises 60 feet to the crater above.

Black Trees: Stunted black trees draw on the aberrant energy of this cavern to grow. A tree provides cover. It takes a DC 5 Acrobatics or Athletics check to move through a square containing a black tree; failure indicates the moving creature stops moving in the last square before entering the tree's space. A creature that starts its turn adjacent to a black tree is slowed until the end of its turn.

Foul Muck: Heavy black muck steeped in aberrant energy covers the floor of the cavern and is difficult terrain. Any creature not aberrant or elemental that enters an area of muck or starts its turn there is subject to an attack: +8 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to defenses until the end of its next turn.

Rough Pillar: Spires of rock thrust up 10 feet from the cavern floor. A pillar provides cover and is blocking terrain. A pillar can be climbed with a DC 10 Athletics check.

Ledges: These ledges stand the indicated height above the cavern floor. Climbing up to a ledge takes a DC 10 Athletics check.

Stream: The water coursing down from above forms a fast-flowing 3-foot-deep stream through the muddy cavern. The stream is difficult terrain. A creature that enters the stream or starts its turn there must make a DC 17 Athletics check or be knocked prone. A creature knocked prone in the stream slides 4 squares toward the sinkhole. A prone creature must stand to move out of the stream.

Sinkhole: The center of the cavern is a rough sinkhole 30 feet in diameter, through which the stream falls. A creature that moves into the sinkhole gets a saving throw to catch the edge. On a failed save, the creature falls 40 feet to the black lake in the cavern below. Because the churning water of the stream cushions the fall, the character takes half damage from the fall. See the next encounter for details of the black lake.



S3. THE BLACK LAKE

Encounter Level 6 (XP 1,255-1,430)

SETUP

- 1 dolgaunt monk (D)
- 3 young phase spiders (S)
- 10 phase spider hatchlings (H)

This encounter can play out in different ways, depending on how the characters enter the area. Read through the entire encounter to familiarize yourself with the setup of the green slimes and the tactics of the creatures in the cavern below. It is very likely that some adventurers will end up fighting alone in the cavern or the black lake while their allies are still trying to descend through the sinkhole.

THE SINKHOLE

Unlike the descent to the cavern above, the climb down the sinkhole to the black lake is a dangerous one. Moreover, the phase spiders and their dolgaunt master have set up this area as a deadly gauntlet for would-be intruders.

Where the stream spills down from the foul mire, mist shrouds the darkness below. Unlike the rough stone of the shaft above, the wet walls of the sinkhole offer only minimal handholds. However, great sheets of webbing cling to those walls, glistening with moisture but offering an easy means of descent.

Anyone who inspects the chasm from above recognizes that the webs are strong enough to hold a climbing character. There is no other sign of immediate danger (if one discounts the giant spider webs)—the green slimes cannot be seen from the top of the sinkhole.

Characters must make Athletics checks to climb down the 30-foot sinkhole to the mouth of the cavern below, then to climb down the final 20 feet to the cavern floor by way of webs or rope. In addition to the rigors of the climb, dozens of deadly green slimes cling to the sinkhole walls, where they are concealed by webs. A character who does not spot a slime is subject to its attack as it breaks free of its web shroud.

Each time a character makes a successful Athletics check to move one-half its speed down the sinkhole, have the player make a Perception check to notice the closest slime. On a successful check, the character can avoid the slime, which then stays dormant. On a failed check, the slime attacks. The Perception and Athletics DCs depend on a hero's method of climbing.

Climbing Method	Athletics DC	Perception DC
Rope	10	5
No rope, using webs	5	15
No rope, avoiding webs	15	10

Use a battle grid to represent the vertical cavern wall for any green slime encounters. Do not let the players know that there is a chance for combat during their descent until a green slime actually attacks.

The XP figures given for this encounter assume that the characters trigger only one full green slime combat. Adjust the XP as appropriate, but the characters should receive experience only for green slimes that are fought and destroyed. Simply escaping from or avoiding a slime nets no XP.

Green Slime	Level 4 Lurker	
Medium natural beast (blind, ooze)	XP 175	
Initiative +9	Senses Perception +2; blindsight 10, tremorsense 10	
HP 47; Bloodied 23		
AC 20; Fortitude 23, Reflex 17, Will 20		
Immune gaze; Resist 5 acid; Vulnerability 5 fire, 5 radiant		
Speed 4, climb 4		
⊕ Engulf (standard; at-will) ♦ Acid		
+7 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and the target is engulfed (save ends). While engulfed, the target takes ongoing 5 acid damage and is restrained. While a target is engulfed, attacks that target the green slime deal half damage to the slime and half damage to the engulfed creature. While it has a creature engulfed, the slime can make attacks only against the engulfed creature.		
Rapid Dissolution		
A green slime's attacks deal 1d6 extra acid damage to a creature that is taking ongoing acid damage.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Skills Stealth +11		
Str 11 (+2)	Dex 16 (+5)	Wis 11 (+2)
Con 17 (+5)	Int 3 (-2)	Cha 1 (-3)

TACTICS

The green slime attempts to *engulf* its victim to prevent it from slipping away. A character not engulfed can make Athletics checks to flee by climbing, but the slime's climb speed gives an adventurer little chance of escaping. If a character fights while climbing, see the rules in the *Player's Handbook* (page 182).

The green slimes fight only along the sinkhole walls. They do not descend into the cavern.

FALLING OR JUMPING

A character that falls because of a failed Athletics check drops 50 feet minus the distance he or she already descended. The character lands in the fall area indicated on the tactical map. The roiling water cushions the impact so that a fall deals half damage.

A character that intentionally jumps into the black lake (most likely in an attempt to escape or avoid the green slime) also takes half damage from the fall. The character can attempt an Acrobatics check to reduce the damage normally, or can do the same thing with Athletics instead (by clutching at and catching nearby web strands to slow their fall).

THE BLACK LAKE

When the characters reach the bottom of the sinkhole with a light source, read:

A foaming lake fills a huge cavern below the sinkhole. A wide stone ledge spreads along its near side. Heavy sheets of webbing run from one side of the ledge to the other, connected by pillars thrust up from the black water.

Once below the ceiling (20 feet above the water surface), a character can climb along the webs to drop harmlessly into any square on the tactical map. The spiders and the dolgaunt then advance out of the darkness toward the positions indicated.

A character who falls down the sinkhole, either by failing an Athletics check in this encounter or by being swept down the stream in the previous encounter, ends up in a random square in the tactical map's fall area.

When the first character drops or steps onto dry ground in the cavern, read:

From the darkness along the edges of the cavern comes sudden movement. Nearly a dozen pale, human-sized spiders swarm along the walls and across the floor, suddenly disappearing, then reappearing as they teleport into attack positions. They are followed by three even larger specimens clambering along the walls under the direction of a humanoid in black robes. The creature appears similar in form to those you fought on the surface of the lake. Neither the dolgaunt nor the spiders can attack a character in the lake, but the spiders advance along the shore and onto the webs in an attempt to keep the character from leaving the water. Remember that there is no illumination in this cavern; characters without a light source may hear the spiders but won't be able to see them.

TACTICS

The dolgaunt monk trusts its spider servants to take care of the intruders and does not enter combat until a character moves into melee range or one of the young phase spiders is slain. Once in combat, the dolgaunt makes *tentacle* attacks in an attempt to grab and restrain two adventurers, then attacks a third with its deadly *fists*. It targets lightly armored characters when it can.

The young phase spiders flank with each other or with hatchlings, using *web tangle* against characters lurking at the edge of the fray. Once a foe is immobilized, a young phase spider seeks another target.

The hatchlings spread out to avoid area attacks but flank with each other and the young phase spiders. If a hero becomes immobilized from a young phase spider's bite, the closest hatchlings swarm that target in the hope of a quick kill.

The phase spiders use their *ethereal repulsion* to teleport characters into the water if possible.

All the creatures here fight until destroyed.

DEVELOPMENT

Once combat is done, the characters can investigate the dolgaunt's lair to discover its secrets. See "Concluding the Adventure."

Dolgaunt Monk (D) **Level 8 Controller**
 Medium aberrant humanoid (blind) XP 350

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7; blindsight 20
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43

AC 22; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20

Speed 8

 ⊕ **Tentacle** (standard; at-will)

 Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 2d4 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed. The dolgaunt monk can't grab more than two creatures at once; see also *clutch of death*.

 ⊕ **Fist** (standard; at-will)

+13 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.

 † **Inexorable Drag** (minor; at-will)

Targets a creature grabbed by the dolgaunt monk; +12 vs. Fortitude; the monk slides the target 2 squares.

Clutch of Death

A dolgaunt monk can grab with up to two tentacles at a time. While grabbing an enemy, it can act normally, but it can't use that tentacle for another attack. Enemies can attack the tentacle. An attack that hits the tentacle doesn't harm the dolgaunt monk, but it causes the tentacle to release the grab. The tentacle's defenses are the same as those of the dolgaunt monk.

Vitality Leech ◆ **Necrotic**

A target that begins its turn grabbed by the dolgaunt monk takes 10 necrotic damage, and the dolgaunt monk gains 10 temporary hit points.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, Goblin

Skills Acrobatics +14, Stealth +14

Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+7)

Con 14 (+6) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+5)

3 Young Phase Spiders (S) **Level 3 Soldier**
 Large fey beast (spider) XP 175 each

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +3; tremorsense 10
HP 45; **Bloodied** 22

AC 19; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14

Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb), teleport 6

 ⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Poison**

 +7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw*: The target is stunned instead of slowed (save ends).

 † **Web Tangle** (standard; at-will)

Ranged 5; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 damage and the spider pulls the target up to 4 squares to a square adjacent to the spider and the target is immobilized (save ends).

 † **Ethereal Repulsion** (immediate interrupt, when an enemy enters a square adjacent to the phase spider; at-will) ◆

Teleportation

Targets the triggering enemy; +6 vs. Will; the spider teleports the target 2 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Skills Stealth +9

Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)

Con 13 (+2) **Int** 5 (-2) **Cha** 9 (+0)

10 Phase Spider Hatchlings (H) **Level 3 Brute Minion**
 Medium fey beast (spider) XP 38 each

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +2; tremorsense 5
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

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

Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb), teleport 6

 ⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Poison**

+8 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

 † **Ethereal Repulsion** (immediate interrupt, when an enemy moves adjacent to the phase spider; at-will) ◆ **Teleportation**

Targets the triggering enemy; +6 vs. Will; the spider teleports the target 1 square.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+2)

Con 12 (+2) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 7 (-1)

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Dark.

Ceiling: 20 feet high; the sinkhole rises 30 feet beyond that.

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A character who runs, charges, or is forced to move through rubble must make a DC 15 Acrobatics check or fall prone at the end of that movement.

Web Bridges: Heavy webs crisscross the cavern, creating bridges 5 feet above the black lake. The webs undulate wildly when anything moves across them. A creature without a climb speed moving along a web bridge must make a DC 17 Acrobatics check or fall into the water.

The web bridges sag between their anchor points. With a DC 7 Athletics check, a character can climb from the water to a web bridge at a climb point marked (by an "X") on the tactical map.

