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DUNGEON 122 MAY 2005

DUNGEON

ISSUE 122 • MAY 2005

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OF THE
Lost Continent

FINAL RESTING PLACE • FIENDISH FOOTPRINTS • ROOT OF EVIL • EBERRON: RING OF STORMS



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72 THE RING OF STORMS

by Keith Baker

The land of Xen'drik holds many secrets, wonders long forgotten by the children of the modern age. Cyclopean ruins recall the heyday of an empire of giants, whose savage descendents lurk in the shadows of their former glory. Xen'drik also hosts the ruins of a mysterious sect of long-lost elves called the Qabalrin, whose shattered cities lie within the mysterious Ring of Storms. An EBERRON backdrop of exploration and doom straight from the setting's creator!



ADVENTURES

20 FINAL RESTING PLACE

by Michael Kortez

Most adventurers like to think that when their number is finally up, their colleagues will bring them home, either to be resurrected or at least returned to their families for a proper burial. But will the PCs draw the line at hauling an adventurer's corpse out of the Underdark? A D&D adventure for 3rd-level characters.



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by Tito Leati

A tiny map etched onto a small knag of wood puts the PCs on the trail of the *Fiendish Foot*, an item of vast necromantic potential. Will your heroes beat a band of hobgoblins to the *Foot*? And what of the object's vampiric protectors? A D&D adventure for 6th-level characters.



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by Mike Mearls

A sickness festers in the heart of a great city—the demon tree Malgarius spreads its diseased roots through paving stones and courtyards. Only the most powerful adventurers have what it takes to enter the demon tree and return alive. A D&D adventure for 18th-level characters.

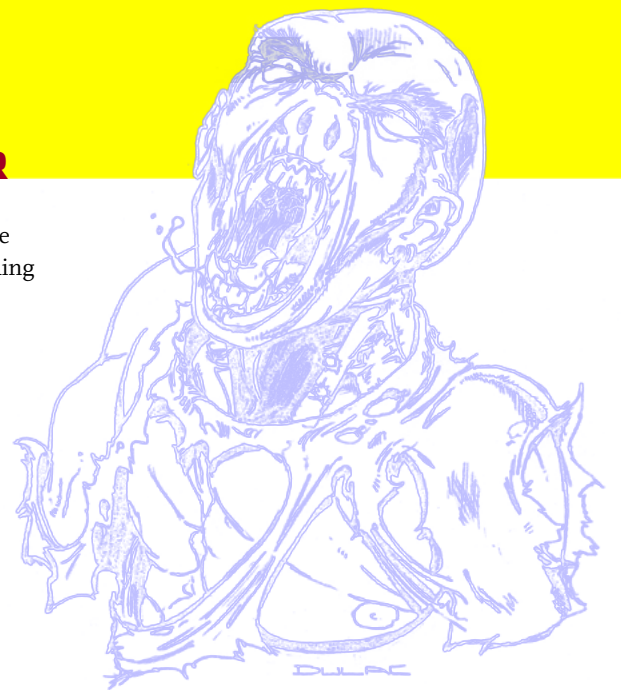


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ON THE COVER

DUNGEON's favorite elf rogue takes on the horrors of the Ring of Storms in this stunning cover by Dan Scott.



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“As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick.”

J.R.R. Tolkien
The Hobbit



DUNGEON ADVENTURE PLAYER REWARDS!

Take advantage of the RPGA's **PLAYER REWARDS** program by scoring points with the adventures from this issue of *DUNGEON!* Each adventure is worth 2 D&D Player Rewards points, and remains active until 6/28/05. Drop by



rpga.com for more details, and use the following adventure codes:

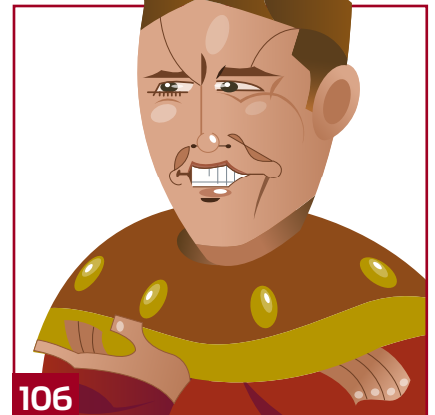
- Final Resting Place (122FP1DN)**
- Fiendish Footprints (122FF1DN)**
- Root of Evil (122RE1DN)**



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YOU CAN'T FORCE IT

The first session of my new Age of Worms Adventure Path playtest campaign was an absolute joy. I slipped right back into the saddle with comfort and aplomb (he said modestly), and the players all felt comfortable in their new skins. Pleasant surprises took the form of young Jeremy Walker's elaborate character background (he's a red-skinned halfling side-show freak), James Jacobs's catty cleric of Wee Jas (with that mysterious sack tucked under her arm), and *DRAGON* Assistant Editor Mike McArtor's ability to play a character with a vow of silence (involving crazy pantomimes and funny looks—no chalk and tablet for our boy Mike). I've smiled a lot thinking about that great session.

Before the game started, I built a huge many-winged chamber from Dwarven Forge Master Maze resin dungeon pieces. A few of the players had never seen anything like it, judging by the dropped jaws. But to get to that room, the eight heroes of our unnamed band had to fight their way through a ravenous pack of wolves. With some clever tactics and a few lucky rolls, all eight of them managed to survive. In a lonely secret corridor, they walked right into the mouth of a trap I'd been giggling about for months. Then, for no reason, in exactly the correct spot, one of them decided to make a Search check, turning up my beautiful pressure plate. Boom. No

more trap. Definitely no more giggles. It was the best first session I've ever had the privilege to run.

As the week went on, work was abuzz with talk of the campaign. The staff fretted over the session's cliffhanger ending. What unseen horror was responsible for the skittering sounds in the darkened shaft? How would the party fare when half of them were in a distant room? The cubicles swelled with anticipation. Both James and Jeremy wrote multi-page in-character accounts of the session and passed them around to the other players. People expected big things. I expected big things.

In the second hour of the second session, in room seven of the Whispering Cairn, the Age of Worms Adventure Path claimed its first PC fatality. That dubious honor goes to the paladin Abelard Albrecht Volker, played by *DRAGON* Assistant Editor Wesley Schneider. The skittering noise from the darkened passage turned out to be a swarm of acid-spitting beetles, and the party fared poorly due to being in two different rooms at a critical moment. Abelard's passing greatly enhanced the tension of the scene, but for me it signaled the start of a real problem. I began to suspect that I had overcompensated for the party's large size. By the time another fight left only one PC standing, I had pretty much confirmed it. My tactical error seriously got in the way of my

enjoyment of the session. But *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* has a way of pulling tricks on you. What seems like a bad session can easily blossom into something else without a moment's notice.

After the desperate fight against the swarms, the hobbled PCs took Abelard's body back to their makeshift headquarters in an abandoned building. There, *DRAGON* Associate Editor Jason Bulmahn's dwarf Gar cobbled together some paint, and walked out to the front of the building. In thick blue paint, he wrote a simple phrase: "Abelard's Band." And the group had a name. An identity. A cause.

Naming a group is an art. In the best case, it's something that just happens. You can't force it. Sometimes, the players resist it, and the campaign can seem to lack a good narrative. Sometimes, the players misfire, and you're stuck with a joke or a clunker. But other times it works perfectly, and defines the campaign. Despite my dumb errors, and perhaps because of them, the campaign hit a major milestone tonight. And it's only the second session.

I love this game.

ERIK

Erik Mona
erik.mona@paizo.com

Tell us what you think of this issue. Write to: Prison Mail, Paizo Publishing, 2700 Richards Road, Suite 201, Bellevue, WA 98005-4200 or send an email to dungeon@paizo.com.

Check out the *Dungeon* messageboards at paizo.com/dungeon

Dungeon



Get Wayne Reynolds to paint a stunning drow beauty on the cover, and they will come. That's the message we took from February's power-packed installment of everyone's favorite D&D magazine. Readers appreciated Wayne's great cover, but they also appreciated the issue's contents, which included the last installment of Greg A. Vaughan's three-part "Istivin: City of Shadows" Campaign Arc. Look for more Campaign Arcs in the latter half of 2005, starting with "Crypt of Crimson Stars," currently set to debut in *DUNGEON* #123 (that's next month, *EBERRON* fans!).

#119 also featured "Unfamiliar Ground," the first-ever adventure from all-star cartographer Christopher West. Readers (and the *DUNGEON* staff) were delighted to learn that Chris is every bit as talented an adventure designer as he is a skillful and inventive cartographer. Keep them coming, Chris!

Newcomer Jack Flynn brought us the "Tomb of Aknar Ratalla," a name so mystifying that we managed to misspell it on the magazine's spine. Anyone care for a game of *EBBERON*?

To top it off, we included part two of the now-complete four-part *WORLD OF GREYHAWK* poster map. The map may have been completed last issue, but we have many, many more surprises in store. Stick with us, and don't forget to tell your friends about the new *DUNGEON*. We'll be here. Waiting.

Back issues of #119 are still available at Paizo.com.



Prison Mail

Illustration by Mike Schley

I Liked Her in Drop Dead Fred

Just finished the wonder that is issue #119. Let the comments fly, you say, and so I shall!

The Cover: Rocked. I prefer this sort of cover—hot drow women—to most any others. Keep them coming.

Unfamiliar Ground: Nice little gobbo runabout, with a very nice twist with the dragon skeleton at the end. Nice to think of all of those players suddenly needing to change their undergarments as the dragon arises. And that illustration of Hezzrack? I loved *Gremlins* too. Whatever happened to Phoebe Cates? She'd make a good drow warrior woman, come to think of it.

Wrath of The Abyss: A solid conclusion to what I found to be a very well thought out, enjoyable adventure. It puts many "epic" adventures to shame. I'll be putting my players—the Pelorian Strike Force!—through this adventure shortly. The poor bastards!

Tomb of Aknar Ratalla: I thought the set up was a bit sketchy at first—some guy just decides to wage war against religion, and somehow manages to get both angels and demons upset with him? All in two paragraphs? The man was nothing but efficient, apparently. But as I read on, I liked this adventure a fair bit. It had some very nasty traps (I particularly liked the sliding floor trap, oh yes) and some nice attempts at diplomacy with the deva

and the ice devil, and I liked the siege aspect that formed the final part of the tale. Even if the origins of this particular badass were intentionally vague for game usage, I would have liked a bit more detail. Small grumble, though.

A good issue. Give yourselves a pat on the back.

Sean Twist
London, Ontario

Map Envy

Now that I have seen such excellent craftwork from the likes of Christopher West and Robert Lazzaretti, I have a really serious inferiority complex looking at the "artwork" (and I use the term loosely) that I produce for my games. What would it take for you to consider doing a few "workshop" articles on mapping techniques put together by these excellent grandmaster cartographers? I can see that you use Campaign Cartographer for maps under some circumstances and maybe some other tools as well. I think that your subscriber base would find this information priceless. A poor workman blames his tools, and damn it, I have all the tools and I *still* have map envy! Any chances I can get on an apprenticeship in one of the guilds these artists belong to?

Kevin Reynolds
Via Email

This Month in Dragon

May #331



DRAGON gives you the best in gaming, presenting new official rules, original game content, great advice, and the perfect inspiration for your D&D game.

The Point of Pole Arms

by Ari Marmell

The awl pike, partisan, and bec de corbin make their return to D&D in this expansive article. Guaranteed to take you back to the day when a 10-minute argument would erupt over which was which, and more importantly, which was better.

Alchemical Charms

by Yuri Pavlotsky

Got a werewolf problem? Pick up a silver charm. Vampire eyeing up your neck? Try a garlic draught. These new alchemical items give you an edge against some of the most diabolical monsters D&D has to offer.

New Uses for Old Equipment

by Mike Mearls

Tired of all that gear that's not doing you any good? Turn your winter blanket into a deadly trap, set up a trip line with your trusty rope, or lay bait with those stale trail rations. Explore all the possibilities to turn your mundane gear into extraordinary gear.

Fast, Furious, and Fantastical

by Frank Brunner

Cruise the dungeon inside your very own beholder-mobile. Ride a carpet of living vermin, glide through the dunes in a sand boat, or sail the seas on a haunted ship. A dozen new vehicles await, as well as some old favorites.

Plus!

The Ecology of the Green Hag, A Novel Approach: *Spiderwick*, and of course, Class Acts, Bazaar of the Bizarre, First Watch, Scale Mail, Sage Advice, and comics.

It's a good idea, and I'll run it by them to see if they're interested. For the record, neither Rob nor Chris use any of the standard RPG mapping programs to produce their masterpieces. I'm afraid the route to perfection is a little less friendly (and a lot more expensive) than that.

Drow Pinups

I was wondering if there was any way to acquire a print or picture of the cover of #119. Is there any way to contact Mr. Wayne Reynolds for such a request, or is that handled through Paizo? Thank you for your help.

Eric Kane
Via Email

I'm afraid that we cannot arrange prints of our cover images, as much as we'd really, really like to. One of these days, we may find a way to offer this service, but it's unfortunately a good ways off. Your best bet is to contact the artists directly by visiting their personal websites. Unfortunately, Wayne does not have a personal website (that we know of), so I'm afraid your quest will have to wait for the time being.

More Critical Threats!

I've just recently become interested in the world of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*. I find it fascinating. I also like the supplementary material provided by *DUNGEON* and *DRAGON*. I've started collecting issues at the relaunch of these titles. Therefore, I have little knowledge of the previous formats. However, I do like the improvements, especially with the bold type fonts, instead of the fancy medieval-looking fonts. It makes reading easier. *DUNGEON* has proven to be a great resource of information and inspiration for my adventures.

By the way, I haven't seen any more "Critical Threat" articles. Will there be more? I hope you didn't get rid of them. I like this part of the magazine.

Thanks and keep up the great work!

Chantit Simma
Via Email

Critical Threats aren't dead, they're just resting. They will return when we've got the right combination of excellent submissions and spare pages.

He Does Maps, Too

Item by item, room by room, map by map, "Unfamiliar Ground" is as tight an adventure as I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Chris West should be congratulated on an excellent first entry into the field of adventure design. Everything in the module made sense and the synergy between rooms was impressive. Challenges and rewards were perfectly balanced. Each encounter was exciting and significant. I have only two more words for Chris: "Bravo" and "More!"

Troy A. Holaday
Muncie, IN

Old School Gamer

Let me start out by saying I like the new changes to *DUNGEON*, for the most part. But before I explain that last bit, let me give you a bit of background. I've been playing D&D on and off since high school (class of '76—I still have the silver *CHAINMAIL* rulebook). Would you believe I'm the youngster in my current group?

However, as a GM, I suspect I'm atypical. My campaign uses a homebrew system. The campaign is low-powered compared to *FORGOTTEN REALMS* or *EBERRON*. A truly legendary character in my world would only rate about 9th level using the core D&D rules. So you see, I can't use *DUNGEON*'s high-level adventures without a lot of work. Even the mid-level adventures may be unusable if they're on the high end. In addition, the "feel" of the *EBERRON* adventures doesn't fit my world very well, especially the warforged race. The setting and adventures are interesting, but too "far out" for my campaign.

So essentially, I have only one adventure I can use per issue. I would prefer more low-level adventures than epic level ones. But that's just my preference, and I wouldn't expect it to be worth much as an indicator of the general readership's preferences.

However, I really like the articles you've added. They are well written and general enough for me to use. They're the reason I've kept my subscription going.

Anyway, I just wanted to throw in my two bronze pieces worth (we're on a silver, not gold, standard).

Ken Angers
Via Email

We try to pack *DUNGEON* with the best value for all D&D players, which is to say folks who use the full rules (including all 20 levels). We're glad that the additional articles are enough to keep you coming back for more, though. I'd encourage you to take a closer look at our *EBERRON* offerings, and you might be surprised just how adaptable they really are. Issue #115's "Steel Shadows," for example, deals almost exclusively with warforged NPCs and villains, but the plot itself remains useful even if you change the living constructs to,

say, decommissioned orc mercenaries living in the aftermath of a major military conflict. Changing around *DUNGEON* adventures to make them work for your campaign is usually a lot easier than it looks.

Retro: Wave of the Future!

I have read on the *DUNGEON* messageboards at Paizo.com that Prison Mail has not been getting the volume of letters it once did, though it was stated that this could be because readers are happier than

ever, so I thought I would oblige you with my first letter to Prison Mail.

I have been a reader of *DUNGEON* since issue #16, though I have never subscribed. I have stayed with the magazine through all of the high and low points of its history. I have seen changes good and bad over these years and I must say that the most recent changes to your magazine are the best changes since glossy paper and color illustrations arrived in *DUNGEON*. What makes me say this? Well, Erik Mona's "From the Editor" in issue #119 made me think about why I buy *DUNGEON*.

I have been DMing since 1982, and have always been on the lookout for "stuff I can use™." *DUNGEON* has usually provided me with that. Sure, there were a few periods when I found very little I could use for a span of three or four issues, but then the dry spell would end and the useful content would return. I do use published adventures, though they are usually heavily modified and sometimes unrecognizable, and *DUNGEON* adventures can usually be dropped right into an ongoing campaign. If not, then an encounter, item, or location can be included. You see, I am a DM who works long hours in a demanding profession and I do not have the time I had when I was younger to prepare for my weekly session.

The changes I like in the new *DUNGEON*?

I like the specialization of content between *DUNGEON* and *DRAGON*. It means getting my DM stuff in one magazine. Not only do I get adventures, creatures, maps, etc., but I also get useful articles like *Dungeoncraft* and even a bit of humorous light reading in *Wil Save*, which I usually read first.

I like the inclusion of adventures, campaigns and articles that reflect the history of the game. I loved "Maure Castle," the feature on the Isle of Dread, the 30 Greatest Adventures, and the mini-campaign based in Istivin, and I'm immensely enjoying the return of more adventures with a *GREYHAWK* flavor and/or placement. Even the "other" adventures seem to have a retro flavor to them, which I like.

I love the *GREYHAWK* poster map. My original *GREYHAWK* map, from the old folio, graced my wall over 20 years ago and had a pin stuck in it to mark the location of every

ORIGINS/DUNGEON MAGAZINE SIDE TREK DESIGN COMPETITION

ORIGINS

Think you've got what it takes to design a killer short adventure? *Origins* and *DUNGEON* magazine have teamed up to present the *Origins/DUNGEON* Side Trek Design Competition, an open call inviting readers of this magazine to pit their favorite original encounter area against all comers. The author of the best short adventure (as determined by judges from *Origins* and *DUNGEON*) will receive an "all-expenses-paid" trip to this year's *Origins* International Game Expo, which takes place June 30 to July 3rd at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, in Columbus, Ohio. You'll have a front row seat to special writing seminars, will get a seat at the Guest of Honor banquet, and will have your encounters realized in three glorious dimensions for a special gaming event at the show. Plus, we'll print your submission in our September issue, with a full-page map by a top fantasy cartographer.