The Black Lake: The flow from above fills this slowly draining chasm. The water here is 5 feet below the adjacent shoreline and 50 feet deep. Creatures in deep water must use the Athletics skill to move (*Player's Handbook* page 183). Creatures in deep water gain cover. Fighting in the water imposes a -2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows, and powers that have the fire keyword take a -2 penalty to attack rolls. The spiders and the dolgaunt monk avoid the water if at all possible.

A creature in the water can move onto the shore by spending 2 extra squares of movement and making a DC 12 Athletics check.

The fragment of the great meteor that created the sinkhole lies at the bottom of the black lake, and its aberrant energy is what drew the foulspawn to this place. Any nonaberrant creature that enters the water or starts its turn there is subject to an attack: +6 vs. Will; 2d6 damage and the target is slowed.

Fall Area: This area marks where an adventurer falling down the sinkhole lands in the water. The turbulence of the stream pouring down from above makes this area difficult terrain.

Sinkhole Perimeter: This marks the boundary of the mouth of the sinkhole in the cavern ceiling.

Stone Pillars: Pillars of rough stone rise 5 feet up above the surface of the water. A slick pillar can be climbed with a DC 17 Athletics check.

RETURNING TO THE SPLINTERED SPRING

If the heroes were adequately challenged by this final encounter, let them climb cautiously back up the sinkhole to avoid the green slimes. If this encounter was easy for the characters, let them make Athletics and Perception checks to ascend once more.

About the Author

Scott Fitzgerald Gray (9th-level layabout, vindictive neutral) started gaming in high school and has worked as a writer and editor much of the time since then. After belatedly realizing he could combine both vocations in 2004, he's been making up for lost time as a freelance RPG editor and designer, primarily for Wizards of the Coast. He lives in the Canadian hinterland with a schoolteacher, two daughters, and a large number of animal companions.





HEROIC

1-10

THE DEN OF DREUS

AN HSI: *THE SLAYING STONE* SIDE TREK

By Logan Bonner

illustration by Ryan Pancoast

The conclusion of *HS1: The Slaying Stone* suggests possible future adventures the heroes might undertake. This side trek lets characters of around 2nd level who completed the quest to find and destroy the *slaying stone* follow up by pursuing Dreus Matrand. This arcane researcher sent the Severed Eye orcs to find the *stone* so she could study it in order to create deadly arcane artifacts.

Dreus's small stronghold lies underground. Most of the rooms hold esoteric compounds and magical garbage that she's hoarded over the years. She's set up magical defenses at the hidden entrance (Encounter 1), prepared a trapped hallway with elemental portals (Encounter 2), and hidden all her most important items in her sanctum (Encounter 3).

BACKGROUND

While a student in the arcane academy of Pollardus, Dreus grew curious about the darkest, most powerful forms of magic. While she studied magical artifice, she wrote detailed notes about anything dangerous—anything that could let her rule using fear—with the intent of collecting such relics at a later date. After her mentor became suspicious of her attempts to access forbidden books, she stole the tomes she wanted and snuck away from the academy.

In the few years since, Dreus raided small treasure vaults for the relics she required, or bartered for them with other plunderers. She made a deal with the Severed Eye orcs, who searched out a few other items before she entrusted them with the task of finding the last *slaying stone*. One of Dreus's expeditions led her to an abandoned underground compound of mysterious origin that brimmed with planar magic.

Finally discovering that one last *slaying stone* existed gave Dreus hope that her experiments—so far fruitless—could succeed if she obtained it. Now she waits for the Severed Eye orcs to return it. If the characters wait a while after they complete *HS1* before they seek out Dreus, or if they let any Severed Eye orcs escape, she might be better prepared for their arrival.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The hooks described here give characters means and reasons to track down Dreus. If more than one of these work for your campaign, give the heroes XP for just one major quest. Convert any others to minor quests. To cover additional minor quests the characters need, think about connecting Dreus's actions to their other goals. For instance, maybe Dreus hired hobgoblins who have also been menacing a character's home town. That adventurer could get a minor quest to find the location of their leader's base in Dreus's records.

HOOK: TREONA'S PLEA

If the characters returned the *slaying stone* to Treona at the end of *HS1*, she tells them that Dreus is still a threat. (She might have known about Dreus from the beginning or learned about her because the characters found out she hired the Severed Eyes, depending on how you structured *HS1*.) She begs them to follow up on the initial quest by seeking out Dreus and stopping her mad quest for the most dangerous of forbidden relics.

Quest XP: 625 (major quest) if the heroes defeat Dreus or sabotage her operations.

PREPARING FOR THE SIDE TREK

If you're looking at this adventure before you've run *HS1: The Slaying Stone*, you have time to drop more information and hooks about Dreus into that adventure. The "Treona vs. Dreus" theme described on page 7 of that adventure is a good place to start.

Use the Severed Eye orcs' behavior to show that Dreus is a threat. These tough orc warriors might still dread what could happen if they have to face their patron after failing at their task. The characters can interrogate the orcs for more information about Dreus's location and defenses.

SKIPPING THE SLAYING STONE

Maybe you started your heroes with an adventure other than *HS1: The Slaying Stone*, but you still want to use this side trek as a short interlude before the next adventure. You can link Dreus to a faction or item within your previous adventure. Her quest for deadly arcane objects leads her to employ the services of many groups.

Dreus's experiments could be dangerous, especially since she has opened portals to the Elemental Chaos and Astral Sea. These experiments could have set elementals or devils loose on nearby settlements, causing them to ask the characters for aid.

HOOK: THE ORCISH CONNECTION

After defeating the Severed Eye orcs, the characters retrieve a *sending stone* from them. Dreus possesses the other stone from the pair. Depending on how sly they are, the characters might catch snippets of Dreus's plans and figure out her location by listening to the messages she sends through the stone. Or they could talk to her directly, either taunting her or posing as mercenaries who want to work for her.

Quest XP: 625 (major quest) if the adventurers use the *sending stone* to track down Dreus and defeat her or otherwise turn the situation to their advantage.

HOOK: THE DRAGON'S IRE

Tyristys, the brass dragon described on page 5 of *HS1* and encountered on page 23, takes umbrage at someone sending the boorish, aggressive orcs to intrude on her territory. Though Tyristys might not like the characters much, she could make an agreement with them: Kill Dreus to earn the dragon's grudging respect. She could strike this deal as part of the skill challenge or later on. Being a dragon, she might require a grisly trophy, like Dreus's meddling hands on a plate.

Quest XP: 625 (major quest) if the characters fulfill Tyristys's spiteful desires.

APPROACHING THE COMPLEX

A trapdoor concealed on the leeward side of a grassy hill leads to a descending spiral staircase. The heroes can find the location fairly simply: It radiates strong magic that normal people wouldn't notice but trained adventurers easily sniff out. Once they enter, the characters find themselves in Dreus's foyer (Encounter 1), where she can greet expected guests but keep them safely on the other side of a magically locked door.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The rooms are littered with magic items, tomes, and curios from Dreus's discoveries. She spent much of her material wealth when she hired the Severed Eyes and other groups to seek out more items for her. (You could create a hidden treasure hoard for her as an additional side quest for the adventurers).

Dreus works only for herself, but she does know many of the other evil rulers in the nearby area. She can provide information about them and quickly gives up whatever she knows if the characters swear to spare her life. She's no fool, though: Make an Insight check for her if a character swears but plans to kill her anyway.

Most of Dreus's power comes from the items she collects, and she needs an implement to channel her magic properly. This makes it easy to imprison her if the heroes choose to keep her alive.

Dreus's death (but not mere defeat) releases the devils from encounter D1 if they haven't yet been freed. If the characters move quickly out of the sanctum, they encounter the devils before they've left the complex. Even if the devils do escape, the characters might run into them later as they wreak havoc in nearby areas. Because Dreus has made some deals with minor devils, she knows a bit about the rules of the inhabitants of the Nine Hells. This information might not matter much now, but it could be useful in an adventure at a higher level.

DI: DEVILS AT THE DOORWAY

Encounter Level 2 (740 XP)

SETUP

2 imps (I)

5 infernal armor animuses (A)

At the beginning of this encounter, the imps fly about within a magic circle, unable to escape. Likewise, the suits of armor are inert, but souls trapped alongside the imps can animate them. The characters need to tackle a skill challenge to open the heavy stone doors. Any failure releases the devils and begins a combat encounter (see the “Special” section of the challenge).

When the heroes enter the room, read:

As you reach the bottom of the spiral staircase, you see a wide stone door across the room, flanked by two stone braziers. Several suits of armor rest on posts throughout the room, and a magic circle inscribed on the ground glows faintly. Two tiny, red creatures fly about within the magic circle. Though they have roughly human features, their long claws and stinger-tipped tails give them a sinister appearance.

After the imps see the characters, read:

One of the imps looks you up and down. “Not one of Dreus’s regulars, are you?” The other continues, “Don’t belong, no.” Looking at the door in tandem, they say, “Door’s trapped and locked by magic. Be glad to help you get through . . . for a consideration.”

THE SANCTUM’S DOOR

This skill challenge allows the characters to open the door to the heart of Dreus’s lair. Any failures activate her defenses, bringing her bound devils out to fight the heroes. An adventurer attempting to work directly with the door (making a primary skill check) must be adjacent to the door, but those using secondary skills can be farther away.

Level: 2 (XP 250)

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, Thievery.

Arcana (DC 15): The character reverse engineers the sigils that bind the door shut, discovering command words to weaken the seal.

Dungeoneering (DC 10): The character identifies weaknesses in the walls around the door. By manipulating these, the hero can sever some of the runes that protect the door.

Thievery (DC 10): Examining the structure around the door, the character realizes that certain stones can come loose to disable trapped parts of the seal. In addition to successes, each successful Thievery check cumulatively reduces the fire damage done by the flame screen by 2.

Secondary Skills: Bluff, History, Perception.

Bluff (DC 15): A character tricks the imps into giving some advice that will help unlock the door. Pick a primary skill and tell the players. If the next check they make uses that skill, it gets a +5 bonus.

History (DC 15): The adventurer remembers tales of this underground complex from before Dreus took up residence. She modified it from the original design, but the next Dungeoneering check gets a +2 bonus.

Perception (DC 10): The character sees scorch marks along the ground between the braziers, which indicate that a screen of fire can be conjured between them.

Special: The first time a character fails a skill check as a part of this challenge, it activates Dreus’s countermeasures. The magic circle drops, releasing the imps and souls trapped within it. The imps attack and the trapped souls fly into the suits of armor nearby to turn them into infernal armor animuses. Furthermore, the two flaming stone braziers create a screen of flames between them. Any creature within the squares of flame takes 2d10 fire damage and is pushed 1 square away from the door. This conjuration doesn’t block movement but deals 10 fire damage to any creature that moves through it or ends its turn within it.

Success: If the adventurers earn 6 successes, the door opens. The devils remain free and must be dealt with if they were released, but the screen of fire dissipates.

Failure: If the heroes obtain three failures, they’ll be stuck for a while. They can try to force the doors open with a nearly-impossible Strength check (DC 25), wait for some of Dreus’s flunkies to return with magic items, wait for Dreus to come out for supplies, or find a way to smoke her out (perhaps literally).

TACTICS

If the adventurers release the devils through a failure, the imps harry the same creature repeatedly (usually a leader). They rely on the animuses to restore their hit points and make their attacks more potent. The animuses defend the imps as best they can.

Because the imps are Tiny, they need to fly into the characters' squares in order to attack. Tiny creatures are allowed to enter and stay in enemy creatures' spaces (*Player's Handbook*, page 282). Normally, entering an enemy's space triggers an opportunity attack, but invisible creatures don't trigger opportunity actions. That's why the imps always become invisible before they attack. (They get combat advantage that way, too.)

If the fight looks dire (especially if at least one imp is defeated), any imps that remain turn invisible and fly off in order to escape. If they do so, the animuses focus on preventing the heroes from pursuing the imps. The animuses try to escape only if it's easy for them to do so.

2 Imps (I)		Level 3 Lurker
Tiny immortal humanoid		XP 150 each
Initiative +8 Senses Perception +8; darkvision		
HP 40; Bloodied 20		
AC 17; Fortitude 15; Reflex 15; Will 15		
Resist 15 fire		
Speed 4, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)		
Melee 0; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage.		
↓ Tail Sting (standard; encounter; recharges when the imp uses vanish) ◆ Poison		
Melee 0; +8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the imp makes a secondary attack against the same target:		
<i>Secondary Attack</i> : +5 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and a -2 penalty to Will defense (save ends both).		
Vanish (standard; at-will) ◆ Illusion		
The imp becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until it attacks.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Supernal	
Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +9, Stealth +9		
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 14 (+3)
Con 16 (+4)	Int 16 (+4)	Cha 16 (+4)

5 Infernal Armor Animuses (A)		Level 3 Minion Soldier
Medium immortal animate		XP 38 each
Initiative +5 Senses Perception +1; darkvision		
Bloodlust aura 2; each nonminion devil within the aura gains a +1 bonus to damage rolls. Multiple bloodlust auras grant a cumulative bonus.		
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 19; Fortitude 16; Reflex 15; Will 14		
Resist 5 fire		
Speed 6		
⊕ Short Sword (standard; at-will) ◆ Weapon		
Melee 1; +8 vs. AC; 5 damage.		
Essence Transference (when the infernal armor animus drops to 0 hit points) ◆ Healing		
The nearest nonminion devil within 5 squares of the animus regains 15 hit points.		
Alignment Evil	Languages –	
Str 19 (+5)	Dex 14 (+3)	Wis 10 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 8 (+0)	Cha 11 (+1)
Equipment heavy shield, short sword		

DEALING WITH THE DEVIL(S)

The imps are more than eager to help out the characters as they attempt to open the door to Dreus's sanctum. Of course, this requires releasing the devils from their imprisonment, which means tricking the door's defenses into releasing the devils. The easiest way to do so is to fail once at the skill challenge. Since Dreus is trying to keep out intruders, she didn't do much to guarantee the magic circle would stay intact. If someone wants to release the creatures voluntarily, a DC 15 Arcana check can suppress the circle.

If the characters release the devils willingly, they have two options: gain 2 automatic successes on the skill challenge and let the devils go free, or gain 1 automatic success and gain the devils' help in fighting Dreus. The devils prefer the first option and won't suggest the second unless pressed. If they must fight, they stay out of the way in encounter 2, coming out only to battle Dreus herself.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

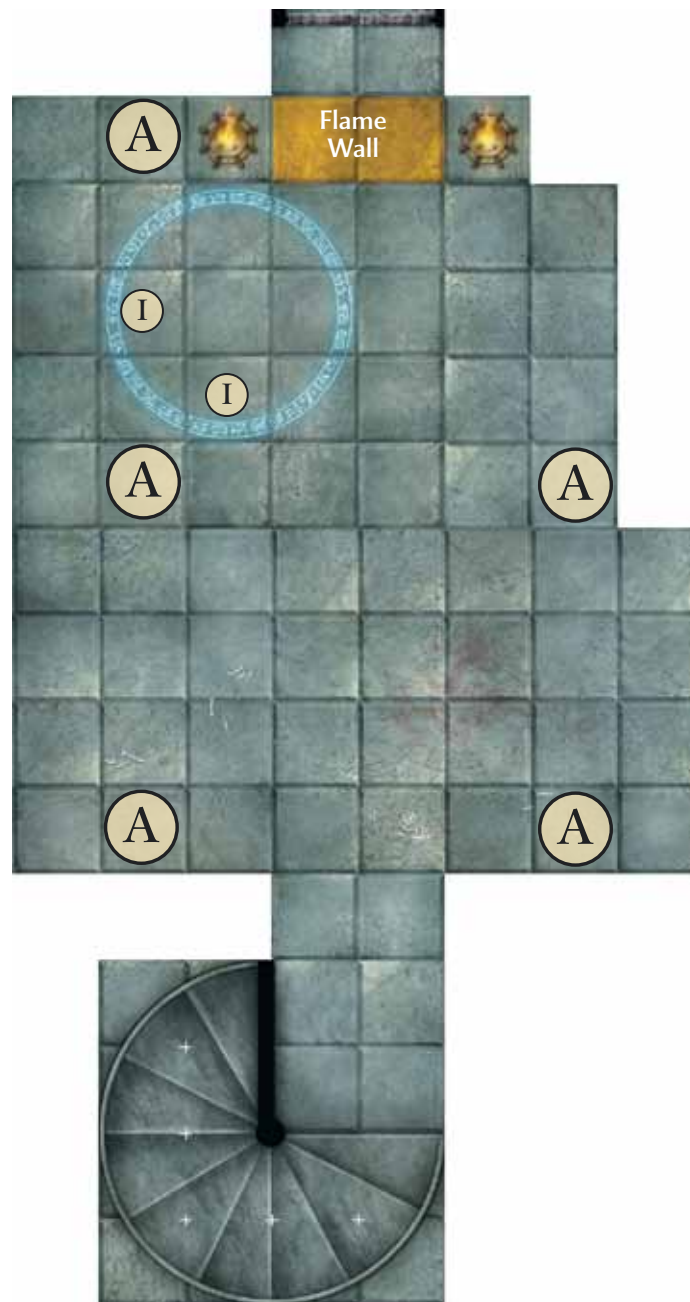
Illumination: Bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 10 feet high. The imps can't fly high enough to get out of reach.

Doors: The heavy stone doors can be opened with the included skill challenge or with a DC 25 Strength check.

Firepots: A creature pushed into a square with a stone firepot takes 5 fire damage. As indicated in the skill challenge, the first failure causes the braziers to produce a wall of magical flames. (The wall's effects are detailed in the skill challenge.)

Magic Circle: The circle traps the imps within it and keeps other creatures from entering. As indicated in the skill challenge, the first failure releases the imps.



D2: ELEMENTAL FUSION

Encounter Level 2 (approximately 638 XP)

SETUP

- 3 crystal stalkers (C)
- 3 inferno stalkers (I)
- 3 wind stalkers (W)

In this encounter, characters fight elementals Dreus brought to this plane. The mass of elemental energy she stored in the middle of the room was part of one of her experiments to transform elementals. Left mostly uncontrolled, it sucks in and combines the small elementals into more powerful ones.

Because the elementals keep a constant watch, it's almost impossible to sneak up on them (unless the intruder becomes invisible). When an elemental sees the characters, the first amalgam forms to lead the elementals. At the start of each round, a new amalgam forms (see "Development"). Since one forms before the battle begins, there will be two of them in the first round.

When the heroes look in the room, read:

At the foot of the staircase leading down, a wide room extends ahead. In the middle sits a pool of elemental energy that churns with chunks of ice and sends up lightning sparks and goutts of flame. Small elementals made of crystal, air, and fire surround it.

When the first amalgam forms, read:

Noticing your presence, an elemental composed of fire shrieks. Its form flies toward the elemental pool, along with one of the air elementals. They're sucked in and re-emerge after a moment in a new form: a rippling sheet of flying flames. It barks an order to the others, and they turn to attack.

TACTICS

The minions stay spread out to make it more difficult to kill several of them at once. The crystal stalkers target several different melee characters, grabbing them to hold them back. The inferno stalkers target ranged attackers. Wind stalkers bunch enemies together for the benefit of the artillery creatures and flamewind amalgams or try to slide any enemy who gets near the pool into it.

All the amalgams like to have their enemies bunched up in groups. A blazegem amalgam uses *blazing shards* to protect inferno stalkers with a fiery zone and attacks clustered groups of enemies. A stonehail switches back and forth between lurker form and its normal form. Usually, one uses *storm of shards*, then moves away from enemies while insubstantial. On the next turn, if threatened it moves, then uses *crystal binding*. Unless it's in serious danger, it tries to attack each round. The flamewind amalgam flies back and forth using *searing wind*, usually attacking whichever enemies seem most likely to kill some minions.

3 Crystal Stalkers (C)	Level 3 Minion Soldier
Small elemental magical beast	XP 38 each
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +3
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 19; Fortitude 17; Reflex 13; Will 15	
Speed 5, burrow 5	
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)	
Melee 1; +10 vs. AC; 3 damage, and the stalker grabs the target.	
Earthen Endurance	
The stalker gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against a creature grabbed by it.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial
Str 15 (+3)	Dex 11 (+1) Wis 14 (+3)
Con 18 (+5)	Int 3 (-3) Cha 8 (+0)

3 Inferno Stalkers (I)	Level 3 Minion Artillery
Small elemental magical beast	XP 38 each
Initiative +5	Senses Perception +1
Blazing Form aura 1; whenever a creature enters the aura, it takes 2 fire damage.	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 16; Fortitude 15; Reflex 16; Will 13	
Resist 10 fire	
Speed 6	
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)	
Melee 1; +8 vs. AC; 3 fire damage.	
✦ Flame Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ Fire	
Area burst 1 within 10; +6 vs. Reflex; 4 fire damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 18 (+5) Wis 10 (+1)
Con 9 (+0)	Int 3 (-3) Cha 8 (+0)

3 Wind Stalkers (W)	Level 3 Minion Controller
Small elemental magical beast	XP 38 each
Initiative +5	Senses Perception +3
Whipping Winds aura 1; whenever a creature begins its turn in the aura, the stalker can slide it 1 square.	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 17; Fortitude 13; Reflex 17; Will 15	
Resist 8 to all damage	
Speed 7, fly 7	
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)	
Melee 1; +8 vs. AC; 3 damage, and the stalker slides the target 1 square.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial
Str 7 (-1)	Dex 19 (+5) Wis 14 (+3)
Con 10 (+1)	Int 3 (-3) Cha 10 (+1)

EXPERIENCE

It's possible that characters could defeat an amalgam, then see its component stalkers reform into another amalgam, so don't keep assigning XP for new amalgams. The starting elementals can form four amalgams (plus one leftover stalker), so don't assign more than 638 XP total.