Two runners up will receive free four-day passes to this year's show and a seat at the special game event and writing program.

We're looking for fun, innovative design featuring concepts that

have not been seen in the pages of *DUNGEON* or elsewhere. Surprise us, and you may be on your way to the preeminent game-playing consumer convention in North America.

Submissions should include a full-page map and no more than five distinct encounter areas. Check out the formatting notes in the *DUNGEON* Submission Guidelines at paizo.com/dungeon. Entries will be judged for creativity and rules balance. Please limit entries to one submission per person. Submissions must be in English, and must be provided in electronic form. The contest is open to residents of the United States, Canada, and Mexico only. All submissions must be accompanied by a signed Standard Disclosure Form, as found in the Submission Guidelines. All submissions must be limited to 3,000 words or less.

Mail Contest Entries to:

Origins/Paizo Writing Contests
GAMA
280 North High St, Ste 230
Columbus OH 43215

Or send via e-mail attachment to:
Programs@gama.org

All entries must be received by 5/9/05 to be considered eligible.

Next Month in Dungeon

June #123

Quicksilver Hourglass

by Anson Caralya

Hidden between the planes of existence and behind time itself, the Quicksilver Hourglass has kept its terrible prisoner obscured from reality. Yet now, the leader of a transplanar conspiracy of vampiric masterminds has invaded this ancient prison, intent on unleashing a wretched doom upon the multiverse. An epic D&D adventure for 30th-level characters.

Salvage Operation

by Mike Mearls

Many moons ago, a powerful merchant's fortunes collapsed as a ship filled with his wares vanished. Four days ago, the missing ship was spotted, listing terribly and adrift at sea. The merchant gathers the last of his resources to mount an expedition to the ship. Are your players prepared for what lurks inside the slowly sinking derelict? A D&D adventure for 2nd-level characters.

Crypt of Crimson Stars

by Andy Collins and James Wyatt

Rumors of an Eberron dragonshard of enormous size and power have reached the ears of Tophran Damilek, one of Sharn's wealthiest citizens. Unfortunately, the shard seems to be concealed within a trap-laden temple-tomb located below a village of cruel halfling nomads and their dinosaur pets. "Crypt of Crimson Stars" is the first installment of the three-part "Shards of Eberron" Campaign Arc, which debuted at Gen Con Indy 2004 as the official D&D Open tournament, sponsored by the RPGA. An Eberron adventure for 6th-level characters.

The Amarantha Agenda

by Phillip Larwood

What happens when a sinister conjurer catches a dryad and manages to bind her fey spirit to a carnivorous tree from the Abyss? The caretakers of Heartwood Grove found out the hard way. Can the PCs reclaim this sacred elven site from its corrupted mistress before she extends her powers even further? A D&D adventure for four 13th-level characters.

GREYHAWK-based adventure. That map is long gone and was replaced by the map from the GREYHAWK boxed set. Now I have a map that contains the locations and doesn't have a bunch of holes in it or markings on it.

What would I like to see? I am glad you asked.

I would *love* to see an article that dissects either an old adventure or one from the current issue and gives ideas for using it, or even parts of it, in existing campaigns. It could be one or two pages in length.

I would love to see conversions of old DUNGEON adventures on your website.

I would love to see more updates of classic adventures, and adventures using classic villains, NPCs, creatures, and classic settings.

Thanks for reinventing DUNGEON. Keep up the good work!

Darren G. Miller
Myrtle Beach, SC

Thanks, Greg!

I just received issue #119 in the mail, and all I can say is "wow!" Perhaps ironically, this is my first time to ever write to Prison Mail in any of its incarnations or, in fact, to the publishers of DUNGEON at all in any role other than that of wanna-be-and-usually-unsuccessful writer (a streak stretching back more than 15 years). However, I feel I must finally speak my peace.

DUNGEON has enjoyed a string of great editors and staffs through the years, with none perhaps equaling the current crew. The vision of Mona, Jacobs, Glenn, et al., has truly brought about a DUNGEON renaissance. My hat is off to these individuals that take the often-banal that is offered and make it magic. I can attest to their talents in regards to my own submissions, which I strive to make palatable to the public only to eagerly open the finished product and find the results far superior to anything I could have done.

I've read many opinions in these letters, as well as on the messageboards, that harp on the magazine's gems and warts. They are all legitimate opinions but seem to mainly focus on minutiae. So let me now say what I believe many of us out here think. Erik and crew, you have done a fantastic job. We all have our pet topics and will continue to nitpick you to death over every detail, but stay the course. And know that most of us only complain because we care. The quality of the magazine has continuously improved in the last few years. Going monthly, the Adventure Path, the Top 30, "Maure Castle," the GREYHAWK maps—you have brought us great stuff. The cover of #119 might be one of the best I have ever seen. It compares back to classics like #24 (probably the best ever), #20, and #1. Even Wil Save in this issue seemed like it was finally finding its voice.

In short, keep up the good work. Thanks for listening to all of us and knowing when to not take our criticism to heart. Though I will be somewhat saddened to pick up issue #120 and not find one of my adventures therein (something for which everyone else will likely be mightily relieved), I look forward to it nonetheless with ever-increasing excitement about where DUNGEON has been and where it is going. So, thanks from an old gamer and a new fan all over again.

P.S. Sorry so long-winded (what a surprise, huh?)

Greg A. Vaughan
Via Email

And thanks to you, Greg. Working with the current DUNGEON team has been the highlight of my professional career, and I couldn't be happier with the magazine than I've been over the last year and a half. Wouldja believe me if I said you ain't seen nothing yet?—Erik Mona

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH DUNGEON

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FINAL RESTING PLACE

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ANY SETTING, LOW-LEVEL (1ST–5TH), DUNGEON CRAWL



Most adventurers like to think that when their number is finally up, their colleagues will return them home, either to be raised from the dead or at least returned to their families for a proper burial. But how far will the PCs go in order to do right by a fallen adventurer? And will they draw the line at hauling his body out of the Underdark?

“Final Resting Place” is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure designed for four 3rd-level characters, scalable for levels 1–5. As an “any setting” adventure, it can be deposited into any game world. The DM can run “Final Resting Place” as a stand-alone adventure or use it to introduce the PCs to a larger, growing illithid threat.

Adventure Background

After Kai Rifter’s wife passed away, he took up the dangerous mantle of a solo adventurer, completing one high-risk assignment after another, attempting to fulfill his secret wish that he might one day re-join his beloved in the afterlife with honor. Kai’s wish was finally granted after he sought out a particularly nasty mindflayer named Sae’Taz.

Kai discovered that a powerful illithid elder-brain had assigned Sae’Taz to design a small, experimental army of enslaved troglodytes with illithid grafts. Satisfied with the troglodytes’ ability to survive the grafting process and their susceptibility to psionic control, Sae’Taz began to conduct a series of test raids on the surface.

Once Kai located Sae’Taz’s lair, he was able to use a *ring of chameleon power* to disguise himself as a troglodyte and sneak close enough to surprise the illithid. A pitched battle ensued and as a final act before Kai succumbed to the flayer’s *mind blast*, Kai threw his *bead of force* at his own feet and took both Sae’Taz and himself to the grave.

Once the troglodyte brigade shook off the illithid’s yoke, they quickly came to see Kai Rifter as their liberator. The way they saw it, Kai was a troglodyte martyr, cursed into human form by the dreaded Sae’Taz. Kai’s battered body was placed in a coffin, lathered with troglodyte musk, and set in a place of honor at the head of the troglodyte’s cavern, the Great Grotto.

When Kai's niece, a young diviner named Hrodel, discovered her Uncle wasn't coming back, she unsealed her Uncle's last will and testament. The will confirmed what she had long suspected: that Kai Rifter wanted nothing more than to be buried alongside his beloved wife in the cemetery of his home town.

Adventure Synopsis

After she reads her uncle's will, Hrodel uses divination magic to uncover the fate of her uncle's corpse. Mortified by what she finds, she hires the PCs to sneak into the troglodyte camp, retrieve his body, and bring it back so that her uncle can be laid to rest.

Meanwhile, the illithid-grafted troglodytes have decided to leave the site of their enslavement to find a new home for their clan. But before they leave the Great Grotto forever, they plan to honor their fallen liberator with the traditional funeral rite of the Hellmusk Clan, cremation in a giant flaming pyre. The approaching ceremony leaves the PCs with only a little time to save Kai's body. The final complication is a half-illithid svirfneblin scout sent by the elder brain to investigate Sae'Taz's sudden disappearance.

The PCs descend to the Great Grotto through a series of caverns and then

steal Kai Rifter's coffin from under the watch of the liberated Hellmusk Clan. They must find a way to do so before the funeral rite begins and Kai Rifter's corpse is consumed.

They must then escape to the surface, with Kai's body in tow, while fending off the pursuit of the enraged troglodytes. They will also have to contend with the elder brain's scout as he stalks the PCs as part of his attempt to unravel the mystery behind Sae'Taz's defeat.

Adventure Hooks

"Final Resting Place" begins as the PCs cross paths with Hrodel and are recruited to retrieve Kai Rifter's corpse. A few possible adventure hooks are outlined below.

- Hrodel knows she needs good help fast. A divination spell puts her on the trail of the PCs. She learns of the PCs' last adventure, satisfies herself that they are both kind-spirited and resourceful, and determines to contact them.
- Rifter was an old mentor for one of the PCs. (Kai Rifter's exact class is unimportant; it has deliberately been left vague and can be customized to match the background of an appropriate PC.) Hrodel remembers the PC as a friend of her uncle's from when she was a little girl. Perhaps Kai even named the PC in his will and he stands to inherit one of Kai's minor magic items, such as Rifter's old lucky backpack (a *Heward's handy haversack*). But since Kai had his pack with him when he died, to recover the gift, the PC will first need to retrieve Kai.
- The PCs are following-up on a rumor of an ancient journal, bound in black gorgon scales, containing a faded map with a collection of riddles that they need to succeed in their next adventure. Their sources reveal that the adventurer Kai Rifter uncovered the journal several months ago. The PCs' efforts to find Kai lead them to Hrodel. Hrodel cannot be certain, but has a vague recollection that her uncle took a black metallic journal with him when he last set out.

CHAPTER ONE: YOU WANT US TO GO WHERE?

The adventure begins with the PCs' arrival in the aging hamlet of Galehaven. Whether Hrodel sought out the PCs or they contacted her, she arranges a meeting at True Quell, Galehaven's cemetery, early in the morning.

Hrodel leads the PCs to the empty plot Kai reserved for himself. It rests right next to his wife, herself a victim of a plague several years ago. Hrodel pulls a worn leather scroll tube from inside her cloak and fingers it sadly before addressing the PCs:

"After my aunt died, Uncle Kai was never the same. He loved her deeply. It was that rare kind of love the bards sing about. He resigned from his adventuring band, the Last Men Standing, and started going it alone. After a while I came to suspect that somewhere inside he didn't really want to come back. It seemed like every time he went out he was looking for something bigger and bigger. After a time, he wouldn't tell me where he was going. His outings crossed the line. Once, he even came back with a searing wound from what I later determined was a beholder's eye ray. I designed a hearth crystal with a spell that would throb each time he was in danger so I could scry and then make sure help was on the way. But it never really worked: the hearth crystal was throbbing almost constantly and it took me too long to locate him. I tried to talk him out of his adventuring. I told him it was time to retire. I swear I did, but he just wouldn't listen. Three nights ago the hearth crystal shattered and I knew—I just knew."

At this point, Hrodel withdraws a yellowed piece of parchment from the leather scroll tube and hands it to the PCs. Inscribed on the parchment is Kai's last will and testament.

Hrodel waits for the PCs to finish reading over the will before she continues:

"With magic, I was able to locate his body. He's not quite a quarter-mile underground, in a massive cavern of some kind. And he's not alone. These reptilian humanoid creatures have him. Lizardfolk, I think. I couldn't

Galehaven

👑 **Galehaven (Hamlet):** Conventional; AL NG; 200 gp limit; Assets 6,700 gp; Population 364; Isolated (Human 95%, elf 3%, halfling 2%).

Authority Figures: Rafton Castlecutter, Mayor (NG male human commoner 4); Rascine "Rex" Kell, Guard Captain (LG female human ranger 1/warrior 2).

Important Characters: Hrodel Vance (NG female human diviner 7); Gyshaunt (NG male half-elf cleric 5).

Notes: Even though it sits on the outskirts of civilized lands, Galehaven is still a sleepy town, only dimly aware of the considerable protection it has enjoyed from Kai Rifter over the years.

get a very good look at them, but they have some kind of a crest on their heads. It's horrible what they've done to him. They've put Uncle Kai in a box, a coffin of some kind, and then mounted the coffin on a bed of sticks as part of some sick ritual. I also now know how Kai got down there. There's a shaft of some kind. It's deep. I can tell you where to find the entrance. I need someone to go down there and get his body. Uncle Kai did a lot for me and a lot for this town. He deserves to have his final wish carried out. He needs to be buried here, at home, where his heart has been for a long time."

After she finishes her plea, Hrodel asks the PCs if they have any questions about her request. If the PCs raise the issue of a reward, Hrodel offers 900 gp from her inheritance, once Kai's body is returned to his grave. She hints that the hamlet might pitch in something too, but she hasn't spoken to them yet. The PCs should pick up on the fact that Kai's death has not left Hrodel in the mood to haggle and if the PCs are persistent she thanks them for their time and seeks help elsewhere.

The PCs may also ask why Hrodel has not called upon the Last Men Standing, Kai's old adventuring band, to carry out this task. Hrodel explains that the Last Men Standing have retired and are now scattered all over the world.

If the PCs agree to help, Hrodel gives them directions to the passageway Kai used to descend into the Underdark. If the party needs some extra help, Hrodel can also loan them her *wand of levitation* (with 7 charges). A party low on magic or muscle may not be able to haul Kai's body to the surface without the wand.

If the PCs investigate Kai Rifter's reputation around Galehaven, they learn (Gather Information check DC 10) that he was widely regarded as a local hero, though he had something of a grim disposition after his wife was lost to the plague.

Cavern Entrance

Hrodel's directions lead the PCs to a forested game trail. After a two-day trip, the trail breaks from the woods and takes them to the hill that contains the cavern's entrance.



Hrodel

Kai's Last Will and Testament

My dear Hrodel, I know these last few months have been especially difficult for you. But take heart, and know as you read these words I am finally at peace. Since Lyra died, I have wished only to escape from this life with honor, that I might have relief from the ever-present sorrow that burdens my soul. To you, I commit all my earthly possessions. This should allow you to live out the rest of your days in peace and security. I have only one last request of you, my darling; the doom of an adventurer is often to die far from home, unburied and forsaken. I beg of you, if you would honor my memory, to retrieve my body from whatever pit or mountain it may lie upon, and return it here to Galehaven. Lay me to rest beside my wife, so that my spirit may be reunited with hers forever.

The Waterfall Caverns



Up ahead, it is easy to tell that one of the moor's hillocks has recently been inhabited. Broken and discarded weapons and equipment litter the ground surrounding a wooden door leading directly into the side of the hill.

The largest hillock has been hollowed-out and now contains a guard cavern complete with arrow slits. Once manned by enslaved troglodytes on round-the-clock shifts, the hut has now been abandoned. Inside the hut the PCs find traces of its past inhabitants: a weapons rack still containing seven javelins, a trapper's net, a large metal water pitcher, and the remnants of some climbing equipment including a 50-foot coil of rope. A crude trap door in the floor (Search DC 10) covers a ladder descending to a natural passageway leading to the waterfall caverns that descend to Sae'Taz's outpost.

CHAPTER TWO: THE WATERFALL CAVERNS

To retrace Kai's steps, the PCs must navigate a twisted cavern complex, originally

carved by an ancient waterfall. The river has diminished over the years, but the fall is still present and there are several challenging stretches of spelunking. Fortunately, the Hellmusk Clan has secured ropes and ladders to the cavern walls in the most difficult areas. Nevertheless, a fall could be serious for low-level PCs, and wise parties will rope up rather than free climb.

PCs who are prepared to take their time over the more difficult stretches may take 10 when negotiating the climbs. PCs fleeing back to the surface with Kai Rifter's body while under pursuit, however, will not have that luxury (See Chapter Four).

Climbing PCs who succeed on a Wisdom check (DC 15), or who have the scent ability, detect a pattern: the most dangerous passages all seem to have a trace of a wretched-smelling odor. The troglodytes have been navigating the waterfall caverns on their way to and from the surface for months, and the trickier stretches cause them to reflexively deposit their stench.

Repeated exposure has left permanent traces of musk on some of the cavern rock. A successful DC 12 Knowledge (nature) check identifies the stink as troglodyte musk.

A. The Source of the Waterfall

At this point, the tunnel floor drops away completely. A pool of dark water froths and bubbles madly seventy-five feet below. On the far side of the cave a spectacular waterfall plummets from a crack near the top of the cave. A faint mist of spray hangs in the air, and the roar coming from the waterfall is nearly overwhelming.

A securely knotted rope enables a climber to quickly descend from this overhang, 75 feet to the cave floor (Climb check DC 5).

B. The Flywalk (EL 3)

The rushing water disappears beneath an overhang of rock directly below the cave floor.

The troglodytes have wrapped a 60-foot-long rope ladder around this overhang and spiked it in place. The ladder can support 350 pounds. The PCs can use the ladder to descend with a DC 15 Climb check. Anyone who is not roped-up that fails a check by 5 or more drops into the water below. A DC 15 Swim check enables the PC to exit the torrent of water before being swept away into the oblivion of the Underdark.

Creature: PCs who study the waterfall carefully (Spot check DC 20) detect an anomalous current of white-water traveling upward, resisting the water's natural flow. A restless water elemental has been traveling up and down the length of the fall as it waits for one of its kin to arrive in just a few hundred more years. Unless attacked or spoken to, the elemental simply ignores the PCs and continues its perpetual circuit. If the PCs communicate with it in Aquan and its attitude is adjusted from indifferent to at least friendly (Diplomacy check DC 15), the elemental can describe the various trips the "stinky solid walkers" (the Hellmusk Clan) have made up and down the caverns in the past few months. If the PCs are able to describe Kai Rifter, the elemental can confirm that Rifter made the descent approximately a week ago. The elemental's circuit takes it the entire length of the waterfall, so if the PCs fail to spot the elemental here, it may also be encountered at areas **D** and **H**.

➤ **Medium Water Elemental:** hp 30; *Monster Manual* 100.