Blazegem Amalgam		Level 3 Artillery
Medium elemental magical beast		XP 150
Initiative +4	Senses Perception +1	
Blazing Form aura 1; whenever an enemy enters the aura, it takes 4 fire damage.		
HP 40; Bloodied 20		
AC 15; Fortitude 16; Reflex 16; Will 13		
Resist 5 fire; Vulnerable 5 cold		
Speed 6		
⊕ Blazing Slam (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire		
Melee 1; +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 fire damage.		
⚡ Inferno Spikes (standard; encounter) ♦ Fire		
Close burst 1; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 4 fire damage, and the amalgam pushes the target 2 squares.		
✦ Blazing Shards (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire		
Area burst 1 within 20; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 3 damage. <i>Effect:</i> The burst becomes a zone of blazing gems until the end of the amalgam's next turn. Any creature that ends its turn in the zone takes 5 fire damage.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial	
Str 15 (+3)	Dex 16 (+4)	Wis 11 (+1)
Con 16 (+4)	Int 3 (-3)	Cha 8 (+0)

Stonehail Amalgam		Level 3 Lurker
Medium elemental magical beast		XP 150
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +2	
HP 40; Bloodied 20		
AC 17; Fortitude 16; Reflex 15; Will 14		
Speed 6		
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)		
Melee 1; +6 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 fire damage.		
⚡ Storm of Shards (standard; at-will)		
Close burst 2; +6 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 damage. <i>Effect:</i> The amalgam disperses into a cloud of flying crystals until the end of its next turn. While in this form, it is insubstantial and weakened and gains a fly speed equal to its speed. The amalgam can't use <i>crystal binding</i> this turn.		
Crystal Binding (minor, usable only while the amalgam is dispersed; at-will)		
The amalgam is no longer dispersed and can't use <i>storm of shards</i> this turn.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial	
Str 11 (+1)	Dex 15 (+3)	Wis 13 (+2)
Con 16 (+4)	Int 3 (-3)	Cha 9 (+0)

Flamewind Amalgam		Level 3 Skirmisher
Medium elemental magical beast		XP 150
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +3	
Blazing Form aura 1; whenever an enemy enters or ends its turn in the aura, it takes 4 fire damage.		
HP 41; Bloodied 20		
AC 17; Fortitude 13; Reflex 17; Will 15		
Resist 5 fire; Vulnerable 5 cold		
Speed 6		
⊕ Reaching Flames (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire		
Melee 2; +4 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 fire damage.		
⚡ Searing Wind (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire		
Melee 0; Flamewind amalgam shifts its speed. Each time it enters an enemy's space for the first time during that move, it makes the following attack against that enemy: +6 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 fire damage.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial	
Str 10 (+1)	Dex 19 (+5)	Wis 14 (+3)
Con 9 (+0)	Int 3 (-3)	Cha 9 (+0)

DEVELOPMENT

The elemental pool constantly alters this fight. At the start of each round, the pool sucks in the two nearest minions of different types. The stalkers combine in the following ways.

Crystal + Inferno: Blazegem Amalgam

Crystal + Wind: Stonehail Amalgam

Inferno + Wind: Flamewind Amalgam

When an amalgam is defeated, it breaks into its constituent stalkers. These can still recombine via the elemental pool. If all that remains are stalkers of the same type, they can't combine and remain as minions. The encounter ends when *all* the elementals have been defeated. If the characters leave the room, the elementals pursue them but are outside the range of the pool's effects.

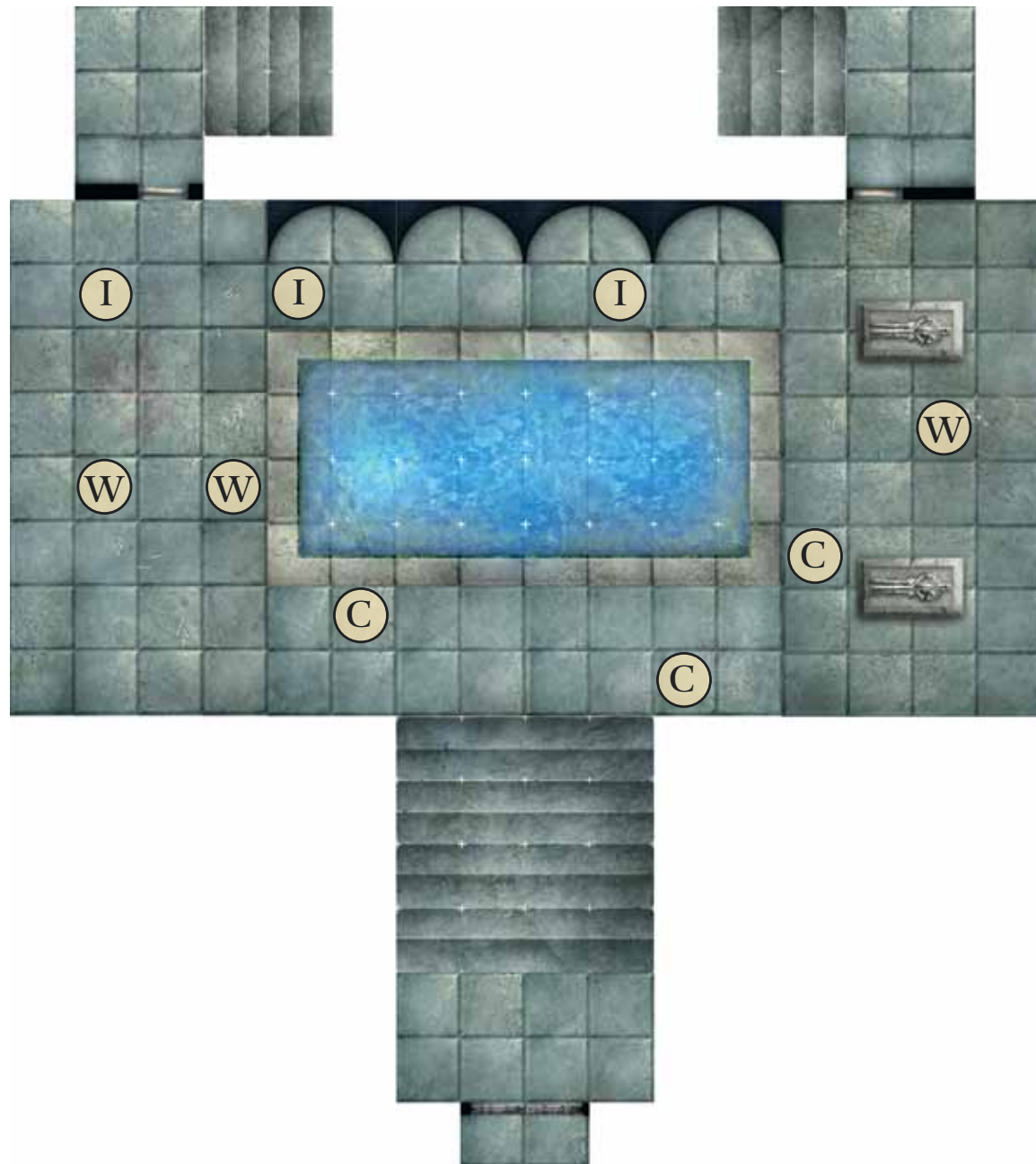
FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Doors: The single doors are unlocked.

Elemental Pool: A non-elemental creature that moves into the pool or ends its turn there takes 1d6 fire damage, 1d6 cold damage, and 1d6 lightning damage. A character knocked toward the pool by forced movement can make a saving throw to avoid falling in.



D3: DREUS'S WORKSHOP

Encounter Level 3 (825 XP)

SETUP

Dreus Matrand (M)
3 skeletons (S)
1 stonefist defender (D)

If Dreus knew the adventurers were coming (because they accrued a failure in the skill challenge to trigger the trap, made a lot of noise in the second encounter, or for some other reason), the skeletons begin on the map. If she knows which door the characters are coming through, they're clustered around that one. Otherwise, they're spread out as shown. If she didn't see the characters coming, she summons them later (see "Development").

When a hero sees into the main room, read:

Several ornate wooden tables fill this room. Dreus stands next to the largest, feverishly combining items and infusing them with magic as part of her experiments. As soon as she sees you, she picks up a staff leaning against the table, and it crackles with dark energy.

If she was prepared for them, read:

She speaks calmly. "So you've made it through. It's been a long time since I got my hands dirty, but I guess that's what we've come to."

If she wasn't prepared, read:

Dreus quickly looks toward you, then scrambles to grab a staff that sits nearby. "Intruders! How did you get past?" She then gestures toward a large pile of bones, her staff glowing with purple radiance. The bones begin moving . . .

TACTICS

Dreus uses *bloodsapper staff* and one of her talisman powers on each of her turns. The state of her rings determines which power she uses. Early in the fight, she picks *talisman of boiling blood* frequently. After she gets low on hit points, she goes more defensive with *talisman of bodily preservation*. If her rings fill up while she still has high hit points, she uses *talisman of assured death* to darken her rings and make *talisman of boiling blood* more effective. Thanks to her aura, she's not afraid to get close and flank with the stonefist defender if she needs to.

The stonefist defender guards Dreus and comes to her defense whenever she's attacked. The skeletons guard the doors at the start of the fight and fight back any enemies in the adjoining rooms.

DEVELOPMENT

If the skeletons didn't start on the map, Dreus needs to use a minor action to summon each one. She must be within 5 squares of the pile of bones to summon them. When summoned, they spring from the pile of bones into adjacent squares. Dreus spends her first turn summoning them if she needs to.

THE FIVE RINGS

Dreus's rings alter which of her powers is most useful and can give the players a cue to what her plans are. You might want to use a visual aid, such as glass beads, to show how many of her rings are lit up at any given time.

Dreus Matrand (M)	Level 2 Elite Controller	
Medium natural humanoid	XP 250	
Initiative +1	Senses Perception +8	
Grave Mist aura 1; creatures in the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against Dreus.		
HP 70; Bloodied 35		
AC 16; Fortitude 12; Reflex 16; Will 14		
Saving Throws +2		
Speed 6		
Action Points 1		
⚔ Poisonous Touch (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison		
Melee 1; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 poison damage.		
⚔ Bloodsapper Staff (standard; at-will) ♦ Necrotic		
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Dreus's next turn.		
Dreus's Rings		
Dreus wears five rings. Each time an attack hits her, a dark ring begins to glow. Her talisman powers change depending on the number of rings that are glowing or dark.		
Dreus's Talismans (minor 1/round; at-will)		
Dreus uses one of the following powers:		
<i>Talisman of Boiling Blood</i> (Fire): Close burst 5; enemies in burst; Fire damage equal to the number of her rings that are dark.		
<i>Talisman of Bodily Preservation</i> : Dreus gains resist equal to the number of her rings that glow to all damage until the start of her next turn.		
<i>Talisman of Assured Death</i> (Necrotic): Ranged 20; +6 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target can't spend healing surges (save ends). <i>Effect</i> : Dreus can make all of her rings go dark.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Primordial	
Skills Arcana +10, Insight +8, Intimidate +7		
Str 9 (+0)	Dex 10 (+1)	Wis 15 (+3)
Con 11 (+1)	Int 19 (+5)	Cha 13 (+2)
Equipment robes, staff, 5 rings		

3 Skeletons (S)	Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural animate	XP 150 each
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +3; darkvision
HP 45; Bloodied 22	
AC 18; Fortitude 15; Reflex 16; Will 15	
Immune disease; poison; Resist 10 necrotic;	
Vulnerable 5 radiant	
Speed 5	
⊕ Longsword (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the skeleton warrior's next turn; see also <i>speed of the dead</i> .	
Speed of the Dead	
When making an opportunity attack, the skeleton warrior gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals an extra 1d6 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Str 15 (+3)	Dex 17 (+4) Wis 14 (+3)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 3 (-3) Cha 3 (-3)
Equipment chainmail, heavy shield, longsword	

Stonefist Defender (D)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Small natural animate	XP 125
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +4; darkvision
HP 38; Bloodied 19	
AC 16; Fortitude 13; Reflex 14; Will 14	
Immune disease; poison	
Speed 8	
⊕ Spiked Fist (standard; at-will)	
Melee 1; +7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.	
Guard Creature	
A stonefist defender gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against any enemy adjacent to its guarded creature.	
Synchronized Flank	
While a stonefist defender is flanking an enemy with its guarded creature, its attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against the flanked enemy.	
Tumble (move; at-will)	
The stonefist defender shifts 3 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned	
Languages –	
Skills Acrobatics +9	
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 17 (+4) Wis 17 (+4)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 11 (+1) Cha 7 (-1)

TREASURE

The relics here include plenty of curiosities that aren't of much interest to anyone but arcane scholars such as Dreus. If the characters search thoroughly, they find three parcels' worth of treasure: a +2 *amulet of protection* (or other level 6 magic item), a +1 *staff of ruin* (or other level 3 magic item), remnants of magic items that are equivalent to 100 gp worth of residuum, and 70 gp.