Tactics: If attacked, the elemental uses its drench ability to douse any fire-based light sources and then tries to bull rush PCs into the water.

C. Vertical Shaft

A round hole in the cavern floor drops away into blackness. Narrow handholds have been chiseled into one wall of the pit.

The troglodytes have chiseled notches for hand and footholds into this vertical 120-foot deep shaft (Climb DC 10). At the bottom of the shaft, the handholds continue down the side of a massive stalactite to the cave floor below. At this point, travelers have a choice between two routes.

A DC 20 Survival check by someone with the Track feat reveals that the route (leading toward the sound of the waterfall) is more heavily traveled. The other route leads to area **I**, which may be impassable to a low-level party.

D. Through the Waterfall

The passageway up ahead is blocked by a wall of cascading water gushing from the cavern roof directly down into a dark pit below. A rickety-looking rope bridge spans the pit, its boards shiny with moisture.

A sturdy, 40-foot rope bridge able to support up to 500 pounds has been strung across the pit, just east of the waterfall. A successful DC 8 Balance check enables a character to maintain his footing on the slippery bridge. Anyone failing this check by 5 or more must make a DC 10 Reflex save to make a desperate grab for the rope bridge before being swept away into the pit and a harrowing fall of thousands of feet into a lightless Underdark ocean.

➤ **Rope bridge:** Hardness 0; hp 15; Break DC 27.

E. Treacherous Footing

An unstable-looking layer of scree and loose rocks covers the sloping floor of this cavern, ending in an enormous crumbling pit far below.

Part of the cave's roof collapsed decades ago. The rubble makes for difficult terrain and reduces a traveler's speed by half. Fortunately, the rubble is in fact quite stable, and there's no chance of it crumbling further.

F. Rope Ladder

This sloping chamber ends in a deep, forty-foot-diameter pit. A rope ladder hangs from the lip of the shaft, extending into darkness.

The rope ladder reduces the Climb check of this ninety-foot deep shaft to DC 5. Without it, it's a DC 15 Climb check.

G. The False Roper

A curious stalagmite in the center of the winding passage looms a full three feet taller than the rest of the rock formations that dot the cavern. More importantly, thin rows of tiny jagged teeth line the stalagmite about four feet off the ground. Above the teeth a single, small, unmoving eye stares ahead blankly.

By carving a set of fake teeth into a stalagmite with a chisel and adding an eyeball, the Hellmusk Clan has made this fake roper to deter intruders. Naturally, the stalagmite does not respond to attacks or attempts to communicate. When examined up close, the PCs can see the teeth are carvings. A tiny socket has been hollowed out and a decomposing eyeball has been placed inside.

H. The Narrow Ledge

The passageway intersects a vertical column of water descending from above. A narrow ledge skirts the edge of the pit around the waterfall.

The narrow ledge is approximately 11 inches wide. The constant mist from the waterfall has coated the ledge with moisture; a successful DC 8 Balance check is required to negotiate the ledge. Failure by 5 or more forces a DC 10 Reflex save; failure sends the PC over the edge into the waterfall. On the far side, the spray has formed a small stream that drains into a reservoir in the Great Grotto (see Chapter Three, below). If the PCs follow the stream they reach the rubble cone (area 1).

I. The Transport Shaft

The passageway suddenly terminates as it intersects a vertical shaft. The cylindrical tube stretches up and down into the darkness as far as the eye can see. Unnaturally smooth, the shaft's width appears to be uniformly ten feet in diameter along its entire length.

This vertical tube enabled Sae'Taz to levitate troops and supplies from its

outpost directly to the surface. Climbing the shaft is impossible without magical aid. PCs casting light sources far enough up the shaft may spy other natural passageways (area J) intersecting the transport shaft.

The transport shaft itself, however, is not entirely natural. Sae'Taz forced the Hellmusk Clan's shaman to widen and sculpt the shaft with *stone shape* spells over several weeks of work. Ultimately, Sae'Taz decided to eat the shaman's brain, as the shaman's high Wisdom score made him less susceptible to the illithid's psionics (Sae'Taz was nothing if not practical).

Although the shaft eventually connects to the surface, a 200-pound slab of rock blocks the exit. Sae'Taz would levitate the slab to open and then seal the shaft. The bottom of the shaft opens into the roof of the Great Grotto, ending in a 110-foot drop to the cavern floor.

◆ **Rock Slab:** 3 in. thick; Hardness 8; hp 45; Break DC 26.

J. Empty Tunnels

These steep sloping caverns intersect with both the Great Grotto (area 9), as well as the transport shaft (area I).

CHAPTER THREE: THE GREAT GROTTA

The cramped rock corridor suddenly opens into a vast natural cavern. The stalactite-covered ceiling towers fifty feet above, and the rough cavern floor lies a full fifty feet below. Nothing can be heard but the roar of falling water. In the distance, a few hundred feet off to the left, the cavern branches off into a thick grove of giant mushrooms, each bathed in a weak, white, phosphorescent light. Farther ahead on the right side of the cavern, a second branch of the cave breaks off. A harsh indigo glow beckons from around the corner. Deep in the recesses of the cave, the bright glow of a large fire is clearly visible.

This massive, multi-branched cavern served as the staging area for Sae'Taz's surface raids and experiments. Now that Sae'Taz is dead, it remains the temporary home of the Hellmusk Clan. The

description above presumes the PCs reach the Great Grotto from the east passageway of the waterfall caverns (area H).

All Listen checks in the Great Grotto suffer a -4 penalty. Not only does the waterfall produce excessive background noise, but the grotto's massive size creates false echoes.

Creatures: If the PCs enter the Great Grotto with visible light sources or make noise loud enough to rise above the fall, the Hellmusk Clan's lone cavern patrol will quickly intercept them.

➤ **Troglodytes (2):** hp 13; *Monster Manual* 246.

➤ **Tentacled Troglodyte:** hp 13; Atk +1 melee (1d4, raking tentacle); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); Full Atk +1 melee (1d4, raking tentacle) and -1 melee (1d4, claw) and -1 melee (1d4, bite); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); Space/Reach 5

ft./5 ft. (10 ft. with tentacle); SV Will -4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: Raking tentacle graft.

Tactics: The troglodytes rely on their chameleon-like skin to sneak-up along the cavern walls and ambush the PCs. Once in position, they hurl javelins at the least armored target and then charge, releasing their stench as they make natural attacks. If two fall, the last flees to area 9 to warn the rest of the clan.

1. The Rubble Cone

The thin stream flowing from the waterfall behind you tumbles over the lip of the cave entrance and rains twenty feet down, splashing against the face of a huge, fifty-foot cone of rubble. The stream then trickles down the gravelly cone into an icy reservoir below.

Illithid Grafts

Many of the troglodytes in this adventure possess illithid grafts, courtesy of Sae'Taz's experimental procedures. The deranged illithid bestowed its followers with a wide variety of grafts, each with unique powers. The grafts in this adventure originally appeared in the *Fiend Folio*. The relevant information is reproduced below, and is also included in the individual creature stat blocks. All of the grafts in this adventure have one thing in common: they each give their host a -4 penalty on Will saves.

Antennae Graft: Sae'Taz was able to take the antennae from an umber hulk and graft them to the head of a troglodyte, granting it tremorsense with a range of 60 feet.

Climbing Leg Graft: Two troglodytes were grafted with an extra pair of climbing legs equipped with sticky pads. These two troglodytes can walk up walls and upside down on cavern ceilings at a speed of 15 feet, as if wearing *slippers of spider climbing*. These are the ones who broke into and looted Sae'Taz's lair (see area 5).

Goring Horn Graft: One troglodyte was given a goring horn graft. This troglodyte has a natural horn attack that does 1d8 points of piercing damage. The graft also confers the benefit of the Improved Bull Rush feat.

Grasping Mandibles Graft: Sae'Taz applied this graft to its pet giant praying mantis. It took the mandibles from an umber hulk and grafted them to the insect's head, allowing it to grab creatures with its mandibles for easier consumption.

Hauling Back Graft: Sae'Taz used this graft to transform two of its troglodytes into a mobile weapons platform. The transformation gives them the carrying capacity of a quadruped, but prevents them from standing upright to make claw attacks.

Jumping Leg Graft: This graft replaces a troglodyte's legs with bowed, jumping leg grafts. They receive a +10 enhancement bonus on Jump checks.

Rending Claw Graft: This graft utilizes a claw amputated from a dire wolverine. It increases the damage on one of the troglodyte's natural claw attacks from 1d4 to 1d6.

Raking Tentacle Graft: This graft replaces a troglodyte's arm with a raking tentacle amputated from a displacer beast. It allows the troglodyte to make a natural tentacle attack with a reach of 10 feet.

Weapon Grafts: Two troglodytes have been given weapon grafts. One has a flail set where his right claw used to be, while the other has a +1 *vicious scimitar* grafted in place of his left claw. The grafting process gives these troglodytes a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls with the grafted weapons.



This steep hill has formed from rock deposits left by the subterranean waterfall over several centuries. To exit the Great Grotto, the troglodytes used to clamber up the cone and then cross the gap from the cone's peak to the waterfall caverns by extending a large wooden plank. After their liberation, the Hellmusk Clan decided their days of dangerous climbs to the surface were over, and they took the plank and added it to the fuel pile for Kai's impending funeral pyre in area 7. As a result, there is now a 7-foot gap between the top of the rubble cone and the lip of the overhanging entrance. PCs can clear the gap with a DC 7 Jump check (DC 14 without the benefit of a running start). Failure results in a 50-foot fall into the pool below, inflicting 1d6 lethal damage and 2d3 nonlethal damage.

Anyone landing safely on the top of the cone can then descend the rubble with a successful Climb check (DC 10). Failure causes the PC to tumble down the slope

in a wave of loose pebbles, taking 3d4 non-lethal damage. A Reflex save (DC 15) enables the PC to regain her footing and avoid the damage.

2. The Mushroom Grove (FL 4)

This branch of the cavern is blanketed by the cold, phosphorus glow of a forest of giant mushrooms, each larger than the size of a man.

Creature: In conjunction with his experiments on the troglodytes, Sae'Taz also tampered with some of the surrounding wildlife. The mind flayer's greatest achievement was a giant praying mantis grafted with the oversized grasping mandibles of an umber hulk. Sae'Taz also grafted a tiny amount of troglodyte dura matter inside the vermin's head to render it susceptible to its psionics, a significant surgical achievement that did not go unnoticed by the elder brain. After Rifter slew Sae'Taz, the mantis, like the rest of the

mind flayer's minions, was freed from its psionic control. The mantis has now taken up residence in the mushroom grove and is slowly hunting the troglodytes that once fought alongside it.

The mantis is currently injured, having been driven off by the troglodytes loading the Hellmusk Clan's caravan in area 9. Two javelins are imbedded in its back, where the mantis cannot reach the shafts to dislodge them.

Back when the troglodytes and the mantis served a common master, the troglodytes tattooed the mantis's exoskeleton with eerie black and red Draconic characters. Even if a PC speaks Draconic or casts *comprehend languages*, the carapace etchings must still be unscrambled (Decipher Script check DC 15) to make sense of them. They read: "I seek your death in the service of Sae'Taz."

➤ **Illithid-Grafted Giant Praying Mantis:** CR 3; Large vermin; HD 4d8+8; hp 26 (currently 19); Init -1; Spd 20 ft., fly

40 ft. (poor); AC 15, touch 8, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +3; Grp +11; Atk +6 melee (1d8+4, claws); Full Atk +6 melee (1d8+4, claws) and +1 melee (2d8+2, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA grasping mandibles, improved grab; SQ darkvision 60 ft., illithid graft (grasping mandibles), vermin traits; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +0, Will -1; Str 19, Dex 8, Con 15, Int 1, Wis 14, Cha 11; *Monster Manual* 285.

Skills: Hide +7, Listen +4, Spot +15.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Natural Armor.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a giant praying mantis must hit with its claws. If it wins the ensuing grapple check, it establishes a hold and makes a bite attack as a primary attack (at its full +6 attack bonus).

Grasping Mandibles (Ex): If the mantis hits a Medium or smaller opponent with its bite attack, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Each successful grapple

check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals bite damage. If the mantis is already maintaining a hold with its claws on a Medium or smaller opponent when it makes a successful bite attack, no further grapple check is required that round. The mantis automatically transfers its opponent from its claws to its mandibles. The mantis may then attempt grapple checks on the following rounds in order to deal automatic bite damage.

Note that while still possessing vermin traits, the mantis is no longer mindless due to the troglodyte brain tissue grafted inside its skull.

Tactics: The mantis, while single-minded, is exceptionally patient. If its first ambush attempt fails, it won't hesitate to withdraw and stalk its prey from a distance, waiting for a better opportunity. Ideally, the PCs should encounter the mantis two or three times before finally being forced to deal with it once and for all.

2A. Hunting Blind (EL 3)

Three troglodytes have set up a hunter's blind in the grove, 6 feet up, on the flat top of a giant mushroom. The troglodytes lie in wait, hoping to kill the giant mantis before their clan withdraws from the Great Grotto. The mantis, however, caught wind of their trap several hours ago and has decided to keep clear in favor of easier targets. In addition to their natural chameleon ability, the hunters also wear shaggy nets draped with chunks of fungus. These nets provide the hunters with a +2 circumstance bonus on their Hide checks while they are in this part of the cavern.

➤ **Troglodyte hunters (2):** hp 13; AC 19 (with cover); *Monster Manual* 246. *Skills:* Hide +11.

➤ **Antennae troglodyte:** hp 13; SQ darkvision 90 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; SV Will -4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: 3 javelins, antenna graft.

The troglodyte with the antennae graft is able to pinpoint the location of any



creature within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground. The antennae were harvested from the same umber hulk that provided the mandibles grafted onto the giant mantis. Although he does not yet fully understand it, when he became free of the mind flayer's control the troglodyte with antennae discovered he had an intense desire to kill the insect with which he now shares a twisted lineage.

Development: If the mantis still lives, the fight with the troglodyte hunters has a 10% chance per round of attracting its attention.

3. The Grafting Pools (EL 2)

Five fifteen-foot-diameter pools dot the cavern floor of this otherwise empty branch. Each pool throbs with a slow sickening pulse of violet light. The pools' surfaces are covered with a sinewy blanket of translucent organic material.

Sae'Taz's grafting experiments were performed inside this series of interconnected pools filled with an illithid-made, nutritious gel. The troglodytes have nothing but bad memories of their time spent submersed in the gel and avoid this area; the PCs can explore it without being accosted. A skin of pliable membrane protects each pool. The gel underneath, while uncomfortable, is not harmful. In fact, not only is the gel breathable, but anyone fully submersed heals at a rate of 1 hit point per hour and requires no sustenance. Unattended by Sae'Taz, however, the gel loses its properties in another 1d4 days.

PCs who remove the skin and delve into the pulsing gel discover the pools are all interconnected at the bottom. The west side of the central pool contains one of Sae'Taz's grafting failures.

Floating in the dense gel is a naked troglodyte. Its arms have been amputated at the elbows and each severed stump has had a bony-ridged tentacle attached in place. Two more tentacles, sprouting unnaturally from the creature's shoulder blades, hang limply in the liquid. Its eyes stare blankly at the pool's surface.

This troglodyte did not survive the trauma of Sae'Taz's multiple grafts, despite the healing properties of the nutrient gel. Sae'Taz died before it could dispose of the troglodyte's corpse.

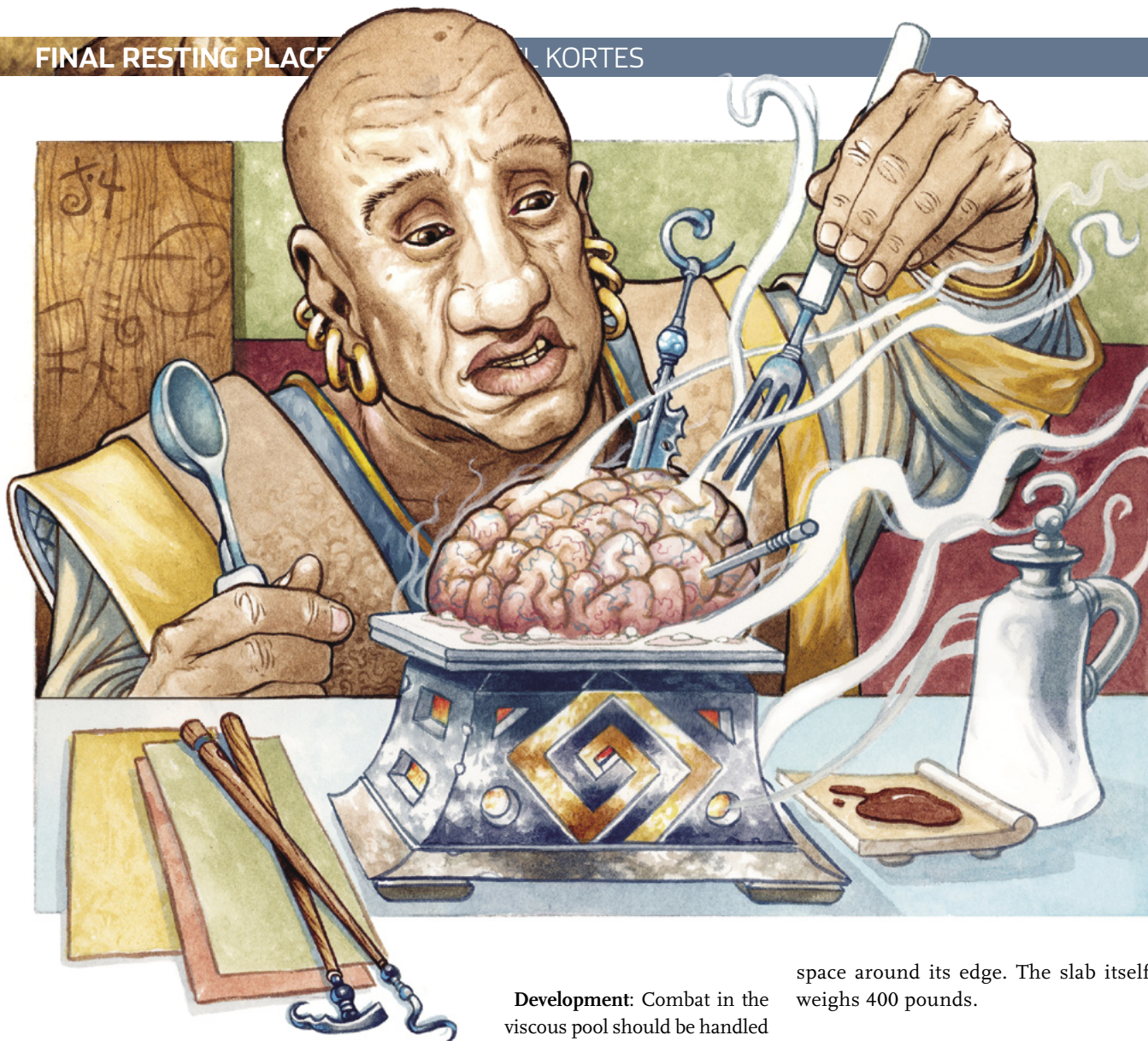
◆ **Membrane Skin:** 1 in. thick; Hardness 1; hp 4; immune to bludgeoning attacks, resistance to fire 10.