Dreus's collection also includes many tomes gathered from far and wide. You might want to place some arcane rituals alongside the treasure or include books that provide treasure hooks for adventures in far-off lands.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Bright light.

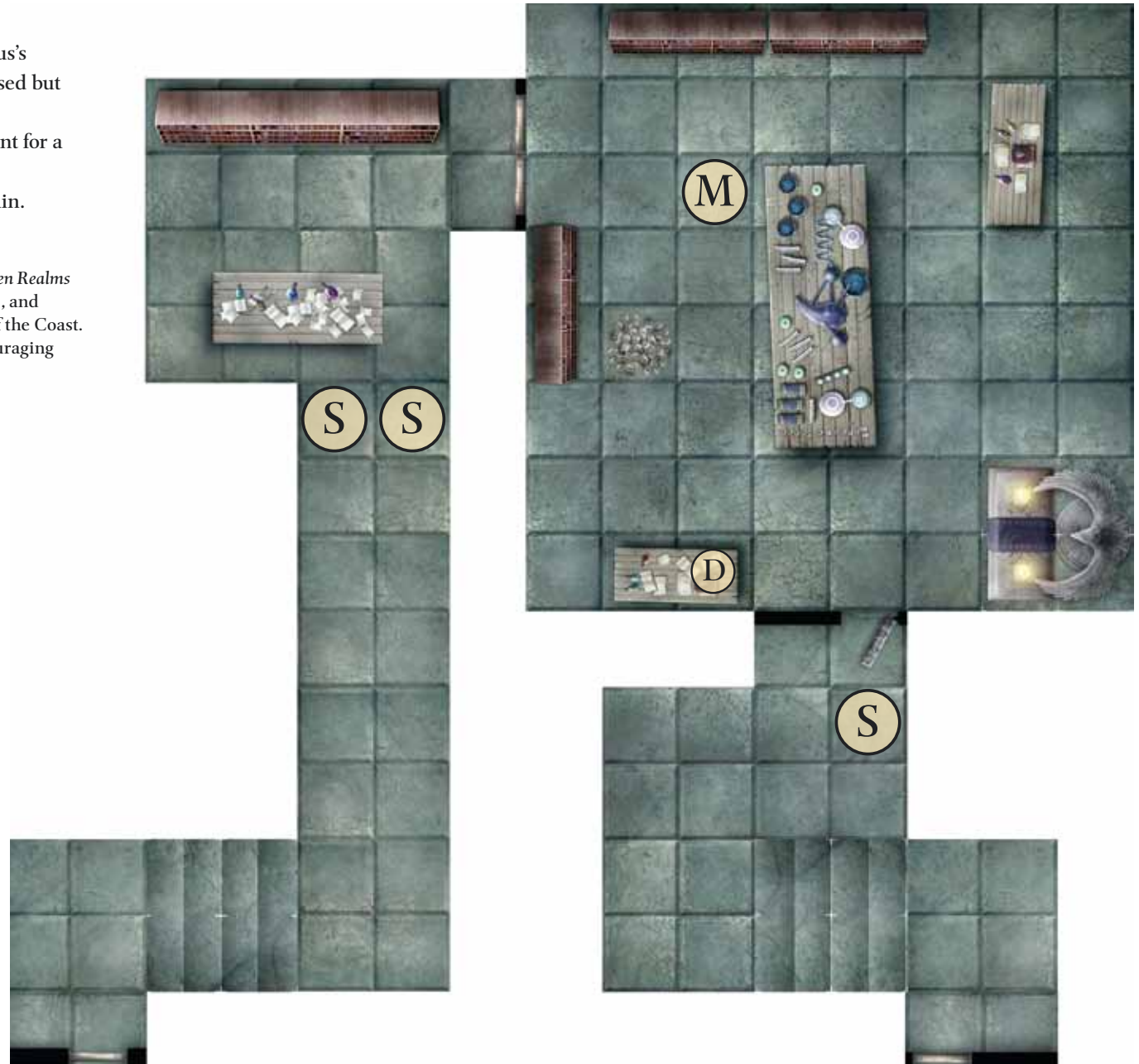
Doors: The door on the south end of Dreus's room is open. The one on the west side is closed but unlocked.

Tables: It costs 1 extra square of movement for a creature to move onto a table.

Bone Pile: The bone pile is difficult terrain.

About the Author

Logan Bonner worked on *D&D Miniatures*, *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*, *Adventurer's Vault*, *Player's Handbook 2*, and *Arcane Power* in his time as a designer at Wizards of the Coast. He has designed both familiars and alchemy, encouraging people to be both social and anti-social.





EYE ON DARK SUN

SUNWARPED FLATS

by Rodney Thompson ♦ illustration by Sam Burley

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Anyone who spends enough time in the wastes of Athas knows that the deep desert produces mutated creatures, sometimes even short-lived new races. Those brave or foolhardy enough to travel off the well-known paths have come across strange places in the desert where everything seems twisted and out of proportion. In these places, cacti grow to towering heights while rodents the size of a crodlu gallop from one stony outcropping to the next. The desert-dwelling tribes call these places “sunwarped flats,” because their constant exposure to the red sun of Athas has warped them in strange ways.

In truth, sunwarped flats are areas where the blazing rays of the red sun interact with the remnants of powerful defiling magic to create pockets of highly unstable

terrain where everything from the land to creatures to magic quickly mutates. Sunwarped flats are dangerous places best avoided by most travelers, as the very fabric of reality seems unpredictable there; a caravan passing through sunwarped flats might find their water stores turned to silt or their mekillots growing violent and carnivorous. Even psionic power reacts unpredictably in sunwarped flats; at least one caravan became permanent residents of the desert after their psionic navigator went insane and ran screaming into the wasteland.

Just as dangerous to travelers are the sunwarped creatures that live in sunwarped flats. The desert-dwelling tribes believe that most of the new races of the desert were spawned in sunwarped flats, and even creatures just passing through the flats may become twisted and monstrous. Sunwarped flats can wreak havoc upon the bodies and minds of creatures with very little exposure. Even creatures that have just entered a sunwarped flat for the first time may find themselves permanently changed.

You can represent creatures twisted by sunwarped flats by using the Sunwarped Creature monster theme from the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*.

Though most inhabitants of the city-states have little to fear from sunwarped flats, the Sorcerer-Kings are all too aware of them and the danger they pose. Many Sorcerer-Kings dispatch their templars to find and guard sunwarped flats near their city-states and to turn away travelers who drift too close. Many templars consider such duty as a punishment akin to exile, because spending time close to sunwarped flats can be just as dangerous as passing through them. At least one Sorcerer-King was known to have dispatched templars under the pretense of finding sunwarped flats when in truth

those templars were sent to guard some other, secret discovery. Rumor has it that templars from Raam unearthed a powerful artifact from a bygone era, and that templars stationed around the excavation's perimeter deterred travelers by claiming that the area was a sunwarped flat and dangerous to anyone that came near.

Dune traders and all the merchant houses spend a great deal of time and effort maintaining updated maps that identify the locations of

known sunwarped flats along major trade routes. These maps are jealously guarded, and some of the merchant houses have been known to engage in clandestine efforts to steal or alter maps belonging to their rivals. Wiping away a reference to the presence of a sunwarped flat can have a devastating effect if it leads to the loss of even a single caravan; such a blow is difficult to recover from. Dune traders often hire navigators who have the locations of sunwarped flats memorized rather than trusting a

SUNWARPED MAGIC

Although the reality-warping effect of a sunwarped flat defies any kind of thorough and rational explanation, there is a tangible and measureable effect on magic within a sunwarped flat. From time to time, small zones of sunwarped magic will manifest. Usually these are no larger than a human in size. The Veiled Alliance claims they are echoes of the defiling magic that laid the foundation for the sunwarped flat in the first place. Skilled arcanists, masters of primal magic, and even experienced masters of psionic power can sometimes absorb this unpredictable magic and use it to fuel their attacks in a way similar to how defilers use life energy to power their spells. You can use the *sunwarped magic zone* terrain power to represent this potential, placing a few squares of sunwarped magic across the battlefield to add a twist to encounters in a sunwarped flat.

Sunwarped Magic Zone Single-Use Terrain

A swirling mist of ambient sunwarped magic hovers nearby, almost calling out for you to draw upon its unpredictable power.

Minor Action

Requirement: You must be standing in a square filled with ambient sunwarped magic.

Check: Arcana check (moderate DC) to absorb the sunwarped magic.

Success: You draw upon the sunwarped magic to power your next spell.

Failure: You take necrotic damage equal to your healing surge value.

Effect: The next arcane, primal, or psionic attack power you use before the end of your next turn is infused with sunwarped magic. The power mutates when you use it; when this happens, roll 1d6 and consult the table below. The power deals 1d10 extra damage (per tier) of that type.

- 1 - Acid
- 2 - Cold
- 3 - Fire
- 4 - Force
- 5 - Lightning
- 6 - Thunder

physical map. The merchant houses, which have too many traders and caravans to be able to hire navigators for all of them, tend instead to hire outsiders to protect their maps or to steal or sabotage the maps of their enemies.

Among the slave tribes of the desert, a legend tells of a city-state now completely absorbed by sunwarped flats. According to this legend, this city-state was destroyed in a battle that saw one side wielding powerful defiling magic and the other side wielding magic powered by the red sun. The resulting devastation created a sunwarped flat that encompassed the entire city-state, and the Sorcerer-Kings declared that knowledge of the city, even its name, was forbidden. According to this legend, the doomed city-state lies ruined in the deep desert, its buildings twisted and shattered by long exposure to sunwarped magic, its streets and catacombs filled with sunwarped wretches and the treasure of a fallen Sorcerer-King awaiting someone capable of seizing it.

SUNWARPED WRETCHES

Sunwarped wretches are creatures that live within the sunwarped flats of the deserts of Athas. Though they may once have been humans, elves, dwarves, or members of another race, long exposure to the mutating power of their surroundings has left them twisted into unrecognizable shadows of their former races. Sunwarped wretches are violent creatures that swarm over their foes. They have been known to eat those whom they slay.

LORE

Nature (DC 13): Sunwarped wretches are dangerous creatures that know little except savagery and survival. Most sunwarped wretches have no memory of lives as members of another race; constant exposure to reality-twisting effects of the sunwarped flats has changed their minds as much as their bodies. Worse, sunwarped wretches can breed with one another, regardless of their original race, and they produce offspring that becomes the foundation of entirely new races. Within a tribe of sunwarped wretches, true-bred offspring mingle freely with twisted former members of other humanoid races, with no way of knowing which is which.

Though savage, sunwarped wretches are relatively intelligent and are comparable to tareks in their cunning. They often try to lure caravans and lone travelers into ambushes by altering key landmarks to make once-reliable maps inaccurate. It is possible to deal with sunwarped wretches nonviolently, but they must be bribed—usually with large quantities of food and water, because other wealth has little value to them. Anyone treating with sunwarped wretches is advised to keep their guard up. At the first sign of

weakness, sunwarped wretches will break any promise of safe dealings.

Arcana (DC 20): From time to time, a curious Sorcerer-King will dispatch templars or hire mercenaries to raid the encampments of sunwarped wretches. These raids are meant to capture sunwarped wretches and bring them back to the city-states alive so that the Sorcerer-King can study the effects of sunwarping on these creatures and learn how to replicate it. Though the twisting effects of sunwarped flats are too unpredictable to produce reliable results, many fear that one day a Sorcerer-King will find a way to master it and produce a new, more powerful servitor race.

ENCOUNTERS

Sunwarped wretches are most often encountered by those who drift too close to a sunwarped flat. They frequently set up ambushes, even complicated ones, and then fall upon their prey with reckless savagery. Sunwarped wretches sometimes domesticate baazrags and other animals, but any creatures found with sunwarped wretches are likely sunwarped themselves. Occasionally, members of a sunwarped wretch tribe are encountered that have not yet been fully transformed by a life in the sunwarped flats, meaning that sunwarped elves, dwarves, humans, and half-giants are sometimes found fighting alongside the tribe.

Sunwarped Wretch	Level 3 Skirmisher
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 150
HP 45; Bloodied 22	Initiative +5
AC 17, Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 12	Perception +2
Speed 6	
Resist 5 fire, 5 radiant; Vulnerable 5 necrotic	
TRAITS	
Swarming Wretches	
While two or more creatures with <i>swarming wretches</i> are adjacent to the same enemy, that enemy provokes opportunity attacks from adjacent creatures when it stands.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Splintered Bone Spear (weapon) ⬆ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
⌚ Hurled Bone Spear (weapon) ⬆ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage.	
⬇ Overwhelming Spear (weapon) ⬆ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature the wretch has combat advantage against); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
Effect: The target falls prone.	
⬇ Feast on the Fallen ⬆ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d4 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Effect: The sunwarped wretch can shift up to 2 squares.	
Skills Nature +7	
Str 17 (+4)	Dex 14 (+3) Wis 12 (+2)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 8 (+0) Cha 7 (-1)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment splintered bone spear, hide armor	

Sunwarped Hulk	Level 4 Brute
Large aberrant humanoid	XP 175
HP 66; Bloodied 33	Initiative +2
AC 16, Fortitude 17, Reflex 14, Will 16	Perception +9
Speed 5	
Resist 5 fire, 5 radiant; Vulnerable 5 necrotic	
TRAITS	
Swarming Wretches	
While two or more creatures with <i>swarming wretches</i> are adjacent to the same enemy, that enemy provokes opportunity attacks from adjacent creatures when it stands.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Petrified Bone Club (weapon) ⬆ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage.	
⬅ Sweeping Smash (weapon) ⬆ Recharge ⌘ ⌘ ⌘	
Attack: Close blast 2 (enemies in blast); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 11 (+2) Wis 14 (+4)
Con 16 (+5)	Int 8 (+1) Cha 7 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment petrified bone club, hide armor	

About the Author

RODNEY THOMPSON is the lead developer of the Dark Sun™ campaign setting. He is a developer and designer for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® whose work includes Player Essentials: Heroes of the Fallen Lands, Player Essentials: Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms, and Monster Vault.



FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S EYE ON THE REALMS

ONDAL'S STAND

by Ed Greenwood ♦ illustration by Sam Burley

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Somewhere in the Heartlands—near Berdusk, some swear, or the rolling, wooded hills where Sembia meets the Dales, or any of a dozen other places—is “Ondal’s Stand.”

How it came by that precise name is now forgotten (most believe someone wryly referred to the place as where Ondal made his “last stand,” though there’s no evidence the mage even knew his doom was nigh). Everyone agrees on what the Stand is: the remains of Ondal’s formerly-

extensive, stone-lined cellars (most of which collapsed when the stout, fortified house above them exploded at the height of the Spellplague, with Ondal inside it).

Though the usual tales are being told of hauntings or entombed-alive-or-merely-sleeping wizards who will return to wreak fell revenge on all who disturbed what they deem theirs, most folk believe that the mage and vintner Ondal perished in the Spellplague.

Wizards beyond counting died in the Spellplague, of course, or went mad and perished of misadventure soon after or when enemies took advantage of their dazed and weakened conditions to remove them from the Realms forever. What makes Ondal memorable is not his wizardry—he was reportedly a fairly kind recluse, devoted to researches and experimentations into all manner of small, benign magic. He is remembered for the wine he'd bottled but hadn't yet sold when the Spellplague struck.

Or rather, what the infamous blue fires which raged violently where Ondal and his house happened to be, did to that wine.

HIGHLY PRIZED DECANTERS

Ondal made a lot of good wine—a little for himself but primarily to sell (it was his chief source of income). His extensive cellars were always full of large casks of wine, sitting in the gloom and aging in the normal manner.

Ondal never moved his casks, even though the cellars were a series of rooms joined by archways large enough to drive a stout trail-wagon through. The cellars ended in a long wagon ramp with massive doors at top and bottom so transport wagons could easily enter and depart.

No, the mage sold his wine not in skins or kegs or corked bottles but in decanters bought in bulk from local glassblowers. He encouraged his suppliers to create beautiful, stoppered glass bottles, indulging themselves when it came to adornments or shaping—not only because he loved and collected striking decanters, but because he correctly believed that impressive containers would make folk pay more for the contents.

Local cabinetmakers created thousands of carry-crates with individual compartments, padded with straw and fistfuls of leaves, to house the decanters on their journeys to market.

So good was Ondal's wine, and so plentiful and reliable its supply, that caravan companies took to stationing agents at the market whose sole job was to snap up all of Ondal's wine that arrived there. These agents tried all manner of tricks on each other to ensure they were the only buyers of the wine, but Ondal frowned on dangerous or threatening tactics or attempts to waylay his wagons before reaching market. Inevitably that led to agents bidding against each other for the cargoes, and that made Ondal richer and the wines more expensive and therefore of interest to the wealthy and refined in such places as Waterdeep, Athkatla, and the cities of Sembia.

The wizard lived comfortably, sipping in moderation and devoting most of his time to magical researches. The wine—which happened to keep very well, though Ondal swore he never cast the slightest magic on it—was enjoyed widely. Overall, life was good ...

... Until god moved against god, and the Spellplague ruined everything.

THE BLUE FIRE STRIKES

The fires of the first wave of the Spellplague smashed Ondal and his house, triggering a series of explosions as various “hanging” enchantments, stored magic items, and ongoing spell experiments twisted simultaneously into wild fury.

Locally, the engorged fires howled across the land, flattening some trees (and Ondal's vines), setting others afire, whirling still more into the

air, and turning one great shadowtop into a many-branched glory of solid sapphire gemstone. (It soon vanished, leaving a trail of dagger-wearing corpses and blood to mark the many times it changed hands on its way to being broken up.)

Of those who survived the fires and stayed rather than fleeing in terror, few folk dared go near the pit of smoking rubble that had been Ondal's home.

When they did, they found a strange array of monsters roaming the dell, “no two alike, except in horrible menace and savagery,” as one caravan merchant reported. These beasts fought each other and pounced on all arrivals in their quest for food, so most curious explorers promptly fled.

Tales of the hungry monsters were told and retold. Their presence was blamed on unleashed captives that Ondal must have been breeding or experimenting with, on gates the wizard must have secretly created that the fearsome beasts were flooding through, or on magic in the ruins that was somehow luring them.

It was a good place to stay well away from, most agreed. Adventurers hearing the same tales thought differently, but there were more adventures to be had at that troubled time than adventurers to have them. One wizard's vanished home was small takings amid a vast and perilous array.

Months passed ere the rank of monsters thinned enough that someone ventured back to the site for a proper look around.

The house and most of its cellars were one great bowl of rubble. There was no sign of still-active magic or that Ondal had blasted his way to freedom. Two cellar rooms and parts of a third

had survived intact, and in them were no less than four wagons (some tales say six, or even seven) neatly loaded. Their decanters of wine seemed entirely unscathed.

The great cellar casks had all ruptured when the blue fires howled around the cellars, and broken glass from countless decanters lay thick and glittering underfoot, but those crated wines on the wagons looked like good, easy salvage. They had to be carried off by hand—months of digging would have been necessary to clear several rubble-filled rooms and the ramp in order to get the wagons themselves out.

It was when those decanters, carried off from the ruins to tables and taverns elsewhere, got opened or shattered that the “fun” began.

“Deadly fun,” as the sage Rambaertus of Waterdeep described it. “The Spellplague in a bottle—unleashed in a rush, the moment you pull the stopper or drop the thing. Which may well be the very last thing you ever do. If you’re lucky.”

BLUE FIRE STRIKES AGAIN

To put matters bluntly, all of the decanters thus far salvaged from Ondal’s Stand appear to be beautiful glass decanters filled with normal (“white” or golden and translucent, rather than dark red) wine in good condition, without spoilage, inclusions, or sediment.

When the decanters are opened or shattered, however, what comes out is not just wine. Magic is unleashed, as suddenly and violently as if a hostile spell has just been cast.

No pattern can be discerned from the discharges thus far; literally any sort of magic (prayers, spells, rituals, manifestations akin to artifact powers; *anything*) can take effect near the decanter. Its nature, location of area of effect or targets, and strength can be, it seems, anything at all.

The very nature of magic means that uncontrolled discharges in any given spot (an enclosed space in particular) can be destructive.

As news of Ondal’s deadly decanters has spread, many folk have hit upon the idea of using them as “bombs” to hurl against foes. As a result, their value has soared, and—sentient cunning being what it is—fake Ondal’s decanters have also begun to appear.

As the peerless philosopher Andragus of the Dueharr once put it mournfully, “When the prospect of doing much damage with swift ease beckons, coins are spent foolishly, and there’s much money to be made.”