Creature: A second troglodyte has also been forgotten in the central pool. After five days alone in the pool with his dead fellow slave, he has gone quite mad.

The troglodyte floats unmoving until a PC comes within 5 feet, at which point he emits a liquid scream and attacks until slain. The troglodyte's stench ability does not work in the pool.

◆ **Insane male troglodyte barbarian 1:** CR 2; Medium humanoid (reptilian); HD 2d8+8 plus 1d12+4; hp 27; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17; Base Atk





+2; Grp +4; Atk +5 melee (1d6+3, sickle graft); Full Atk +5 melee (1d6+3, sickle graft) and +2 melee (1d4+1, claw) and +2 melee (1d4+1, bite); SA rage 1/day, stench; SQ darkvision 90 ft., fast movement, illithid graft (weapon graft: sickle); AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +0, Will -4; Str 14, Dex 11, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8; *Monster Manual* 246.

Rage (Ex): hp 33; AC 15, touch 8, flat-footed 15; Grp +6; Atk +7 melee (1d6+5, sickle graft); Full Atk +7 melee (1d6+5, sickle graft) and +4 melee (1d4+2, claw) and +4 melee (1d4+2, bite); SV Fort +11, Will -2; Str 18, Con 23.

Skills: Climb +5, Hide +7, Jump +3, Listen +3, Swim +8.

Feats: Athletic, Improved Natural Armor, Multiattack^B.

Language: Draconic.

Possession: Weapon graft (sickle).

Development: Combat in the viscous pool should be handled like fighting underwater (See pages 92–93 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*), but with all of the penalties doubled. A successful DC 15 Swim check enables PCs to navigate the pool at one quarter their normal speed (minimum 5 feet per round).

4. The Transport Disk

Seemingly out of place, a smooth, circular, two-inch-thick, nine-foot-diameter slab of black stone rests in the center of the cavern floor.

The disk rests directly below the Transport Shaft (see area I). Sae'Taz occasionally loaded the disk with troglodytes or raid equipment and levitated it straight up the shaft to the surface. The disk was shaped so that it could glide up the shaft with just a foot of

space around its edge. The slab itself weighs 400 pounds.

5. Sae'Taz's Stalactite Manor

The largest stalactite in this giant cave stands out. It is almost twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide at its base, with its tip hanging ninety feet over the cavern floor. The south face of the stalactite has been carved into the shape of a gaping three-cornered maw filled with hooked teeth.

A successful DC 12 Knowledge (arcana) check identifies that the stalactite's maw has been carved in the likeness of an ethereal marauder. Sae'Taz ordered the carving done by the Hellmusk Clan's former shaman, who used *stone shape* while supported by troglodytes with illithid climbing grafts. PCs who climb (Climb check DC 25), levitate, or otherwise reach the ceiling and explore the giant sculpture find the stalactite's "mouth" has been hollowed out into a small cave, 10 feet deep.

Characters that enter the three-cornered mouth and search the inky blackness beyond may detect a faint shimmering of light at the back of the maw (Search check DC 15).

The shimmer is the outside of the entrance to Sae'Taz's customized *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*. As a reward for its innovation, the elder brain provided Sae'Taz with a one-shot expendable magic item that created a *magnificent mansion* with an extended duration of six months. The mansion provided Sae'Taz with a home-away-from-home while the mindflayer completed its study of experimental grafting. A PC may identify the shimmer's true nature with a successful Spellcraft check (DC 22).

Sae'Taz designated itself as the only creature capable of entering the mansion. In order for the PCs to enter the mansion, they must steal Sae'Taz's head off the short-spear in area 6 or the illithid's severed hand from Oriac in area 7. The Hellmusk Clan has discovered this trick and it is possible the PCs could learn it from a charmed or captured troglodyte.

5A. Inside the Mansion

This chamber is over five times larger than the stalagmite that houses it. The gelatinous walls, ceiling, and floor glisten with an alien moisture and undulate gently, as if alive. The room's furnishings are in chaos; remnants of a banquet hall, a library or study, a bed chamber, and perhaps even a laboratory are all here, but it looks as though they have been hit by a whirlwind—their contents are scattered throughout the room.

With a twisted sense of aesthetics, Sae'Taz patterned its mansion's interior after the membrane of a gelatinous cube. The effect, however, is purely visual.

Four days ago, two troglodytes with illithid climbing grafts (see area 9) used Sae'Taz's severed hand as a key to break into and loot its

mansion. Better safe than sorry, they smashed everything that made them edgy and now most of Sae'Taz's treasures have been destroyed. Most of the valuable items that were left were seized and packed into the Hellmusk Clan's caravan in area 9.

A minute after the PCs enter, they are greeted by three unusually tall female elf servants. Speaking in Common,

the elves call the PCs "honored guests of the surgeon" and attempt to make them comfortable. The servants do their best to treat the PCs like royalty and quickly begin to clean up the mansion. The elves are actually magical servants created by the mansion. They know nothing of the world outside of the mansion. They



cannot attack and dissipate if they take 6 or more points of damage. The rest of the mansion's servants were torn into nothingness by the two troglodyte looters.

The elves offer to bring the PCs the "surgeon's drink" or to prepare the "surgeon's banquet." If the PCs take the servants up on the offer of the "surgeon's drink" they receive a fizzing, neon-orange brew, served in a glass cone. The drink smells like strong lemon and nullifies the drinker's sense of smell for 1d4+2 hours if consumed. Sae'Taz used the brew to render itself immune to the troglodyte's stench ability while it was performing his grafting experiments. As an additional side effect, if any PC has the scent ability, the brew disables it for the duration of the effect.

The banquet is much more disappointing: the elves set out an elaborate meal of humanoid brains, served in stringy, bowl-shaped tissue. The PCs can get the confused servants to bring some more suitable nourishment, but only after explaining what they want in painstaking detail.

PCs who search the mansion may find several items of value. Finding each item requires a successful Search check (DC 20). PCs who recruit the eager-to-please servants receive a +10 circumstance bonus on their Search checks.

- The scattered remnants of Sae'Taz's spellbook, which was, unfortunately, torn apart at the seams by one of the troglodyte looters. Only five spells remain: *mirror image*, *rope trick*, *erase*, *Tenser's floating disk*, and *message*.
- A loose scroll of *airwalk* which has been folded-up and wedged into the back pages of a scattered book.
- 400 gp worth of salvageable exotic lab equipment and rare material components. The rest of Sae'Taz's lab has been destroyed.
- A *hand of the mage*, once a paperweight on a now overturned desk.

The PCs may also discover (Search DC 20) and translate Sae'Taz's crystalline journal from its native Undercommon. In addition to logging the mind flayer's hideous experiments, the journal

contains references to the elder-brain's long-term goal of establishing a hold on the surface world. The journal may be used as a campaign seed for future adventures into the Underdark.

6. The Throne (EL 3)

Fifteen feet off of the ground, an elaborate throne has been carved into the back of the cavern wall and inlaid with sparkling, tear-shaped gemstones. A web of black rock ripples through the cold stone of the empty, high-backed chair. Twenty feet from the base of the throne a wrenched rotting octipoid

head has been crudely mounted on a spear jutting from the cavern floor. The head's milky-white eyes stare ahead blankly.

This area of the cavern is where Sae'Taz sat and issued orders to its thralls. It is also the site where Sae'Taz met its death and



the troglodytes have marked it accordingly. After one of the troglodytes was slain by the trap Sae'Taz used to guard his throne, the Hellmusk Clan has stayed clear of the sculpted chair. Anyone who climbs up the face of the cavern (Climb check DC 15) and touches the throne is suddenly showered in a wicked waterfall of albino cave bats. The bats attack until dispersed.

Sae'Taz's severed head was one of the few parts of the illithid which survived the concussive explosion from Kai Rifter's *bead of force*. The Hellmusk Clan recovered the battered head and mounted it upon a half-spear to celebrate the death of their former tyrant. Whenever a troglodyte passes by the head, they still reflexively emit their foul musk out of fear of their former overlord. As this has gone on for several days, the area around the head bears a reeking odor. Any non-troglodyte approaching within 20 feet of the head risks being sickened as though affected by a troglodyte's stench. The save DC is only 10, however, as the musk is not fresh.

➤ **Instant Bat Shower Trap:** CR 3; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset (1 hour delay); spell effect (*summon swarm*, 11th-level wizard, bat swarm: hp 13; *Monster Manual* 237); Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 27.

Treasure: Sae'Taz's throne has been inlaid with 6 moonstones (300 gp total). The surgical goggles Sae'Taz wore whenever he operated by the grafting pools are still strapped tightly over the mindflayer's forehead. The Hellmusk clan has left them there, fearing they are cursed. The goggles are actually *goggles of minute seeing*.

7. The Pyre Hut (El. 3)

A crude wooden hut constructed on stilts rises ten feet out of a shallow, stagnant pool of water. What looks like lamp oil has been sprinkled onto the hut. A fifteen-foot ramp leads from the pool's edge to the inside of the open hut.

In accordance with the Hellmusk Clan's tradition for a funeral rite fitting a hero, a giant funeral pyre has been erected here. The pyre hut is a jumbled mass of timber the troglodytes collected

from the surface, as well as roots and mushroom stalks from area 2. The pool is only 2 feet deep; just deep enough to contain the flames once the burning hut collapses.

Creatures: Oriac, the clan's raid-chief, and Nushiefa, the clan's high-shaman, are performing the final rituals before the ceremony is scheduled to begin. Oriac became the new raid-chief after his father failed to survive the application of his fifth illithid graft, while Nushiefa was prematurely elevated to his post after Sae'Taz ate his mentor's brain. When the PCs arrive, Nushiefa is chanting a preparation ritual as he sprinkles the pyre with sacred oil. Nushiefa worries that when the Hellmusk clan tries to reintegrate into troglodyte territory, their illithid-grafts will mark them as abominations and rival tribes will hunt them down in the name of their god, Laogzed. He has been unable to persuade Oriac to consider this risk. Instead, Oriac believes the clan's illithid grafts will enable them to bully the other clans into unifying under the Hellmusk banner, and he cannot wait to leave this accursed cavern to exercise this dominance. While he waits, Oriac has been loitering around the pyre, hoping to fuel a rumor he started that he was a close friend of the great liberator within the hut.

Oriac wears the severed hand of Sae'Taz around his neck on a long chain. After Sae'Taz was killed by Rifter, the illithid's hand was one of the only parts to remain intact. Originally taken by Oriac as a trophy, Nushiefa deduced that the troglodytes might be able to use the hand to enter Sae'Taz's private mansion. To that end, he inscribed the Draconic rune for "key" on the palm of the hand, and lent it to the troglodytes with climbing grafts so they could loot the residence of their former master.

Sae'taz did not allow Nushiefa to summon a familiar, and he has been too busy with Kai's funeral preparation to perform the ritual since the illithid's demise.

➤ **Oriac, male troglodyte warrior 2:** CR 2; Medium humanoid (reptilian); HD 4d8+12; hp 30; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +3; Grp +4; Atk +6 melee (1d8+2, grafted masterwork battleaxe) or +4 ranged (1d6+1,

javelin); Full Atk +6 melee (1d8+2, grafted masterwork battleaxe) and +2 melee (1d4, claw) and +2 melee (1d4, bite); or +4 ranged (1d6+1, javelin); SA stench; SQ darkvision 90 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +0, Will -5; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 7, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills: Climb -1, Hide +5, Intimidate +2, Jump -1, Listen +3.

Feats: Multiattack^B, Improved Natural Armor, Weapon Focus (javelin).

Languages: Draconic.

Possessions: Hide armor, grafted masterwork battleaxe (named "Splatter"), javelin, Sae'Taz's severed hand.

➤ **Nushiefa, male troglodyte adept 2:** CR 2; Medium humanoid (reptilian); HD 2d8+4 plus 2d6+4; hp 24; Init -2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15, touch 8, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +2; Grp +2; Atk +1 melee (1d4-1, claw); Full Atk +1 melee (1d4-1, 2 claws) and -1 melee (1d4-1, bite); SA spells, stench; SQ darkvision 90 ft., summon familiar; AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref -2, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 7, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 10.

Skills: Concentration +4, Hide +6, Knowledge (religion) +3, Listen +3, Spellcraft +2, Survival +2.

Feats: Combat Casting, Improved Natural Armor, Multiattack^B.

Languages: Draconic, Undercommon, Common.

Adept Spells Prepared (caster level 2): 0—*detect magic*, *inflict minor wounds* (DC 11), *resistance*; 1st—*bless*, *cause fear* (DC 12).

Possessions: *Potion of entropic shield*, barrel of oil, ceremonial dagger, steel symbol of Laogzed.

Tactics: If Oriac spots a PC entering the pyre he grabs the torch and lights the pyre ahead of schedule. Then he charges, running into the flaming hut if need be to preserve the integrity of the cremation ritual. Nushiefa calls for aid from the troglodytes at the caravan, and then moves in to back up Oriac. He begins by casting *bless*, followed by *cause fear*. Oriac fights to the death, but Nushiefa retreats to area 9 if Oriac falls or he is reduced to 10 hit points or less and reinforcements have not arrived.

Treasure: Ten feet inside the pyre hut rests Kai Rifter's coffin. If the PCs unseal the coffin, they confirm that Kai Rifter's corpse is indeed inside. Out of

respect, the troglodytes have resisted the urge to pilfer any of Rifter's possessions, though most of Rifter's magic items were annihilated in the explosion of his *bead of force*. Kai's backpack, a *Heward's handy haversack*, survived, and it has been tucked under his head as a pillow. In addition to an assortment of mundane adventuring equipment, the backpack still contains two potions (*cure light wounds* and *jump*), a vial of *silversheen*, a *Quaal's feather token (fan)*, a tanglefoot bag, and a smokestick. If the PCs began the adventure hoping to get a peek at Kai's gorgon-scale journal of maps and clues, they find the journal inside his pack as well.

◆ **Oak coffin:** 2 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 20; Break DC 18.

Development: If Nushiefa yells for help, seven troglodytes from area 9 arrive in six rounds. The final part of the cremation ritual is scheduled to last a couple of days, but if the troglodytes are alerted to the presence of the PCs, they rush to conclude the ritual within the next half hour. If that happens, Nushiefa and Oriac light the pyre while a dozen troglodytes form a circle around the hut. The PCs must break through the circle of troglodytes and brave the smoke and fire if they have any hope of rescuing Kai's corpse, which burns to ashes in 3d6+10 rounds. The rules for smoke inhalation and catching on fire can be found on pages 303–304 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*.

8. Slumber Receptacles

This stretch of cavern is punctuated with scores of small openings leading to shallow recesses carved from the rock wall. A series of handholds and footholds have been chiseled into the wall to enable easy access to the uppermost cave entrances.

While the troglodytes were still under its control, Sae'Taz ordered them to sleep in these cramped, pod-like receptacles. The Hellmusk Clan has already evacuated and packed their belongings onto the caravan in area 9. PCs who search the receptacles find only a few

thin woven mats that the troglodytes left behind.

9. The Caravan (EL 10+)

A gigantic bonfire illuminates the far end of the grotto. About two dozen of the reptilian humanoids work in the firelight, loading bags, bundles, and boxes of various shapes and sizes onto a massive covered wagon. Two giant lizards have been chained to the front of the wagon. Several of the workers are clicking their slithering tongues together in a rhythmic percussion, as though participating in some form of song. Beyond the wagon, a large passageway leads out of the cave disappearing into the blackness beyond.

The Hellmusk Clan is loading their provisions and treasures into a communal caravan as they prepare to depart and head deeper into the Underdark to reunite with other troglodyte clans. When the PCs arrive in the cavern, the clan is undergoing the delicate process of packing eggs. As a result, most of the troglodytes are inside the wagon or working close by. A few troglodytes cook a slain darkmantle over their final campfire to make a snack for the road.

Creatures: Two 5-foot-long monitor lizards are tethered to the wagon. Their chains prevent them from moving more than 5 feet from the wagon. The overburdened lizards can only pull the caravan at a speed of 15 feet.

The troglodytes sing a tribal war song to lift their spirits as they work, and as a result their Listen checks suffer a –4 circumstance penalty. PCs who attempt to take advantage of the distraction and ambush the troglodytes could find themselves quickly overwhelmed by sheer numbers. There are 21 troglodytes here, ten of which have had some form of illithid graft bestowed on them by Sea'Taz. Refer to the illithid grafts sidebar on page 28 for more information on the grafts.

Having experienced the danger of wielding his scimitar hand, the troglodyte with the +1 *vicious scimitar* graft avoids using it unless severely pressed. If he does, his attack receives a further +2

bonus to hit and inflicts 3d6+1 points of damage. The troglodyte does 1d6 points of damage to himself with a successful hit. The blade loses its properties if severed from the troglodyte.

The two troglodytes with hauling back grafts have been permanently reduced to all fours. They are joined together by a wooden ballista platform that has been grafted on top of their backs. If other members of the Hellmusk Clan climb onto the mobile platform, the ballista can be fired from its swiveling tripod. The ballista does 3d8 points of damage on a successful hit, and has a critical threat range of 19–20 with a range increment of 120 feet. Because of its Huge size, a troglodyte firing the ballista takes a –4 penalty on attack rolls. It takes a troglodyte two full-round actions to reload the ballista. For more information see the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, page 100.

➤ **Monitor lizard (2):** hp 22; *Monster Manual* 275.

➤ **Troglodytes (11):** hp 13; *Monster Manual* 246.

➤ **Climbing troglodytes (2):** hp 13; Spd 30, climb 15; SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: Climbing leg graft.

➤ **Jumping troglodytes (2):** hp 13; SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Skills: Jump +10.

Possessions: Jumping leg graft.

➤ **Horned troglodyte:** hp 13; Full Atk +1 melee (1d6, club) and –1 melee (1d4, claw) and –1 melee (1d4, bite) and –1 melee (1d8, gore); or +1 melee (1d4, 2 claws) and –1 melee (1d4, bite) and –1 melee (1d8, gore); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Feats: Multiattack^B, Improved Bull Rush^B, Weapon Focus (javelin).

Possessions: Goring horn graft.

➤ **Clawed troglodyte:** hp 13; Atk +1 melee (1d6/x3, rending claw); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); Full Atk +1 melee (1d6/x3, rending claw) and –1 melee (1d4, claw) and –1 melee (1d4, bite); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: Rending claw graft.

➤ **Flailing troglodyte:** hp 13; Atk +2 melee (1d8+1, grafted flail); or +1 ranged

(1d6, javelin); Full Atk +2 melee (1d8, grafted flail) and –1 melee (1d4, claw) and –1 melee (1d4, bite); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: Weapon graft (flail).

➤ **Vicious troglodyte:** hp 9; Atk +3 melee (1d6+2/18–20 plus 2d6, +1 grafted vicious scimitar); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); Full Atk +2 melee (1d6+2/18–20 plus 2d6, +1 grafted vicious scimitar) and –1 melee (1d4, claw) and –1 melee (1d4, bite); or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: Weapon graft (+1 vicious scimitar).

➤ **Weapon platform troglodytes (2):** hp 15; Atk/Full Atk +1 melee (1d4, bite); SV Will –4; *Monster Manual* 246.

Possessions: Hauling back graft.

Tactics: If combat erupts, half of the troglodytes emit their musk and attempt to close in and overwhelm the intruders. The other half remain behind to guard the wagon and the eggs. Nushiefa and Oriac join from area 7 in six rounds, leaving Kai Rifter's coffin unguarded.

Treasure: If the PCs manage to raid the Hellmusk Clan's caravan, they find it filled with bulky goods pilfered from the surface world valuing a total of 800 gp. They also find a live stirge (hp 5, *Monster Manual* 236) in an iron birdcage and an unlocked wooden chest filled with manticores spikes. Several of the treasures pilfered from Sae'Taz's lair are also here: a *gray bag of tricks*, a *wand of arcane mark* (10 charges), a scroll of *grease*, a *potion of mage armor*, and a collection of gemstones including a tourmaline (100 gp), an uncut piece of rose quartz (50 gp), a bloodstone (50 gp), 6 freshwater pearls (10 gp each), and a small crate containing 7 pp, 81 gp, 267 sp, and 181 cp mixed together.

Vokilar (El 4)

After Sae'Taz failed to contact it, the elder brain decided to dispatch a half-illithid svirfneblin scout named Vokilar to investigate. Vokilar's mission is to determine the current state of readiness of its slave army and to find out why Sae'Taz severed its telepathic connection with the elder brain. Coming from miles below, it takes Vokilar several days

to reach the Great Grotto. His arrival occurs just after the PCs reach the cavern. Vokilar should be introduced at a dramatically appropriate time, such as once the PCs have discovered the location of Rifter's coffin, but have not yet determined how to retrieve it and get it to the surface.

➤ **Vokilar, half-illithid svirfneblin warrior 1:** CR 4; Small aberration (gnome); HD 1d8; hp 8; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 22, touch 17, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +1; Grp –3; Atk +4 melee (1d4/18–20, rapier) or +4 ranged (1d6/x3, longbow); Full Atk +4 melee (1d4/18–20, rapier) and –1 melee (1d3, 4 tentacles), or +4 ranged (1d6/x3, longbow); SA extract, improved grab, mind blast, psionics, spell-like abilities; SQ darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, nondetection, svirfneblin traits, telepathy; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 10; *Fiend Folio* 91 (half-illithid), *Monster Manual* 132.

Skills: Hide +10, Intimidate +2, Listen +5, Move Silently +2, Spot +3.

Feat: Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Common, Draconic, Gnome, Undercommon.

Extract (Ex): If Vokilar successfully maintains his hold with all four tentacles for 1 full round, he automatically extracts that opponent's brain at the beginning of its next turn, instantly killing the creature.

Improved Grab (Ex): If Vokilar hits an opponent that is Small or smaller with a tentacle attack, he deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple (grapple bonus –3) as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he gets a hold, he attaches the tentacle to the opponent's head. After a successful grab, Vokilar can try to attach his remaining tentacles with a single grapple check. The opponent can escape with a single successful grapple check or Escape Artist check, but Vokilar gets a +2 circumstance bonus for every tentacle that was attached at the beginning of the opponent's turn.

Mind Blast (Sp): This attack, usable once per day, is a 40-foot cone. Anyone caught in this cone must succeed on a DC 14 Will save or be stunned for 1d4 rounds.

Psionics (Sp) (caster level 8): 3/day—*detect thoughts* (DC 15).

Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 1): 1/day—*blindness/deafness* (DC 16), *blur*, *disguise self*.

Telepathy (Su): Vokilar can communicate with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Possessions: Chain shirt, rapier, longbow, 40 arrows, *elixir of hiding*, *elixir of sneaking*, *potion of cure light wounds* (2), *potion of pass without trace*, *potion of sanctuary*.

Tactics: Once Vokilar discovers Sae'Taz's head in Area 6, he attempts to remain hidden at all times. After he spots the PCs, he mistakenly assumes they are responsible for Sae'Taz's death and deduces that if they can defeat one of his illithid masters, they are far too powerful to attack as a group. Instead, he relies on stealth and the superior range of his darkvision to get close enough to listen in on the PCs without being seen. As he grows bolder, Vokilar attempts to isolate and capture a lone PC to use his *detect thoughts* psionic ability to interrogate his prisoner. He attempts to discover the details of Sae'Taz's death and what the PC knows of the elder brain.

If discovered, Vokilar fights from cover, sniping with his longbow, reserving his *mind blast* for opponents who get too close. Vokilar's orders do not require him to slay the PCs, only to investigate, and his priority is to return to the elder brain, alive, with answers. Should Vokilar discover a PC has Sae'Taz's crystalline journal (from area 5A), however, he does his utmost to secure its return (or destruction) before the PCs can escape with any evidence of the elder brain's conspiracy against the surface world.

CHAPTER FOUR: ESCAPE

Unless the PCs employ a ruse or decoy of some kind, the Hellmusk Clan quickly discovers the theft of Kai Rifter's body. They don't hesitate to pursue the PCs all the way to the surface to ensure their great liberator gets the cremation he deserves. They cannot be reasoned with. Rifter's coffin weighs 275 pounds and is 7 feet long; transporting it is not an easy

Scaling The Adventure

“Final Resting Place” is designed for a group of four 3rd-level characters, but with a little work it can be adapted for use by 1st–2nd-level characters or 4th–5th-level characters. Specific changes to the adventure include:

1st–2nd-level characters: Cut the Hellmusk Clan’s numbers in half in each encounter or consider replacing the troglodytes with illthid-grafted hobgoblins (the “Clan of the Splintered Spine”). Remove the mantis’s grasping mandibles graft. Do not have it strike while the PCs are engaged with the troglodyte hunters. Reduce Oriac and Nushiefa’s levels by 1. Remove Vokilar’s half-illthid template. Make him a svirfneblin with a raking tentacle graft and a *potion of detect thoughts*.

4th–5th-level characters: Make the elemental a Large water elemental. One or two monitor lizards should accompany the Hellmusk patrol at the entrance to the Great Grotto. The mantis should be uninjured. For an even tougher challenge add a second mantis with the same grasping mandibles graft. Have the throne trap instead summon a lesser cranium rat swarm (*Fiend Folio* 167). Change Vokilar to a level 2 rogue or ranger. Increase his ability scores to match the elite array before his racial modifiers and template bonuses are added. Give him ten *+1 seeking arrows*. Oriac and Nushiefa should have 2–3 extra levels of warrior and adept, respectively. Make Splatter, Oriac’s grafted battlaxe, a *+1 battleaxe*.

task. Removing the body from the coffin is a possibility, although it is somewhat messy. The corpse is intact, but the explosion from the *bead of force* has destroyed most of Kai’s skeletal structure, making him vulnerable to the conditions of rough travel. Feel free to reduce the promised reward if the PCs return Kai’s body in pieces. At this point, the PCs have several different options available to them to return to the surface. The most likely scenarios (along with the Hellmusk response) are outlined below.

Back the Way We Came!

Hauling the coffin back up the waterfall caverns is onerous and slow, but still possible with a little resourcefulness, some magic, or a lot of rope. Oriac and Nushiefa (or their successors) send the Hellmusk Clan in steady waves of pursuit to harass the PCs all the way to the top. Each wave is composed of 1d3+1 of the remaining troglodytes from area 9. The PCs likely need a rear guard to protect those who are left vulnerable as they transport the body.

If the PCs were lucky enough to discover and befriend the water elemental, it can give them a significant edge by carrying the coffin up the cavern waterfall. The elemental can take the coffin all the way from area H to area B, almost two-thirds of the way to the surface. The PCs could also sabotage the rope bridge over the falls at area D, which buys them some time as the troglodytes struggle to find a new way to cross.

Up, Up, and Away!

For a more direct route, the PCs might use Hrodel’s *wand of levitation* or the *air walk* scroll found in Sae’Taz’s mansion to float Kai’s coffin up the central transport shaft. If they do, only the two troglodytes with climbing grafts from area 9 can clamber up after them. If Nushiefa or Oriac are still alive, they organize the remaining troglodytes into three groups, race through area J, and attempt to head the PCs off at ambush sites at the three points where the central transport shaft intersects with other passageways. If the PCs are levitating at a speed of 20, the troglodytes should easily have time to intercept them. The PCs will have to fend off a barrage of javelins as well as a few crazy troglodytes jumping into the shaft in a desperate attempt to grapple the characters and force them back to the ground. Finally, PCs who float to the top must find some way of lifting the stone cap which seals off the shaft (see area I).

Plunge Deeper!

A third option is to escape deeper into the Underdark, in search of another way out. This is a grim alternative, as the PCs must first get past the Hellmusk caravan in area

9. Flight into the Underdark is beyond the scope of “Final Resting Place” and it is up to the DM to design an interesting trek through the inky blackness before the PCs find their way home.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs succeed in returning Kai Rifter to Galehaven, Hrodel rewards them with 900 gp as promised. Plus, to show their appreciation, the local town council spontaneously raises an extra 150 gp per character. Further, if Hrodel’s magic confirms the PCs have not pilfered any of Kai’s surviving possessions for themselves, she offers to cast 500 gp worth of divination spells for the party, either immediately or the next time they stop over in Galehaven. The PCs can also expect their reputations in the adventuring community at large to be enhanced once Hrodel spreads the word that they “did right by Rifter.” Hrodel also invites the PCs to Kai’s funeral, which takes place a week after the coffin is returned. It is well attended by those Kai has helped over the last several decades. If the party has particularly impressed Hrodel, she might invite a good-aligned PC cleric to help perform the ceremony, or perhaps allow a PC bard to sing or recite an appropriate verse as her uncle is laid to rest.

If Vokilar survives to report back to the elder brain, it labels the PCs a threat and decides to keep an eye on them. If the PCs escaped with Sae’Taz’s crystalline journal, the elder brain may send sinister agents to recover it. For their part, the PCs may decide to pick up where Kai left off and continue to investigate the Underdark. Uncovering the elder brain’s ultimate design on the surface world could be a mission for a full-fledged Underdark campaign. 🗡️

“Final Resting Place” is Michael Kortes’s second appearance in *DUNGEON* following “Beast of Burden” in issue #100. He enjoys procrastinating at work by building paperclip monsters (CR 3–7 mostly) and surfing the message boards at paizo.com. “Final Resting Place” is dedicated to every PC who’s ever hauled a fallen friend out of a dungeon.



Fiendish Footprints

BY TITO LEATI

BY CHAD DU LAC & UDON W. JIM ZUBKAVICH

BY KYLE HUNTER

ANY SETTING, MID-LEVEL (6TH-12TH), TEMPERATE FOREST & DUNGEON CRAWL



Hundreds of years ago, the eccentric aristocrat Nepenchil built himself a tower deep in the woods. What he found in the ground below would not only change his life forever, but would send shockwaves of evil down through the centuries, creating a terrible infestation of undead waiting patiently for a group of unwary adventurers to release them.

“Fiendish Footprints” is a D&D adventure designed for a group of four 6th-level characters. The adventure takes place in the dungeons of a ruined keep in any temperate forest of the DM’s world.

Adventure Background

In life, Nepenchil was renowned for his prowess as an archer and hunter. He lived in a remote (but nevertheless quite

extravagant) wilderness tower deep in the woods, and invitations to his week-long hunts were coveted by aristocrats from nearby cities. That is, until the night one of his parties turned tragic. Nearly two dozen nobles perished when Nepenchil’s tower burned to the ground. Only a few servants survived, and they told harrowing tales of how Nepenchil had paralyzed his guests with poisoned wine and had cut their throats to drink their blood, going one at a time down the table until one of the noblemen recovered early from the drug. In the resulting scuffle, a candelabra was upturned and ignited one of Nepenchil’s coveted elven tapestries. The exterior shell of his tower was made of stone, but the internal walls and floors were of rare wood, and they went up in flames with shocking alacrity.

Since that fateful night, rumors that Nepenchil had become a vampire spread with ferocity equal to that of the fire that had consumed his tower. For several years, most travelers avoided the area, since those who entered the forest vanished as often as not. Finally, an eldritch knight named Kenewor who had dedicated his life to vampire slaying took it upon himself to investigate Nepenchil’s ruined tower.

The vampire slayer quickly confirmed the truth behind the rumors; Nepenchil had indeed become a vampire. A furious battle ensued between the wizard and the vampire, but in the end Nepenchil was defeated. Kenewor gathered the vampire’s most portable treasures, fully intending to return with them to civilization and bequeath them to one of the vampire’s living descendants. And

he would have done just that, had it not been for the *fiendish foot*.

Kenewor mistook the strange talisman around Nepenchil's neck for yet another piece of jewelry. It certainly seemed strange enough—a miniature cloven hoof, carved of obsidian. What Kenewor did not know was that this was the *fiendish foot*, a cursed talisman forged by Orcus, the demon prince of undeath. When carried, the *fiendish foot* grants its wearer powerful defenses, but these defenses mask a terrible curse. This curse causes the victim to grow increasingly obsessed with blood, and eventually transforms the victim into a vampire thrall of Orcus. Nepenchil fell prey to this curse years ago after he found the *fiendish foot* while exploring an ancient crypt beneath his tower.

By the time he returned to the city, Kenewor had fallen under the cursed talisman's sway. He returned all the other items to Nepenchil's descendants but kept the *foot* for himself. His will proved stronger than Nepenchil's, however, and after he nearly cut open a friend's throat with a razor, Kenewor realized the *fiendish foot* was trouble. He first tried to smash it with a hammer, but it wouldn't crack. Likewise, neither fire nor acid seemed to harm it. He tried to bring it to a priest to have its evil exorcised, but found the sanctified ground of the temple too nauseating to bear and couldn't form the words to even call to the priests within. Horrified that the curse's effects had so tainted his soul, Kenewor next tried to dispose of the foot by throwing it into the ocean, but when he tried to do so he collapsed in a fit on the ship's deck. He would have perished, if not for some immediate aid provided by the ship's captain.

Despondent, Kenewor realized that even death wouldn't save him. He knew that if he died, the *fiendish foot's* claim on his soul would curse him—that with his death, he would transform into a

vampire. His sanity quickly eroding, Kenewor decided the only recourse was to return to Nepenchil's manse, a ruin now known as the Ashen Tower, and return the *fiendish foot* to the underground chamber in which he first encountered it. He wasn't surprised to find the underground ruins still infused with Nepenchil's vampiric taint, and used his magic to further seal the underground regions from accidental discovery.



Yet upon returning home, Kenewor found that while he had returned the *fiendish foot*, its curse remained. His obsession grew, and he spent all of his days writing about the *fiendish foot's* beauty in his journals, painting pictures of its location into whatever surface he could find. When a group of adventurers came to question him about several missing locals who were known to have visited his estate, Kenewor's madness reached a breaking point. He perished in the ensuing battle, his body and home crumbling to ashes in a fire, an end paralleling the doom of Nepenchil

so long before. Although he had managed to die without maintaining possession of the *fiendish foot*, and thus did not rise as a vampire, one of his obsession-spawned maps of the cursed talisman's location survived the conflagration. This tiny map, inscribed on a knag of wood no more than two inches wide, is still large enough to lure new victims into following the fiendish footprints that led him to his doom.

Adventure Synopsis

This adventure begins as the PCs discover a strange map carved onto a tiny knot of wood. Research indicates that the map seems to be tied to a ruined tower in the woods. As they approach the ruin, the PCs encounter a band of elves that has chased a notorious hobgoblin bandit into these woods, a region the elves have traditionally never explored. The PCs travel into the woods, defeat the hobgoblin bandits, and discover that the mysterious treasure hidden in the dungeons below the ruin is not only protected by a group of vampiric undead, but may just have

been the cause of all the region's troubles.

Adventure Hooks

The easiest way to start "Fiendish Footprints" is to have the PCs find Kenewor's knag in a treasure hoard, buy it in an antiquity shop, or even steal it by chance with the Sleight of Hand skill. The knag is an uneven small disk of old walnut wood with fine etchings on one side. The object is not magical, but the tiny engravings on it make it an interesting find. The etching shows a tiny room that corresponds to area 5 of the Ashen Tower's dungeon, along

with a strange, hook-shaped rune. The rune is actually a representation of the safest route to the cache of the *fiendish foot* in the tomb complex beyond the passage. Following this route, the PCs can avoid two dangerous pit traps set by Kenewor (areas 7 and 8).

Two phrases are also etched on the knag: “Fiendish Foot” and “Nepen chil’s Rest.” Certain Knowledge checks can reveal more information about these two phrases. A character with bardic knowledge can substitute that ability for any of the Knowledge checks listed below.

- **Knowledge (arcana) DC 20:** The *fiendish foot* is a powerful relic that grants its wearer defenses similar to those possessed by fiends. If the DC for this check is exceeded by 10 (DC 30), the character knows that Orcus made the *fiendish foot*, and that its curse causes its owner to transform into a vampire upon death.
- **Knowledge (nobility and royalty) DC 20:** Lord Nepen chil was an eccentric human aristocrat who moved into a forest keep about a hundred years ago. Invitations to the week-long hunts he hosted were quite coveted by the nobles of the time.
- **Knowledge (history) DC 20:** Once the PCs know who Lord Nepen chil was, this check reveals that Lord Nepen chil’s tower was consumed in a tragic fire that resulted in the deaths of all two dozen of his noble guests. In the months to follow, it became apparent that Nepen chil had not only survived the fire, but had become a vampire. A vampire hunter named Kenewor slew him a few years later. He returned from his battle with a large amount of treasure, yet rumors persist that he left even more treasure behind at Lord Nepen chil’s tower.
- **Knowledge (geography) DC 20:** This check pinpoints the location of Lord Nepen chil’s tower, known now as the Ashen Tower. This location can be in any large woodland wilderness in your campaign.
- **Knowledge (local) DC 20:** Khurbok, an infamous hobgoblin warlord, has

recently settled in the vicinity of the Ashen Tower. His hobgoblins are harassing the nearby countryside, and are said to make liberal use of spells against their victims.