A RACE TO ARMS

Since the discovery, shop owners, caravan merchants, and adventurers have sought to secure the site of Ondal’s Stand. Or rather, sites; several reputed and widely-separated locales are being fought over, from the Dales to a few days of easy riding southeast of Waterdeep, and many spots between. As contenders are murdered and open clashes become more frequent, one truth is becoming increasingly clear.

Several wizardly organizations, sinister cabals, and enforcers working for various governments—as well the usual crowd of hired “snatch-and-grab” adventuring bands, “wheeling like vultures, as usual,” as the sage Rambaertus put it—are all

attempting to track down the remaining decanters and take them into protective custody.

According to the sage and others, the high mortality rate for such efforts has led to increasing numbers of adventurers getting hired for this task, many of whom are told only the bare minimum about Ondal and his decanters.

Secondary disasters are now occurring, as sweating adventurers drop decanters or decide to take a quick swig to “gain meself some magic.” A handful do, but most come to a swift and wailing end or are transformed into horrible monsters.

And the prices of Ondal’s decanters race higher.

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 ...

THE ART OF SAYING NO

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

illustration by Rob Alexander

The difference between being a good DM and a great DM is the ability to say yes. Do the players want to try something crazy using a number of skill checks? You bet! Make an impromptu skill challenge. Does one of them want to play a shardmind assassin with a bloodline from *Dragon* magazine? Okay, find a way to make the character's story work in your campaign. But in the face of demanding players, a DM can often wonder, "What about me?"

Most DMs like both the world building and game management aspects of DMing. The perfect DM is probably two people—one who creates setting and adventures, and one who directs the game. Ideally, we enjoy both aspects of DMing, and with practice it becomes easy to hone your "yes" skill while running a game. In fact, once you've formed the habit of saying yes, when you inevitably encounter a situation when you want to say no, doing so feels wrong.

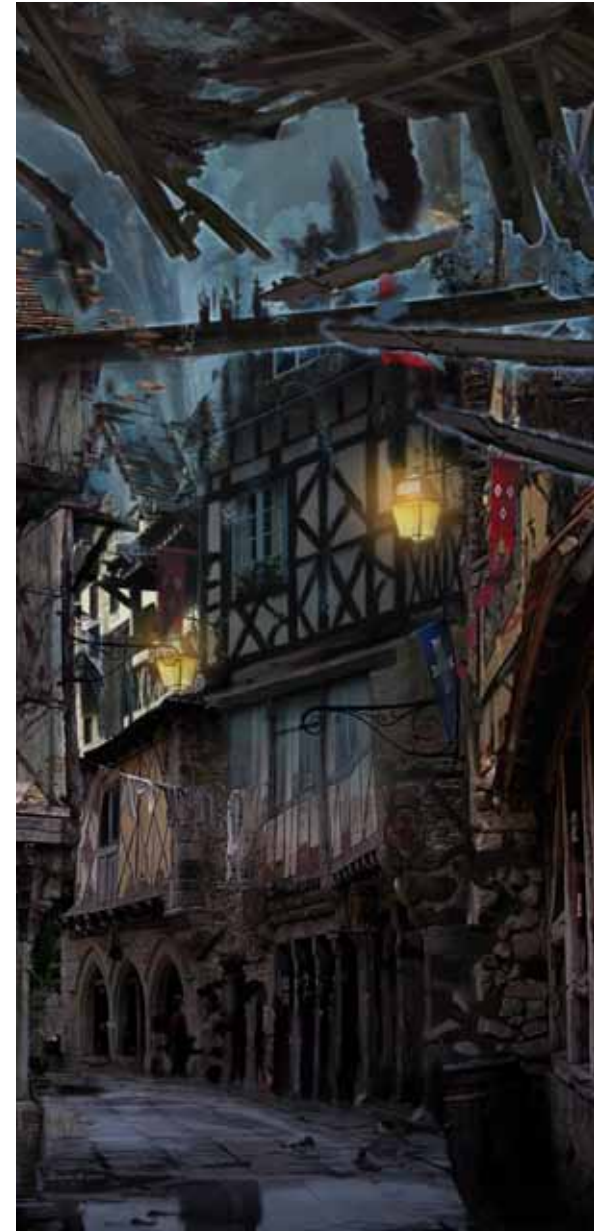
I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Sometimes it is okay to say no.

HELL, NO!

Saying yes is a skill, but saying no with tact and respect is perhaps an even more difficult skill to master. Of course, "No" is a DM's greatest tool when faced with an absurd request. Either sarcastically or naively, players might ask if they can do something

well beyond reason or the rules of the game. "Can I grow wings and fly to that balcony?" No. Not without a bloodline feat, a magic item, or paragon path. "Please, please, please! I know it's a natural 1, but can we say it's a critical instead?" Nope! The skill of saying yes should never bleed into the absurd. It seems that this aspect of running a game should go without saying, but if you are a new to DMing, just keep in mind that it is okay to say no when faced with bizarre requests.

If the request is somewhat reasonable, and you still want to say no, don't dismiss that urge yet. Figure out why you want to say no but be mindful of reasonable alternatives. For example, imagine a group of adventurers caught in a storm giant's cloud castle. The group has accomplished their main goal, but now they are trying to make their way down to the castle's lower levels to where some griffons—and their method of escape—are tethered. They know the path, but are besieged on all sides by the storm giants and their allies responding to the hue and cry raised from the characters' initial assault. In the face of this mounting threat, the players begin to wonder if their characters can even make it to the griffons. One of the players puts forward an idea: Can we try to climb the exterior of the strange cloud foundation of the castle to get directly to the mounts, bypassing at least the bulk of their foes? It's far-fetched, but interesting.



This is the sort of plausible solution you would expect desperate heroes to consider, and maybe even one such adventurers would be able to pull off in the most over-the-top adventure stories.

On the flip side, they would be skipping most of the entire session you've planned. And you like what you've planned. Is it wrong or somehow selfish of you to want to preserve at least a semblance of the game you prepared? No. Go ahead and say no. But you might want to say it this way: "No, but..."

NO, BUT...

One goal to strive for is to say "no," with an eye toward compromise. This is where the collective storytelling aspect of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* often resides. While many indie RPGs try to capture collective storytelling with rules, I think it often works better as DM craft rather than a general mechanic. No matter what shape it takes—be it the adventure you are using, your note on today's sessions, a handful of minis and a stack of *Monster Manuals*, or just a laptop with *D&D Insider* ready to go—until you sit at the table and actually run your game, you should treat your prep as a draft: a set of assumptions that can change when faced with the reality of play. The craft of collective storytelling is learning to bend and shape that draft when your players come up with something interesting that you or the adventure designer didn't consider.

For instance, let's return to our adventurers trying to get to their griffons. If the response were, "You can try, but it looks suicidal. Glancing outside a window, you see a balcony maybe one or two stories down. You could try for the balcony and get closer to the griffons."

You might have to restructure your encounter a bit. Maybe you were planning a copper dragon attack in the next group of rooms. You can always take the guts of that encounter and reapply it as an aerial fight once the character reach the griffons. When you're willing to restructure an encounter like this on the fly, you'll often find new inspiration and end up with a better, more evocative encounter than you'd initially planned!

I know what you're probably thinking: Saying no like this is just a "yes" in disguise. Exactly! This might seem daunting at first. With the greater amount of change you make in your adventure flow, the more you'll be worried if you make a mistake. Take a deep breath, don't sweat the small stuff, and you'll find that your players don't notice the details nearly as much when they get to do something cool.

NOT AN OPTION

Often one of the best and interesting ways to say no is to create a set of campaign assumptions before your game session or campaign gets started. This version of "no" lets you set the ground rules for the tone and themes of your campaign. Now that the 4th Edition D&D rules have matured and the options have increased, a new player might feel overwhelmed or you might not know where to start when creating adventure content of your own. Creating a set of assumptions can help you focus your design, and requires your players to make interesting and game-affecting choice in character creation.

You have to be careful. Some players might chafe at the idea of a campaign that has no elves, dragon-born, or divine casters. Players often have favorite classes, races, and power source combinations, and

taking them out of their comfort zone may seem tantamount to punishment. At the same time, a D&D game works best when a DM is passionate about his or her creation. You should feel free to tell present the stories that you want to tell. Maybe you're excited about the *DARK SUN* setting. While you can definitely run that campaign with every one of the rule choices available in 4th Edition (including allowing divine classes), maybe you want to kick it old school. You can definitely limit the character choices based on older editions of the setting. Just let your players know what you're doing and why. If they have a clear understanding of the basic assumptions and your reasons, you will often find that players are willing to accept these limitations. Reasonable players recognize that D&D is a game in which DMs get to flex their creative muscles, and often find that a campaign that limits select and strategic options can often be satisfying *because* of its constraints.

Next month we'll look at ways in which you, the DM, can manage and communicate limited campaigns for the fun and enjoyment for all.

GLAD TO BE BACK!

Save My Game has been on a bit of a hiatus for the last few months, but I'm glad to be back to help you become better DMs. For those of you who don't know, there is a great and active [Save My Game community](#) group in the Wizards Community where fellow DMs share their issues and gain great input from other DMs all around the world. From this point forward, I will gather questions for the mailbag from this group. If you have an issue, a problem, or a puzzle, post there, and do it often.

In celebration of this month's theme, let's do something fun with the mailbag. Join me in the Save My Game community group, in the "Challenge of No" discussion. Give me with the best "No, but..." problems that have come up in your game. The group's DMs (myself included) will give you ideas to change your campaign on the fly when faced with interesting player ideas. I'll share some of the best ones in next month's column. I look forward to reading and helping you with your problems.

FROM THE MAILBAG

In case you're new to this column, every month I tackle a general DMing problem area, and end with some letters submitted to us through the Save My Game group. Sometimes these letters spawn columns of their own. Other times, the month's letters are so good I'll devote an entire column to answering them. The following are just a couple of questions that caught my fancy this month.

How Do They Do It?

The adventures D&D Insider releases each month are exactly as well planned out as I'd like mine to be. How long does it take to write those adventures? How do the pros approach adventure building, like they would for a 3rd-level adventure in Dungeon magazine? I'm looking for tips, tricks, or world-reshaping words of power that will allow me ascension into DM enlightenment. Where do I start each week? This all takes so much time...although I love it, it's tiring. There must be a better way.

—Angiloth

I think there is a very human desire to want your weekly games to appear and function like a published adventure. I also think it is a mistake to hold yourself

to that standard every session. Writing an adventure suitable for publication in *Dungeon* magazine is a time-consuming process that usually starts with an outline, the testing of some rough ideas in actual play, and then the process of iteration after iteration before sending it to the powers that be (submissions@wizards.com). Honestly, you could put in a full work-week's worth of hours, something the RPG team actually does, and still come short from those goals by the time your weekly game session starts.