If hints of mysterious treasures aren’t enough to entice your group of players, you might want to use an alternate adventure hook to get “Fiendish Footprints” started. Two possible hooks appear below:

- Reports of a powerful band of hobgoblins that has been harassing local settlements near the woodlands reach the PCs’ ears. The leader of this band is a chieftain named Khurbok. A band of elven archers has been charged with the defeat of Khurbok’s hobgoblins, yet rumor holds that the elves are having trouble dealing with the hobgoblin mercenaries. If the party includes any elves, they might have ties to these archers and could feel an obligation to provide assistance.
- While visiting a village near the edge of the woods, the PCs hear the story of a treasure hunter named Berwim. About a year ago, this rogue questioned many old peasants about a ruined keep deep in the woods. The peasants think that Berwim had some clue about a great treasure hidden there. Berwim hired some shady fellows and set out toward the keep a few days later but he never returned; ever since, stories of the “cursed treasure of the Ashen Tower” have persisted in town.

CHAPTER ONE: INTO THE WOODS

The journey through the woods to the Ashen Tower eventually takes the PCs to an area of sparser vegetation. As they near the tower’s site, a successful DC 15 Spot check allows a character to notice a column of smoke rising from the chaparral ahead. Otherwise, the PCs stumble into a clearing occupied by a large elven encampment, and quickly find themselves surrounded by nervous elven archers.

This campsite consists of an ornate pavilion, surrounded by fifteen smaller tents. All of the tents are colored in various hues of deep green and blue. The elves are weary, and some bear wounds from recent fights. One large group of elves is busy preparing a pyre, gathering firewood and freshly picked flowers, while others sort items from a pile of spoils that includes numerous large black shields and well-polished steel blades. A few hundred yards from the camp, a grassy meadow rolls down into the still waters of a shallow bog. Near the bog, a macabre heap of humanoid corpses has been put to fire—this is the source of the plume of smoke. The land between the camp and the burning cadavers shows the signs of a small but intense battle, fought by the victorious elves against a band of hobgoblins.

The elves are a company of archers who finally intercepted a band of hobgoblins led by a warlord named Khurbok. The elves killed most of the marauders, but eight hobgoblins (Khurbok and his bodyguards) managed to flee deeper into the forest. The weary elves did not pursue them (see “Talking with the Elven Leaders” below). They set up this camp near the site of the battle and put to fire the corpses of their dead enemies.

If the PCs don’t make any hostile moves and can adjust their initial attitude of unfriendly to indifferent with a DC 15 Diplomacy or Intimidate check, the elves quickly soften their stance and invite them into their camp to speak with their leaders.

Talking with the Elven Leaders

Before the PCs can speak with the elven leaders, they’ll need to wait for the funeral that has just started to reach its conclusion. The elven guards ask the PCs in soft voices to wait near the edge of the camp, far enough away so as to not interrupt the ritual, but certainly close enough for them to observe. If one of the PCs is an elven cleric, he might be invited to participate in the ritual.

From the far side of the camp, elves carry wooden litters bearing the corpses

of nearly a dozen of their fallen to the central pavilion, where a cleric wearing a winged helmet waits. Beside the cleric stands a hooded acolyte and a noble warrior with a bandaged wound on his head. The acolyte carries an incense burner that trails a thin cloud of exotic smoke.

Thirteen elves and forty-seven hobgoblins died in the battle. After amassing the carcasses of the slain hobgoblins and igniting them, the elves are bidding a more honorable farewell to their own dead. Unless the PCs attack or molest the elves, the funerary rites take 30 minutes, ending with the incineration of their dead warriors on the funeral pyres.

After the funeral, the PCs are invited to speak with the elven leaders. These are Litiraan, a noble warrior (male elf fighter 5) and Telkya, priestess of Corellon

Larethian (female elf cleric 5). The two meet with the heroes inside the central pavilion, where they invite the PCs to a light dinner with some fine wine.

If asked about the funeral, the elves tell of the recent battle with Khurbok and his hobgoblins. They know that some of their archers resent the fact that neither Litiraan nor Telkya approved pursuing Khurbok and his eight surviving bodyguards into the deeper woods. If asked why they let the hobgoblins go, Litiraan patiently explains that, by order of his queen, he has led his hunters on Khurbok's trail since the hobgoblin's attack on an elven village a few days ago. Khurbok's band was a particularly tough one, since many of his hobgoblins were spellcasters.

Although Khurbok managed to escape, Litiraan does not intend to

pursue him into the woods. The reasoning behind Litiraan's decision stems from his belief that the woods the hobgoblin fled into are cursed, and are a dangerous area for elves. If the heroes ask why, Telkya says that ages ago, the area was the home of Luthicath, one of the greatest orc druids of his time. Luthicath's hatred of elves was legendary, and he cursed the area so that elves could never inhabit it by infesting the place with wretched mockeries of elvenkind; humanoid plant monsters made of thorns and spines known today as needfolk.

If the elves learn that the PCs are seeking the Ashen Tower ruins, they grow quiet and thoughtful. If questioned further, Litiraan admits that he knows of the ruins the PCs speak of; they are located deep in the forbidden section of the woods. After a few moments of



thought, he offers the PCs a 5,000 gp reward if they can bring him Khurbok's head. He says he'll wait three days here in the camp for their return, but he cannot provide them with any aid. If elven PCs are present, Telkya discourages them from entering the woods, but Litiraan praises their courage if they do so anyway.

Creatures: If the PCs' intention to enter the forbidden woods becomes public knowledge, two young elven brothers named Ilar and Micor ask to come with them. Their father was slain by Khurbok, and the brothers want vengeance. Litiraan disapproves, but a successful DC 25 Diplomacy check convinces him to change his mind and let the brothers accompany the PCs. Ilar and Micor are extraordinary in that they are twins. Driven by a lust for revenge, they tend to behave foolhardily in combat but are nonetheless loyal and skilled allies. If either Ilar or Micor survive this adventure, they could make excellent cohorts for any of the PCs with the Leadership feat.

➤ **Ilar and Micor, male elf fighter 3:** CR 3; Medium humanoid; HD 3d10+3; hp 24 each; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +3; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d8+1/19–20, longsword) or +8 ranged (1d8+2/×3, +1 composite longbow); Full Atk +4 melee (1d8+1/19–20, longsword) or +6/+6 ranged (1d8+2/×3, +1 composite longbow); SA —; SQ elf traits; AL CG; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills: Climb +5, Jump +5, Ride +7, Survival +2.

Feats: Point-Blank Shot^B, Rapid Shot^B, Track, Weapon Focus (longbow).

Languages: Common, Elven, Goblin.

Possessions: Longsword, +1 composite longbow (+1 Strength) with 20 arrows, masterwork studded leather armor.

Needle in a Haystack (EL 7)

Finding the ruins of Lord Nepenchil's keep in the woods is difficult, even if the PCs have the aid of the elves. The ruin's exact location is unknown to the elves, and even if the PCs managed to dig up some old maps of the region,

the forest has overgrown much of the ruin and roads that once led to it. Ashen Tower lies only 10 miles from the elven camp, but the approach is through densely overgrown forest. Aerial reconnaissance is useless due to the dense tree canopy.

If the PCs ask the elves for advice, they recommend tracking Khurbok's group into the woods. The hobgoblins know the area quite well, and have no taboos about this part of the woods. It's quite likely that they know the location of the ruins, and tactically it makes sense for them to retreat to such a location. Tracking the hobgoblins is fairly easy, and requires only a DC 12 Survival check; Ilar and Micor can both follow this trail if they're with the party.

If the PCs decide to simply search the uncharted woods on their own, allow them a DC 30 Survival check every day they search the woods. Each day that passes, the PCs gain a cumulative +1 bonus on this Survival check; eventually, they should find the ruins. Of course, you should also feel free to liven up these days spent searching with additional encounters like the one that follows.

Creatures: The elves' traditional taboo against entering this part of the woods is not without cause, for the entire region is infested with dangerous plants that find the presence of elvenkind intolerable.

As he and his bodyguards passed through the woods, Khurbok made semi-peaceful contact with the indigenous needlefolk tribes. These humanoid plant monsters bear an ancient hatred of elves, and the hobgoblin leader managed to convince the needlefolk that a large group of elves would soon be entering the area. In gratitude for this welcome information, the needlefolk granted the hobgoblins safe passage to the Ashen Tower.

A needlefolk is a green, hairless biped whose body is covered with short, stiff bristles. In human terms, it is emaciated. Its arms end in "hands" that sport vicious claws, and the coloration of the tiny leaves that cover the monster's body matches the color of the foliage around them.

➤ **Needlefolk (6):** CR 2; Medium plant; HD 3d8+3; hp 16 each; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +2; Grp +3; Atk +3 melee (1d4+1, 2 claws) or +2 ranged (1d12+1, needles, range increment 20 ft.); SA —; SQ plant traits; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 6, Wis 15, Cha 5; *Monster Manual II* 158.

Skills: Hide +8 (+16 in forests when moving, +24 in forests when stationary), Listen +4, Move Silently +2, Spot +4.

Feats: Alertness, Stealthy.

Language: Sylvan.

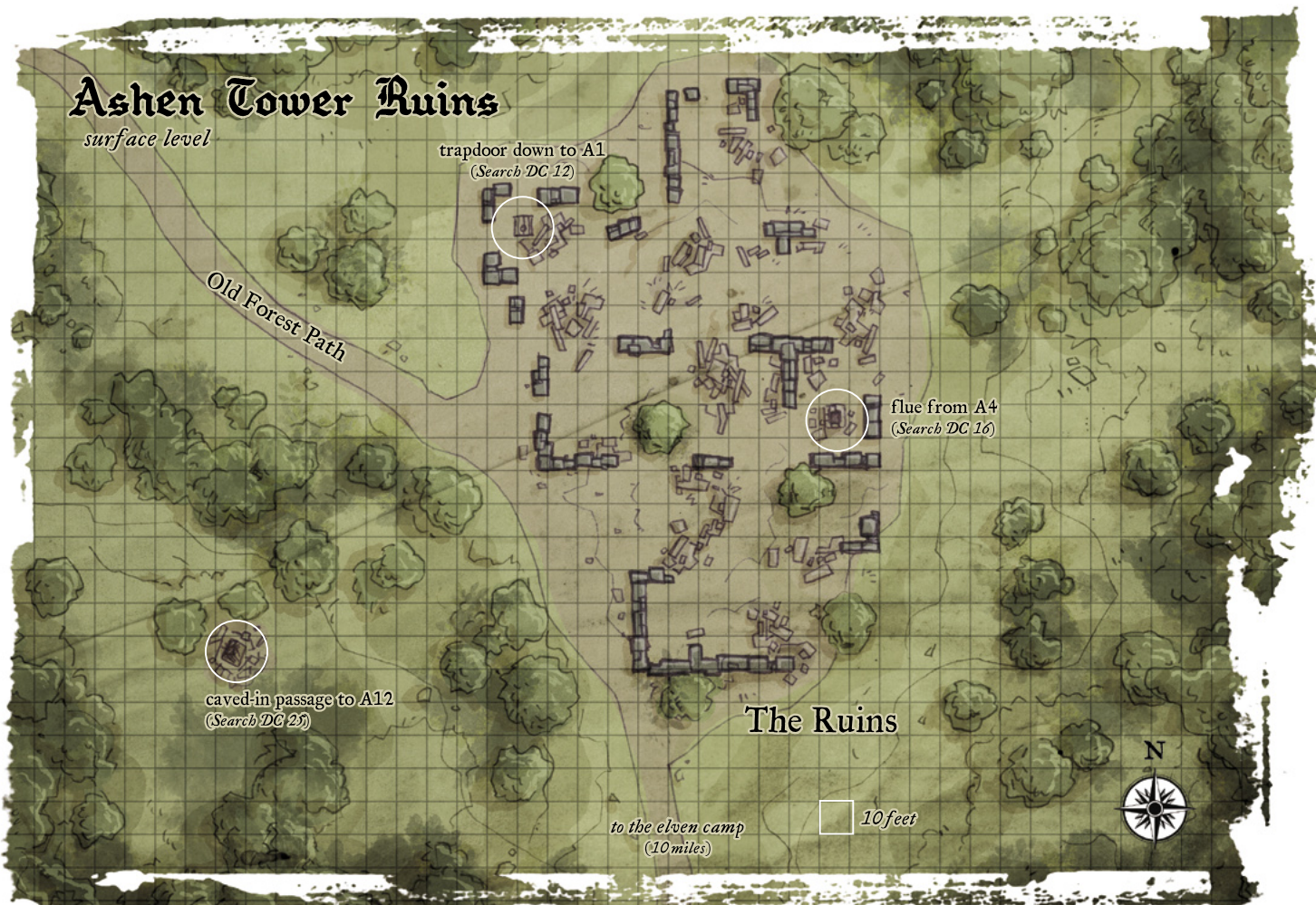
Tactics: Hundreds of needlefolk hide throughout this area of woods, so eventually the PCs are going to stumble into one of their ambushes. The needlefolk start combat by firing upon the intruders with their needles, focusing attacks on elves and half-elves if they can.

CHAPTER TWO THE ASHEN TOWER

The PCs may not even realize at first that they've reached the Ashen Tower's ruins. Little more than a few crumbling stone walls remain above ground, but once the PCs notice the ruins it's fairly easy to pick out where the tower once stood.

When the hobgoblins arrived, they quickly found a trap door in the northwest corner of the ruins and entered the chambers below. If the PCs are following their trail, they find this trap door automatically. Otherwise, a successful DC 12 Search check in this area of the ruins is required to find this entrance.

Two other possible entrances to the dungeons below exist. One is via a chimney flue that connects area 4 to the eastern portion of the ruins. There's a 10% chance that the hobgoblins have a fire going in area 4, in which case the chimney's presence is marked by rising smoke and can be found automatically. Otherwise, it takes a successful DC 16 Search check in this part of the ruins to locate the entrance. The chimney is only a foot in diameter, and descends 20 feet before opening into the ceiling of area 4. A Tiny or smaller creature



can climb the chimney with a successful DC 10 Climb check. A Small creature must make a DC 15 Escape Artist check every 5 feet to make progress, and a Medium creature must make a DC 30 Escape Artist check to make the same progress. Large and larger creatures cannot fit into this chimney at all.

A third possible entrance exists in the overgrowth to the southwest of the ruins. A DC 25 Search of this area uncovers a shallow depression in the ground. A DC 20 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check reveals that the depression is likely from a caved-in passageway. Clearing the tunnel to area 12 requires twenty man-hours of work and a successful DC 20 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check to prevent the tunnel from collapsing again.

The genesis of this third entrance is of particular note. A few years after Kenewor came back to these crypts to return the *fiendish foot*, a group of tomb robbers led by a scoundrel named Berwim arrived on the scene. Unaware of the entrance to the dungeons in the ruins themselves, they dug a passage directly into the crypts from the surface. The rogues managed to avoid the guardian Kenewor left behind, but were disappointed to find the place relatively empty of loot. The only thing of value they found (unfortunately for them) was the *fiendish foot*.

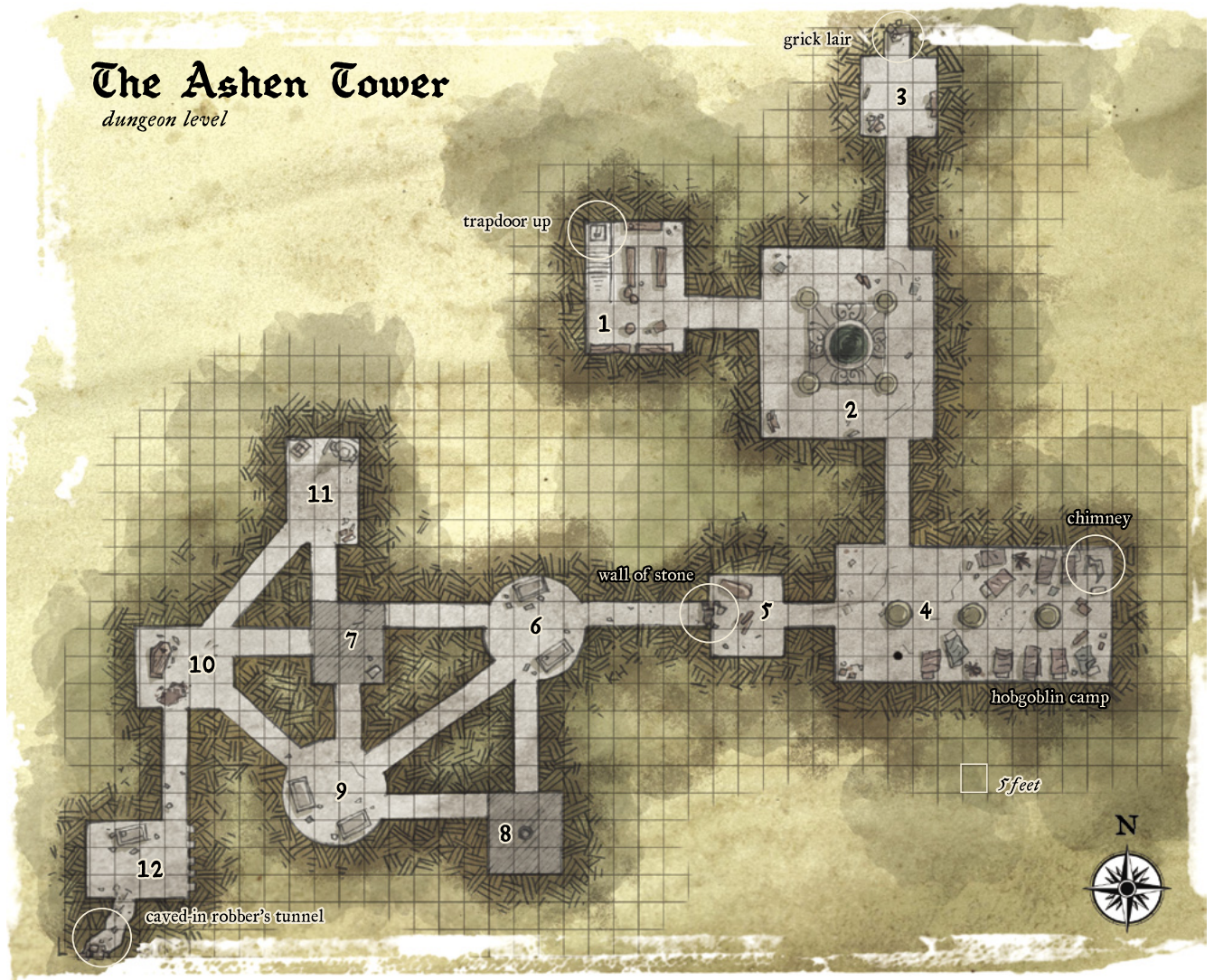
Being scoundrels, the rogues fell to bickering and fighting for possession of the lone item of loot only a few hours after they left the crypt. Berwim's followers ganged up on him and killed him with ease, but the *fiendish foot* had already cursed him. That night,

the murdered rogue was transformed into a vampire by the *fiendish foot*. He tracked down his killers and quickly overwhelmed them, transforming them all into vampire spawn. Berwim then led his new minions back to the crypts for shelter before sunrise. For a few days, they preyed upon the surrounding countryside, but at the end of the week the crudely constructed tunnel gave out. It collapsed, sealing the vampire and his spawn inside the crypts below the ruin.

Creatures (EL 6): Kurbok has posted three of his hobgoblin minions in the ruins as guards. All three are hiding in the rubble, keeping a sharp eye out for the elves (whom they expect at any moment to lay siege to the ruins). When the PCs arrive, the three hobgoblins remain hidden and observant until they are discovered or the PCs seem to be about to enter the

The Ashen Tower

dungeon level



dungeons below. Their hoots and shouts when they attack are heard automatically by their kin in areas 1 and 4 below, who prepare for battle as detailed there.

➔ **Follower of Khurbok, male hobgoblin warrior 2/adept 2 (3):** CR 3; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 2d8+2 plus 2d6+2; hp 20 each; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk or Full Atk +5 melee (1d8/×3, masterwork battleaxe) or +5 ranged (1d6, masterwork javelin); SA spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., summon familiar; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 11.

Skills: Concentration +5, Hide +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +7, Spot +3.

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Focus (battleaxe).

Languages: Common, Goblin.

Adept Spells Prepared (caster level 2): 0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic, guidance*; 1st—*protection from good, command* (DC 12).

Possessions: Masterwork battleaxe, three masterwork javelins, masterwork studded leather armor, +1 *light wooden shield*, *potion of cure moderate wounds*.

Ashen Tower Dungeon

Unless stated otherwise, the dungeon passageways and rooms are of unremarkable masonry, with 12-foot-tall arched ceilings. Water drips from the walls in some places, and thick tangled plant roots hang down from cracks in the ceiling in others.

Khurbok's band of surviving hobgoblins now takes refuge in the dungeon.

These humanoids wear cloaked hoods, and have a sinister, lean appearance. All of them have been taught a smattering of magic from their leader. To join Khurbok's circle of adepts, a new member is required to show his devotion by summoning a cat familiar and then feeding it to Gimuk, Khurbok's worg cohort. As a result, none of the hobgoblin adepts have familiars today. Including Khurbok, there are ten hobgoblins in the dungeon. If a battle begins, the hobgoblins quickly mobilize to repulse intruders. Cornered and expecting reprisal from the elves at any time, the hobgoblins fight to the death.

1. Cellar (EL 7)

This dusty, dark cellar was apparently used to store spirits. The stone stair-

way that leads down from the trapdoor above it seems sturdy and safe. The wooden shelves against the walls and in the middle of the room have suffered badly from moisture and old age. Broken kegs and bottles lie scattered across the floor.

This cellar was ransacked decades ago and is now empty.

Creatures: Four of Khurbok's hobgoblins are stationed here at all times. If they notice the approaching PCs, they hide behind the shelves until the PCs enter the room. At this point they spring out and attack with a loud battle cry, alerting the other hobgoblins in the complex, who immediately mobilize to aid in the defense of their refuge.

➤ **Follower of Khurbok (4):** hp 20 each, see page 49.

2. Well (EL 3)

Four circular pillars support the ceiling of this room. A ten-foot-wide circular well yawns between these four pillars in the room's center. A broken bucket sits near the rim of the well and a few old wooden crates are piled against the east wall of the room. The crates are open and empty.

The well plunges 50 feet into a 10-foot-deep pit of murky water. A spiral staircase made of wood was once suspended inside the well, allowing easy access to the water, but this structure collapsed long ago. The wall inside the well is pocked with cavities, so it's only a DC 12 Climb check to scale it.

Creatures: A strange, deformed creature known as a boggle lurks in this room. Named Ritoz, the boggle serves Khurbok as a jester and scout. Ritoz climbed down into the well in search of fresh food and water, and now waits there until he hears trouble in the room above.

➤ **Ritoz, male boggle:** CR 3; Small monstrous humanoid; HD 4d8; hp 18; Init +9; Spd 40 ft., climb 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 16, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +4,

Grp +0, Atk +5 melee (1d4, claw); Full Atk +5 melee (1d4, 2 claws) and +0 melee (1d4, bite); SA improved grab, rend 2d4; SQ darkvision 60 ft., damage reduction 5/magic, *dimension door*, fire resistance 5, grease, scent; AL CN; SV Fort +1, Ref +9, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 21, Con 11, Int 5, Wis 8, Cha 6; *Monster Manual II* 33.

Skills: Climb +8, Escape Artist +14, Hide +13, Move Silently +8, Sleight of Hand +7.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Stealthy.

Languages: Boggle, Goblin.

Improved Grab (Ex): If a boggle hits an opponent up to one size category larger than itself with a claw attack, it can immediately make a grapple check without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Dimension Door (Sp): A boggle can use *dimension door* (caster level 7) six times per day as a spell-like ability.

Grease (Su): A boggle can secrete a film of oily substance onto its skin at will. This grants it a +10 bonus on Escape Artist checks. It can also use the oil to duplicate the effects of a *grease* spell, except that the range is touch, and the duration is 4 rounds. A DC 12 Reflex save resists the effects of the *grease*. Boggles are immune to the effects of this substance.

Tactics: If Ritoz hears combat erupt in a nearby room, he clambers up to the edge of the well and hides, preparing an action to snatch and pull a PC down into the well with a successful grapple. Alternatively, he uses his grease ability to make the floor near the well slippery.

3. Guardroom (EL 6)

The remains of a broken table and two splintered chairs lie on the floor of this square room. The rusty head of a glaive and a smashed crossbow lie at the foot of an empty weapon rack on west wall. To the north, an ancient cave-in fills what was once an exit from the room.

Creature: The rubble to the north hides a narrow passage to the lair of a solitary and unusually large grick,

which scuttled in from a collapsed (and now inaccessible) section of the dungeon to the north. The grick is scared by the numerous hobgoblins, and has opted to wait for their departure in his hole. Still, the monster's nervous fear can turn into rage if anyone pokes around too closely in its nest in the rubble.

Remember that as long as the Large grick is wedged in its nest, it's squeezing and thus suffers a -4 penalty on attack rolls and to AC. The grick moves into the room to the south as soon as it can to remove these penalties.

➤ **Grick Behemoth:** CR 6; Large aberration; HD 6d8+24; hp 51; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +4; Grp +16; Atk +11 melee (1d6+8, tentacle); Full Atk +11 melee (1d6+8, 4 tentacles) and +6 melee (1d4+4, bite); SA —; SQ damage reduction 10/magic, darkvision 60 ft., scent; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +8; Str 26, Dex 15, Con 18, Int 3, Wis 16, Cha 3.

Skills: Climb +16, Hide +3 (+11 in rocky areas), Listen +8, Move Silently +4, Spot +8.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Natural Armor, Stealthy, Track^B.

Treasure: A DC 21 Search check of the grick's nest turns up a skeletal forearm that still wears a platinum bracelet worth 250 gp.

4. Khurbok's Hall (EL 7)

Three round pillars support the ceiling of this fifteen-foot-high hall. Filthy bedding is heaped to the east around a smoldering campfire under a narrow vent in the ceiling. A wooden chest sits dangerously close to the fire.

Creatures: Khurbok and his hobgoblins have chosen this chamber as their temporary lair while they plot their next move. The hobgoblin chieftain is always encountered here, along with two of his followers and his cohort, a worg named Gimuk.

➤ **Khurbok, male hobgoblin warrior 3/adept 4:** CR 6; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 3d8+3 plus 4d6+4; hp



34; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +5; Grp +6; Atk or Full Atk +8 melee (1d8+2/×3, +1 battleaxe) or +7 ranged (1d6+2, +1 javelin); SA spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., summon familiar; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +7; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +5, Intimidate +8, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Ride +7, Spot +5.

Feats: Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (battleaxe).

Languages: Common, Goblin.

Adept Spells Prepared (caster level 4): 0—*cure minor wounds*, *detect magic*, *guidance*; 1st—*cure light wounds*, *protection from good*, *burning hands* (DC 13); 2nd—*bull's Strength*.

Possessions: +1 battleaxe, +1 javelin, +1 studded leather armor, +1 light wooden shield, *potion of aid*.

➤ **Gimuk, male worg:** hp 30; *Monster Manual* 256.

➤ **Follower of Khurbok (3):** hp 20 each, see page 49.

Tactics: Khurbok lets his worg and hobgoblin minions engage the PCs in melee while he casts *protection from good* and *bull's Strength* on himself. He then drinks his *potion of aid*. This done, he casts *burning hands* on as many of the PCs as possible and wades into combat, fighting to the death.

Treasure: The chest near the fireplace contains the remnants of Khurbok's band's treasure: 4,700 sp, 790 gp, and a pouch of 15 azurites worth 10 gp each.

5. Nepenchil's Rest

A simple coffin, made of walnut wood, lies half-open near the north wall of this

room. The headless, semi-pulverized skeleton of a humanoid is huddled in the middle of the room on the floor. The skeleton's skull, which bears huge, sharp fangs, sits near the southeast corner of the room. A section of the wall to the southwest seems smooth and polished, a much different style of stonework than the surrounding walls.

This is the chamber in which Kenewor defeated the undead Nepenchil so long ago; the remains on the ground are in fact those of the slain vampire. Nepenchil is truly at rest; there is no danger of awakening the vampire today.

The smooth section of wall to the southwest once opened into a passageway that led to a complex of crypts that served as Nepenchil's true lair. Kenewor sealed it off long ago with a *wall of stone*.

If the PCs are following the map on the knag, they might recognize this room as the one indicated on the inscription.

🗡️ **Wall of Stone:** 3 in. thick; Hardness 8; hp 45; Break DC 26.

6. Crypt of the Banquet (EL 4)

This round crypt contains two stone sarcophagi amid heaps of shattered pottery. Faded frescoes on the wall depict a group of ancient nomadic nobles. A half-dozen couples lie on beds of fur and use hide saddles as pillows while they eat grapes to the accompaniment of a satyr's double flute.

The remaining chambers in this subterranean complex are a cluster of ancient crypts built long ago by nomads. Nepenchil unknowingly built his tower above them, and broke into one while constructing the subterranean section of his home. It was as he explored them that he discovered a terrible relic left with the dead of an age past—the *fiendish foot*.

These chambers are of a much older and uneven construction, with walls of smoothly hewn rock and 8-foot-high ceilings. The sarcophagi were opened and ransacked long before Nepenchil arrived, and today, only a few bones remain inside them.

Creatures: One of the vampire spawn created by Berwim lurks in this crypt, eager to drain some energy and drink some human blood after decades of undead starvation. The undead is insane with hunger, and fights to the death without bothering to call for aid from its kin.

🦇 **Vampire Spawn:** hp 29; *Monster Manual* 253.

7. Trapped Crypt (EL 3)

The walls of this room are smooth and bare. A large trunk sits near the middle of the room on the floor.

In the years after becoming trapped in these crypts, Berwim has existed in a constantly shifting cycle of lucidity

and madness. During his times of clarity, the vampire rogue passes the time building traps to protect his lair, never quite becoming lucid enough to focus on digging his way out of the collapsed tunnel.

Trap: This crypt contains one of Berwim's traps. The entire floor of this room is rigged to drop open as soon as a creature tries to open or examine the trunk (which is, of course, empty), or as soon as at least four Small, two Medium, or one Large or larger creature enters the room. The pit itself is 20 feet deep and lined with spikes.

🔪 **Spiked Pit Trap:** CR 3; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (all creatures in the room); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 20.

8. Treasure-Filled Trap (EL 3)

The walls of this room are smooth and bare. A large trunk sits near the middle of the room on the floor.

Trap: This room is similar to area 7, complete with spiked pit trap.

🔪 **Spiked Pit Trap:** CR 3; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (all creatures in the room); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 20.

Treasure: Unlike area 7, a small secret panel is built into the northern wall of this pit, about 10 feet from the floor. A successful DC 20 Search check reveals this panel. Within, Berwim has hidden his treasure (mostly spoils stolen from his vampire spawn after he created them). The loot is contained in two sacks and a wooden casket.

The two sacks contain 25 fine ceramic pottery urns collectively worth 50 gp, along with 348 sp. The casket contains three violet garnets worth 500 gp each, four silver bangles worth 25 gp each, Berwim's discarded

+1 dagger, and four potions of cure light wounds.

9. Crypt of the Hunt (EL 6)

The frescoes on the walls of this round crypt depict a group of ancient nobles on horseback, hunting game with bows, lances, and domesticated panthers. Several half-naked nymphs can be seen running away in the forest as well.

Creatures: Two vampire spawn use the sarcophagi as coffins here. As with the undead in area 6, these vampire spawn are crazed with hunger.

🦇 **Vampire Spawn (2):** hp 29 each; *Monster Manual* 253.

10. Burned Coffin

This room contains a shattered and burned wooden coffin. A large swath of dried blood stains the floor near the south wall, and a broken-open chest lies heaped to the north.

The ruined coffin was once one of Nepenchil's—Kenewor burned the coffin during his fight with the vampire more than a hundred years ago. The dried blood is from this same battle. The broken chest to the north once contained the *fiendish foot*. After sneaking into area 11 and stealthily dragging the chest back here, Berwim smashed it open after being defeated by its once extraordinary lock.

11. Kenewor's Guardian (EL 8)

The ceiling of this room vaults to fifteen feet overhead. A massive stone chair sits in the northeast corner of this square room, and seated in this chair is a ten-foot-tall suit of banded mail armor. The armor has a great helmet with just two narrow slits for the eyes, and grips a large scimitar and a round shield in its gauntlets.

Creature: Kenewor chose this crypt as the place to hide the *fiendish foot*. After locking the relic in a stout chest, he placed a powerful guardian of his

own creation here. This guardian is seated on the chair—an animated suit of armor known as a dread guard. He left the construct with orders to attack whoever entered the room. Unfortunately, while the dread guard is quite observant, it can't see invisible foes, and Berwim was able to not only sneak into this room unseen using a *potion of invisibility*, but managed to sneak back out with the chest right under its nose.

The dread guard attacks only if it sees someone enter the room, or if someone assaults it with ranged attacks from outside the room. Once it animates, red eyes glow inside its helm's visor, and it rises to its feet with a terrible racket. It pursues enemies who try to flee for 1d6 rounds before returning to its post here.

➤ **Advanced Dread Guard:** CR 8; Large construct; HD 12d10+30; hp 96; Init +0; Spd 20 ft. (can't run); AC 18, touch 9, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +9; Grp +21; Atk +10 melee (1d6+13/18–20, +1 *silver scimitar* with 5-point Power Attack); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d6+13/18–20, +1 *silver scimitar* with 5-point Power Attack); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA —; SQ cold resistance 10, construct traits, darkvision 60 ft., fire resistance 10; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 26, Dex 10, Con —, Int 6, Wis 13, Cha 2.

Skills: Spot +16.

Feats: Cleave, Power Attack.

Possessions: +1 *silver scimitar* (Medium sized), masterwork light shield.

Development: Note that the dread guard can become a powerful weapon against the vampires in the crypt if the PCs can lure the vampires and the construct into the same room. The dread guard focuses its attention on the closest enemy, and the vampires prefer to flee



Berwim

from the construct since it's immune to so many of their attacks and its weapon can penetrate their damage reduction with ease.

12. Berwim's Crypt (EL 7)

This rectangular crypt contains a single stone sarcophagus near the north wall. To the east, the wall is covered with dozens of tiny empty niches. A large pile of digging tools lies heaped near an archway to the south; about a dozen feet beyond the archway, this southern passageway is collapsed in a wall of rubble.

The collapsed tunnel to the south is all that remains of the tunnel Berwim and

his henchmen dug so many years ago. The niches in the east wall once held urns of cremated remains, but these urns were emptied by Berwim's men and looted. The urns are now hidden in area 8.

Creature: Berwim lurks in this room, deep in one of his increasingly long-lasting bouts of hunger-induced insanity. In life, Berwim was a bald, ugly tomb robber. As a vampire, his sinister look has become both terrible and disgusting. The wounds left so long ago by his accomplices have reduced Berwim's shirt to a grotesque ring of ragged and bloodstained strips of cloth that hang loose around his collar. The scars of the wounds inflicted

The Fiendish Foot



before death are still evident on his exposed torso.

➤ **Berwim, male human vampire rogue 5:** CR 7; Medium undead; HD 5d12; hp 32; Init +8; Spd 30 ft.; AC 22, touch 15, flat-footed 22; Base Atk +3; Grp +6; Atk or Full Atk +6 melee (1d6+3 plus energy drain, slam); SA blood drain, children of the night, dominate (DC 16), create spawn, energy drain, sneak attack +3d6; SQ alternate form, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, evasion, fast healing 5, gaseous form, resistance to cold and electricity 10, spider climb, trapfinding, trap sense +1, +4 turn resistance, uncanny dodge; AL CE; SV Fort +1, Ref +10, Will +2; Str 17, Dex 18, Con —, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 18.

Skills: Appraise +9, Bluff +23, Craft (trapmaking) +9, Diplomacy +6, Disable Device +9, Hide +20, Intimidate +12, Listen +17, Move Silently +12, Open Lock +12, Search +17, Sense Motive +9, Spot +17.

Feats: Alertness^B, Combat Reflexes^B, Dodge, Improved Initiative^B, Lightning Reflexes^B, Mobility, Skill Focus (Bluff).

Languages: Common.

Possessions: Bracers of armor +1, ring of protection +1, fiendish foot.

Tactics: In his moments of lucidity, Berwim is a dangerous foe. When insane with hunger, this danger is mitigated somewhat. Berwim makes grapple

attacks each round against the closest target rather than using his slam attack in a desperate attempt to pin a target to drain its blood. Remember, his energy drain is only triggered when he slams a target, and thus won't affect creatures that succumb to his grapple. Remember also that since he lacks the Improved Grapple feat, this tactic provokes attacks of opportunity. If reduced to fewer than 10 hit points, he abandons this tactic and uses his slam attack for the remainder of combat.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the heroes bring proof of Khurbok's death to Litiraan's camp within three days, the elves are jubilant. They don't ask how the PCs managed to accomplish this feat, since they have no desire to know anything about the forbidden woods, but they do honor their promise to reward them with gold. Of course, the elves don't have the money on site, but 1d4 weeks later a large chest of the promised gold arrives with a gracious elven escort.