At best, your weekly game session notes should aim to look more like a draft than a finished adventure. Start with brainstorming. Let your flights of fancy take hold and write them down. Don't kick out any idea as being too far-fetched or unworkable—just let the creativity flow. This shouldn't take more than 5 or 10 minutes for a weekly session. Then set those ideas aside, maybe even overnight. Look at them later with fresh eyes and start pruning ideas. Always keep your characters in mind. The biggest advantage that a regular session DM has over the adventure designer is the intimate knowledge about the characters in the game. An adventure writer has to make something an adventure interesting for every character (and every type of player). You can make your challenges and story more forthright in its design. Once you have pruned, you'll find you have a pretty good outline for a session's story and challenges. The next thing you do is start gathering your assets. By that I mean that you should find or create the stat blocks, traps, hazards, terrain, skill challenges, miniatures, and Dungeon Tiles you need for the session. Once you have the outline and your assets in place, you have enough to run the adventure. Leave the rest for when you actually want to get an adventure published in *Dungeon*.

How Do I Get Good?

Our group has a problem. When we finish a campaign, we can't agree on who will be DM the next one. Now I've offered to DM, though I have no actual experience as a DM other than running an adventure from Dungeon Delve. So before I go and either kill off the entire party, get them into awkward situations, or anything else a proper DM should avoid, I'd like some advice on how to be a good DM.

—Kenlar

Sometimes the best way to learn a new skill is through imitation. You might want to consider running either the Scales of War adventure path, start with *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell*, or run the Chaos Scar adventures. At the very least, reading those adventures should give you some general ideas of how an adventure should run. As you become more comfortable with the flow of adventure design you will find that you'll want to make adjustments to the published adventures to suite your group and their play style. Adjustments and creativity will eventually lead you to create your own adventures. Start with plenty of aids and the work of other designers. Become comfortable running a game, and given enough time you will feel confident enough to fly freely with your own design.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland caught the D&D bug at an impressionable age. Once the content manager for the RPGA, and a developer for the 4th Edition D&D rules, he is now a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast, Paizo Publishing, and is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrogard. During the daylight hours he teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.

EPISODE 28: QUEST LOG

BY JAMES WYATT

illustration by Wayne England

Two sessions done, I'm gearing up for number 3, and somehow I feel like I'm not getting enough of this game. A monthly game can be tricky to sustain. The ones I've played in help pull that off by playing all day Saturday, but the schedules of my players don't allow for that, alas. We might just have to start trying to play more often.

So last time, the adventurers found themselves washed up on a beach. Kobolds came and raided the camp, stealing some of the precious supplies the characters had rescued from the ship. After driving off the raiders, the characters climbed to the top of the island, where they found a temple erected at the mouth of a volcanic crater.

World development sometimes happens on the fly. I knew ahead of time that these kobolds were fire cultists—the slingers were armed with only fire pots, and the skirmishers were doing some fire damage as well. Inside the temple, fire elementals and fire beetles joined the fun alongside more kobolds. And during the first fight, I had the kobolds talking about the “Fire Lord.”

When someone made an Arcana or Religion check, I had to speak intelligently about this Fire Lord. And I made a snap decision. See, in the Aquela setting of old, almost all of the gods were named after constellations, from Eridana (Eridanus), who has morphed into Erathis, to Aquela himself (Aquila). The four Elementals—who I now describe as primordials

who joined the side of the gods during the Dawn War—were Aquela (water), Delphinus (earth), Ara (air), and Vela (fire). But I decided, pretty much on the spur of the moment, that the fire “god” was now named Imix.

Yeah, that Imix—the one who appears prominently in *Monster Manual 3* as one of the Princes of Elemental Evil.

I'm still not sure that was the right decision. It puts an evil light on one of the Elementals that was never present before and begs the question of why this Prince of Elemental Evil might have joined forces with the gods. It might cut off any possibility of my using Tharizdun and the Temple of Elemental Evil in my campaign without pretty heavy modification. And it upsets the gender balance of the Elementals!

But hey, I think I can live with it and build on it. Part of the whole philosophy of cooperative world-building and storytelling that's developed in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* is to welcome those spur-of-the-moment inventions, whether they come from players or from some random generator in your own mind. What if Imix was secretly in league with the Elder Elemental Eye even while making overtures to the gods? Aquela, Ara, and Delphinus (or whatever name I eventually give the air and earth Elementals) might still have come to the bargaining table with the best intentions, but Imix could be a traitor.

At any rate, I introduced the story idea of cultists who are trying to restart the Dawn War by “freeing” the Elementals from the control of Erathis and turning them against the gods once more. More seeds are planted for stories to grow out of.

QUESTS

Speaking of story seeds, one of the things I did to prepare for the last session was type up quest cards to help the players keep track of the various goals they might choose to pursue. Here are a couple of examples:

MAJOR QUEST: RETRIEVE THE TOME

Arcane Apprentice background—Valanri (Amy)
Find the *Tome of Striking Lightning* and return it to Laurish Samprey in Angleburg. The tome lies in an ancient tower in the heart of the Bloodwhisper Forest near Haven.

Reward: 125 XP per character

This quest was embedded in the Arcane Apprentice background that Amy chose for her character. It's the reason she was on the ship bound for Haven, but if the other characters help her complete it, they'll all get XP.

MINOR QUEST: WHAT'S IN THE CHEST?

Find a way to open the chest you lifted from the hold of the *Cresting Wave*.

Reward: 125 XP

This one was based on the actions that A's rogue (who has a name, which I have written down, but it's not here with me) took during the first session. He was poking around the ship's cargo hold while the pirates were attacking, looking for anything valuable he could abscond with. I told him he found a small chest, and he made off with it.

Then I made a note to myself to figure out what's inside. (I wrote, "It should get him into trouble—but the kind of trouble that draws him into the story.") As I was getting ready for the next session, I was thinking about it, but I didn't come up with anything really cool. So I decided to put it off, and I added this quest as a way to keep up A's interest in the chest without nailing down what's in it just yet. I also don't know yet what he's going to have to do to open it, but for that I might just wait until he tries something really cool.

MAJOR QUEST: STOP THE KOBOLDS

Stop the kobolds that have been raiding the survivors of the ship and retrieve the goods they stole.

Reward: 125 XP per character

Here's the quest I gave them after the first kobold encounter. It was just a simple way to encourage them to follow the kobold trail up to the temple.

MAJOR QUEST: CHAOS IN THE FEN

Drive the bullywugs that destroyed Fenrise back into the Chaosreek Fen.

Reward: 150 XP per character, and Jessie will earn the rank of knight-errant in the Knights of the Green Flame.

I haven't given out this quest yet. It's tied to Carlos's background (the Refugee background—he came from Fenrise) and to Jessie's objective (she has the Aspirant Knight background). When Jessie reaches Haven and talks to Sir Brendan, he'll give her this quest as a test to prove her readiness to advance to the next higher rank in the Order of the Green Flame.

In all, I wrote up ten quests and gave out nine of them in our last session. Five quests are tied directly to character backgrounds (including Chaos in the Fen, which is really tied to two of the backgrounds). Three are tied to events in the first session, including a major quest to kill Korthos Blooddrinker. (I put a note on that card warning the players that they wouldn't be able to accomplish that quest until they were higher level). One more is tied to the events of the second flashback session: find out why cultists of Dagon were trying to kill Garel-Kai in Angleburg. And the last one, Stop the Kobolds, was tied to the events of the second session.

The beauty is that, once the characters defeat the kobolds and find a boat to take them on to Haven, I have no idea which way they're going to go next. Which of these quests (or new ones they acquire in the meantime) will they decide to pursue? That's entirely up to them.

That's where our gaming schedule can actually work pretty strongly to my advantage. Because of the work I outlined last time, creating several dungeons and other adventure areas throughout the "level 1-5 zone" of the archipelago, I have some idea of what the characters will find if they decide to visit the tower in the heart of Bloodwhisper Forest—that's where the hostile elves are. If, in our next session, they managed to clear out the Fire Warren, get to Haven, and strike out into the heart of the forest, I could throw together one elf encounter for the trek through the forest, pretty much on the fly, and get us through the rest of that session. Then I'd have a month to prepare the tower itself, once I know that's where the characters are headed.

There are a couple of tricks to this. I want to make sure that I keep planting story seeds—things like the rogue's stolen chest—and keep the overall story of the campaign moving forward. I want to make sure that each little adventure leads them on to more adventures. Once the characters clear the kobolds and elementals out of the Fire Warren, I need to plant another mystery or quest hook inside the temple, something that raises questions or spurs them on to further action, even as the players and their characters are enjoying the satisfaction of completing their first adventure and reaching 2nd level. I haven't figured out yet what that's going to be, so that's high on my to-do list before our next game.

I want the players to feel like there's a whole world out there for them to explore, and they can choose their own destiny to a certain extent by determining what quests they're going to pursue. On the other hand, I need to make sure that I don't overwhelm them by giving them so many quests that they can't decide what to do next or despair of ever completing them all.

DUNGEON DRESSING, REVISITED

Remember a couple of months ago when I talked about [the importance of sprinkling interesting elements on an encounter map](#)? Well, I often use pre-printed poster maps for encounters, and this last session was no exception. For the encounters on the shore (first kruthiks, then kobolds), I used the Forest Cliff Lair map, which originally appeared in *Fantastic Locations: Dragondown Grotto* and reappeared in *Keep on the Shadowfell*. I told the players that the river represented the coast of the island, so the smaller land mass wasn't there. But there was that unexplained blue circle of runes and standing stones.

At some point, naturally, the players started asking questions about the blue circle. I had nothing prepared—I was completely making things up as I went along. But first some Arcana checks revealed that it was made to contain a fire and draw power from it. They decided to build a fire inside the circle, so I described how the flames burned hot and green, but none of the heat escaped the circle, and the runes started glowing with power. They tried throwing the chest in the fire to see if that would open it. That might have qualified as “trying something really cool,” if I had yet figured out what was inside. But

instead, I used that as an opportunity to make the fire creepy: the flames seemed to reach out to welcome the chest, and the characters heard whispers about the Fire Lord. Something suggested that the fire was channeling power to or from the Elemental Chaos. At that point, they decided to extinguish the flames and retrieve the chest.

All of which is to reiterate what I stated in December: there's a lot of fun to be had in the game, both in and out of the context of combat encounters, when players explore interesting terrain features that appear on the maps in front of them. That's a huge advantage, in my mind, to using artistically-rendered maps on the battle grid, whether it's poster maps or Dungeon Tiles. (If you use Dungeon Tiles, don't neglect the smaller tiles that often include dungeon dressing elements.) If you're less comfortable winging it than I am, it's a good idea to think ahead about the weird magical effects that might arise when the characters go poking around these things. Don't think just in terms of game mechanics but of atmosphere and spectacle (remember, your special effects budget is your players' imaginations and your ability to describe what's happening in an evocative way—spend it all!).

In this case, I was also able to tie the special effects into the story of the adventure, setting up a connection to the Fire Lord and giving the players a chance to ask about that mysterious being outside of a fight with the kobolds and before they got to the temple at the top of the volcano.

That's all for this month. Next time, I should be able to speak with more confidence about the mystery in the depths of the Fire Warren, and report back on which of those story lines my players have decided to follow!

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Creative Manager for D&D R&D at Wizards of the Coast. 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 also contributed to the *Eberron Campaign Setting*, and is the author of several *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* novels set in the world of Eberron.