If the heroes find the *fiendish foot*, they'll have to make some hard choices. If they decide to keep the item and abuse its powers frequently, they'll likely attract the attention of good-aligned organizations who would rather see the relic destroyed. And if the relic's owner perishes, the surviving PCs might find themselves stalked by one of their own, transformed into a vampire.

A good party might decide to destroy the *fiendish foot*. Kenewor was a powerful spellcaster, and even he wasn't able to destroy the artifact. The means and method of its destruction can fuel any number of subsequent quests and adventures. ▣

Tito Leati's previous credits in DUNGEON include "Iriandel," "The Seventh Arm," and "The Demonskar Legacy" (part four of the Shackled City Adventure Path).

Mt. Zogon

The Fiendish Foot

Several of these minor artifacts were created by Orcus, the demon prince of undeath, to spread the plague of undeath on the Material Plane. The *fiendish foot* is a 4-inch-long piece of black obsidian, skillfully carved in the likeness of cloven hoof. If held against firelight, the talisman glitters with a blood-red tinge, while in daylight it becomes a deep, opaque black. A tiny hole is drilled in the top of the foot, through which a string or fine chain can be threaded.

If worn as a necklace or bracelet, the owner of the *fiendish foot* can call upon its fiendish magic once per day as a free action to gain all the benefits of the fiendish creature template. Creatures that cannot gain this template (such as outsiders, constructs, and undead) cannot gain any benefits from the *fiendish foot*. Once activated, the benefits of the template persist for 10 rounds before fading.

Each time the *fiendish foot* is activated, its wearer must make a DC 20 Will save or his alignment shifts one step closer to chaotic evil. This is considered a deliberate change for the purposes of the *atonement* spell.

Worse, if a humanoid or monstrous humanoid claims the *fiendish foot* as his own, he must immediately make a DC 20 Will save or fall under the artifact's dreadful curse. He must make this save again each day to

continue to resist the curse, even if he has not activated the artifact's power. Once a victim succumbs to this curse, his skin grows pale and sunburns easily, and he gains a growing craving for fresh blood. Loss or destruction of the artifact does nothing to lift this curse. The curse can be lifted with a successful *break enchantment* spell or by a *remove curse* cast at a caster level of 20th or higher. If the cursed victim dies while under the effects of this curse and still in the possession of the *foot*, his body rises as a vampire (or vampire spawn, as appropriate) with the next sunset. The newly created vampire is free-willed, and often tries to pass the *fiendish foot* on as a "gift" to someone new, since it no longer gains any benefit from the item's ability to impart the fiendish creature template. A cursed victim who dies without possession of the *foot* escapes this undead fate, although he must make a successful DC 20 Will save to voluntarily leave the *fiendish foot* behind, and must make a new DC 20 Will save once a week thereafter to resist reclaiming the *foot*. If any of these saving throws are failed, the victim suffers 1d4 points of Wisdom drain and becomes obsessed with reclaiming the *foot*, if at all possible.

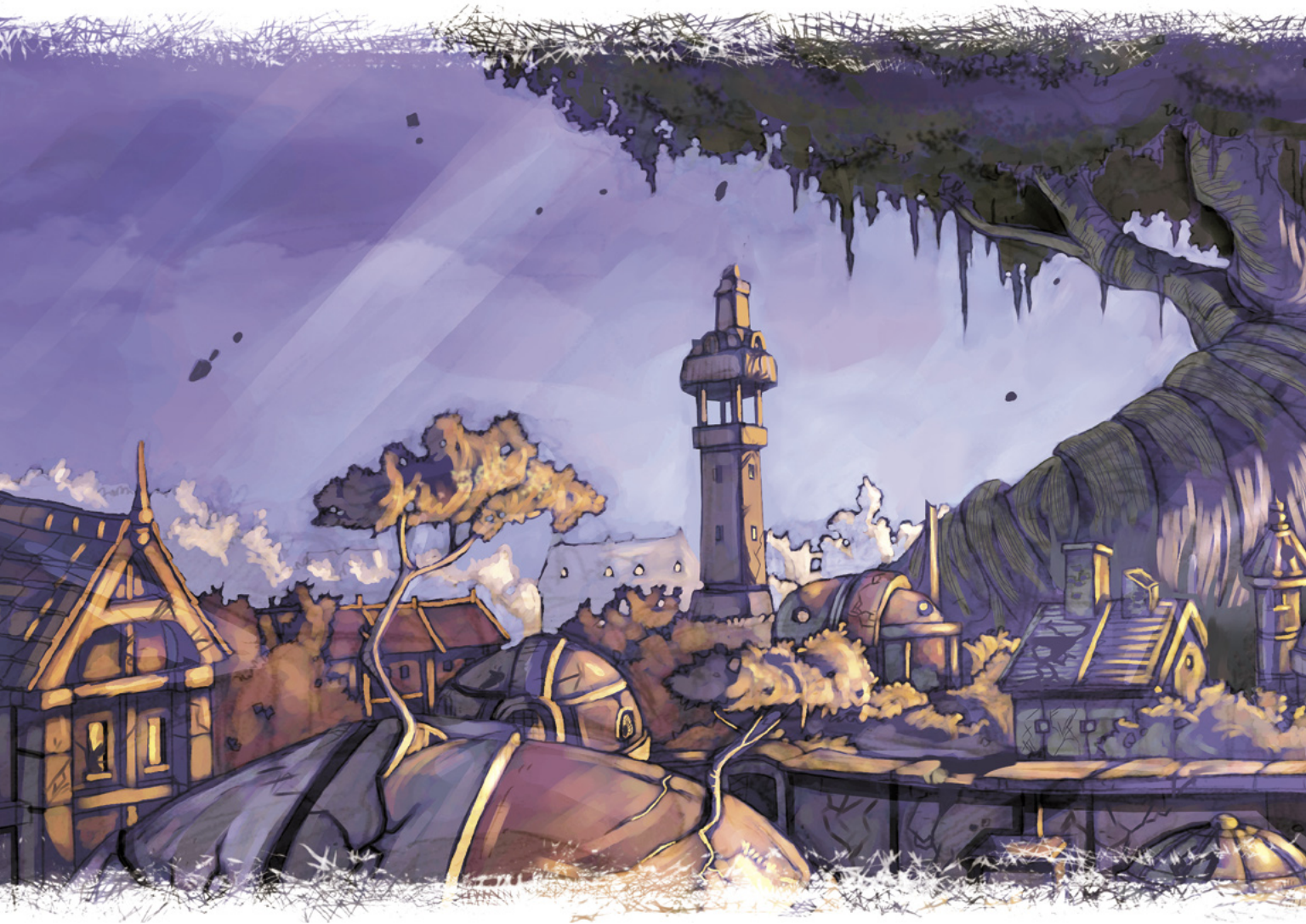
Scaling the Adventure

Although "Fiendish Footprints" is designed for four characters of 6th level, it can be adapted for 7th–8th level characters. Advance all classed enemies by a number of class levels equal to the difference between the average party level and 6. Give each of the needlefolk 2–4 levels of rogue (or scout, if you have access to *Complete Adventurer*). Consider giving Ritoz the boggle the same increase in rogue or scout levels. Replace the grick behemoth with an umber hulk

(or two). Remember that worgs are intelligent creatures, and can gain character levels—give Gimuk a number of fighter levels so his new Hit Die total is two below his master's. Deepen both pit traps in the crypt by 20 to 40 feet, and double the number of vampire spawn encountered. Finally, replace the advanced dread guard with a shield guardian.



BY TONY MOSELEY



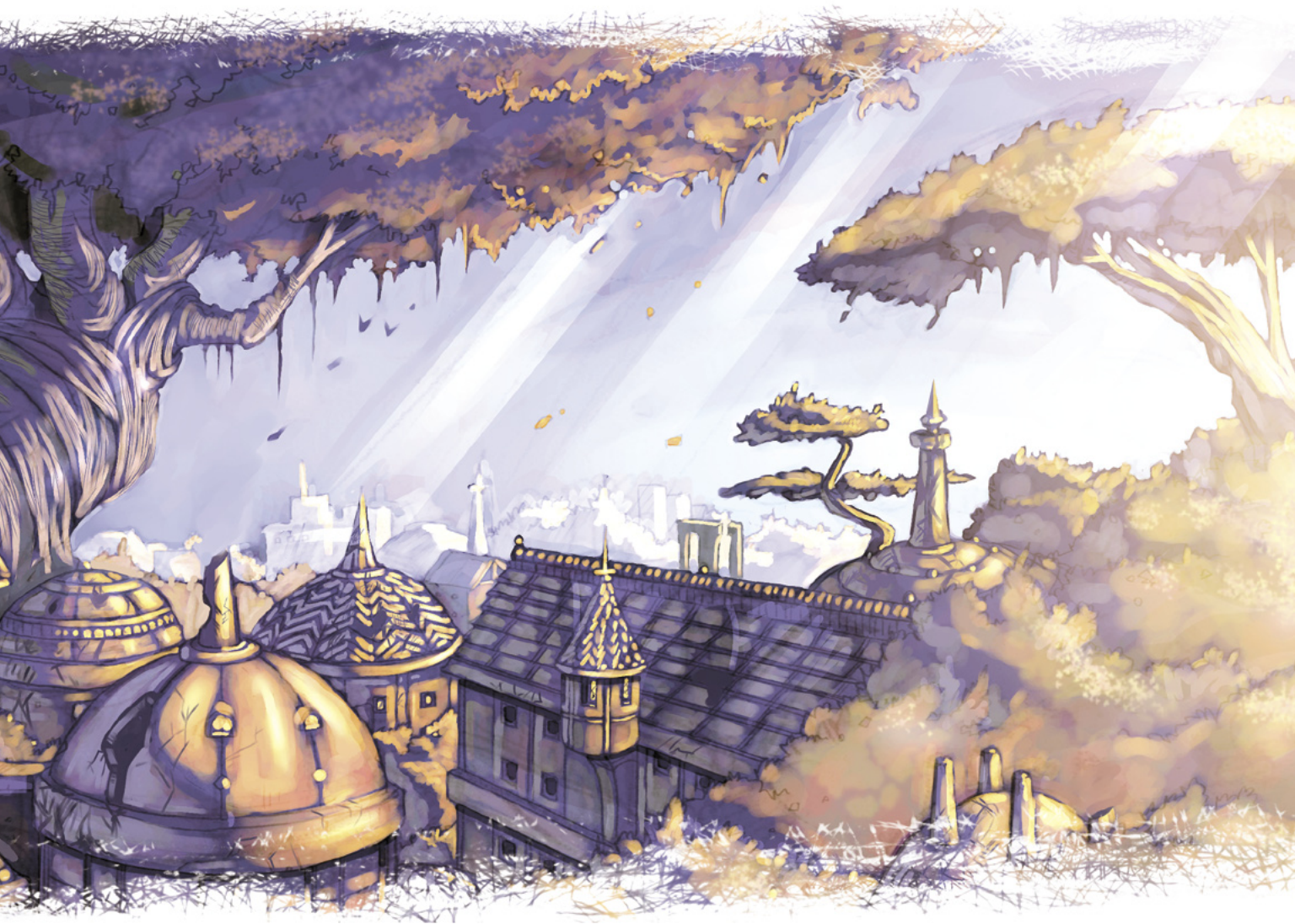
Root of Evil

BY MIKE MEARLS

BY UDON W. JIM ZUBKAVICH

BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI

ANY SETTING, HIGH-LEVEL (13TH-20TH), DUNGEON CRAWL



The green hag druid Gathra has long raged against the encroaching taint of civilization. She sees within its gleaming towers and burgeoning cities a place of refuge from the natural world. In her eyes, the law of nature is simple: kill or be killed. The weak die to sustain the strong, ensuring that only the worthiest creatures perpetuate the species. Yet civilized lands give safe harbor to pitiful weaklings who are only fit to fill the bellies of the mighty. As Gathra gained power, she traveled the planes in search of a mighty weapon that she could use to level these hated bastions of protection. She found her answer in the Abyss.

“Root of Evil” is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure suitable for four

18th-level characters. This adventure is designed to work with any campaign setting, as Gathra could conceivably launch her gambit on almost any world via planar or dimensional travel.

This adventure is designed specifically to be as portable as possible. Gathra chooses a small city or large town that offers sufficient carnage for her followers without calling an entire army down upon her before she can ready her defenses. In GREYHAWK, Highfolk makes a good initial target. In a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, she might choose to strike at Phlan in hopes of forging an alliance with Zhentil Keep before eventually turning against it. In EBERRON, the lingering distrust and fear left over from the war make any

kingdom a prime target. Gathra might strike at Breland in hopes of winning a temporary alliance with Aundair and Karnath, while drawing on Droaam for troops and other support.

Adventure Background

The evil green hag druid Gathra gained the *Seed of Malgarius* from an obscure demon lord of torture and bloodletting named Lazbral'thull. When a master attunes and properly infuses this magical seed with arcane energy, it takes the form of Malgarius: the towering, demonic plant creature trapped within the seed. Given enough time, Malgarius can spawn a demonic forest that slowly drains all life from the world as it spreads.

With this weapon in hand, and with a small army of followers eager to conquer in her name, Gathra returned to the Material Plane. She epitomizes the philosophy of many neutral evil druids, and sees sympathy and charity as weaknesses that undermine the brutal, deadly way of the natural world. Living things exist to struggle against each other and establish a clear hierarchy of weak victims and strong rulers. She intends to shepherd Malgarius to its full power in order to spawn a deadly forest capable of consuming the entire planet. In her eyes, this plan represents the best way to introduce a new, brutal order to the world. That it happens to place her at the top of the food chain makes it all the more appealing.

Luckily for the planet's inhabitants, Malgarius is by no means a mindless entity. Once it was a free creature that reigned over a layer of the Abyss, but Lazbral'thull defeated it, conquered its realm, and sealed the essence of its life force within a physical container, the *Seed of Malgarius*. For untold millennia, Malgarius slumbered. Recently, it has shown signs of awakening.

Lazbral'thull was unprepared to risk everything fighting the demonic tree again, and was unsure of how to permanently destroy his sleeping enemy, so he gave the *Seed of Malgarius* to Gathra as a gift along with the secret of unleashing and controlling its power. While he knows that the process of controlling Malgarius is risky at best, he assured Gathra that it was foolproof. Blinded by her ambition, Gathra planned her conquest of the world around the *Seed's* abilities. In truth, the baleful plant lord serves Gathra only grudgingly. It hates Lazbral'thull for defeating it eons ago and schemes for a chance at freedom. Perhaps it may find just such an opportunity courtesy of the PCs.

Adventure Synopsis

In "Root of Evil," the characters must penetrate the chambers found within Malgarius's great body, defeat the demonic tree's defenses, broker a deal with Malgarius that wins them access to Gathra's inner sanctum, destroy Malgarius, and slay Gathra. They have only a little time before

the tree reaches its full power, but if they are swift and decisive they can destroy this threat to the world.

Malgarius is a living, breathing environment. It shifts its form to smash the adventurers, alters its passages to lead funnel to its guardians, and works to prevent them from finding Gathra's hiding place. The characters must overcome the tree's defenses, trick it into leading them to Gathra, and then determine how to destroy the tree while battling the vicious hag.

Unlike other site-based adventures, there is no overall map for the tree's interior. Malgarius can shift and change its interior regions to suit its needs. As the party travels through it, they encounter a series of guardians that Malgarius places in their path. The tree demon simply alters the passages in its body so that the party must journey to these battlegrounds.

Adventure Hooks

The PCs may receive an early warning of the trouble that is about to erupt. A divination spell could show that some evil is about to befall the city of Vendren, where the tree is set to manifest, or a wave of visions and prophecies may sweep the land. Considering the characters' level, they are likely to be important movers and shakers. If trouble is on the horizon, kings, religious leaders, and other folk may seek them out and ask for aid. Unfortunately, these warnings are just a bit too late, and by the time the PCs arrive at Vendren, Malgarius has already taken root.

If visions and prophecies don't work for your campaign, you could instead foreshadow Gathra's plan in the form of a letter found in another villain's possession. In her haste to secure allies to aid her plan, Gathra contacted many powerful evil creatures, including the last villain the PCs defeated. In his possessions the PCs find a short letter that invites the now defeated villain to join Gathra in the city of Vendren, where she plans to unveil the new world order she has secured. The message contains an implied threat; if the villain doesn't join Gathra, he stands to be destroyed once she sets her plan in motion. No details

are given in the letter about this plan, but a date appears for its occurrence.

Finally, since Malgarius's arrival causes a city's near total destruction, the PCs might have vengeance in mind. After a long month on the road, they might come back to find their hometown or base of operations overrun by an enormous, demonic tree. In this version, the adventure becomes much more personal for the PCs—they must defeat Gathra to save their homes and loved ones.

The Destruction of Vendren

Gathra needs only to crack open Malgarius's seed to unleash the demonic plant upon the city. In a matter of minutes, it grows to over 2,000 feet tall and transforms the area in a one-mile radius into a horrid, demonic forest. Gathra's followers fan out to loot and slay any survivors. A city's structure would suffer tremendous damage from this transformation, while the orcs, trolls, and shambling mounds that constitute Gathra's army smash the region's surprised defenders and gather loot. Most civilians are captured and forced into slavery. Every six hours, the forest expands by another mile.

The exact development and ramifications of this event depend on your campaign world. Malgarius's sudden appearance in the capitol city of a major kingdom could cause tremendous chaos and discord. Discontented nobles rebel, prophets claim the end of the world is near, and political and military rivals attempt to fill the power void. Villainous groups emerge to ally with Gathra, while the call for heroes sounds across the land. If instead the tree takes root in an isolated area, it might slowly gain strength beyond the notice of civilized folk, but the long-term implications remain unchanged.

The adventure text covers only Malgarius's inner portions. To make this scenario as portable as possible, it ignores the terrain around the tree. In most cases, the characters are powerful enough that they can ignore the surrounding region and focus on the tree itself. Feel free to draw on your campaign notes to handle

the action in the surrounding area as necessary. If you want to use this adventure as a one-shot scenario or as fill-in for your campaign, you can use the following introduction.

A Desperate Call

The characters receive a summons via sending from Phillyria, the high priestess of Pelor within the city of Vendren. The lord mayor and many of the most important officials are dead, slain in the tree's sudden appearance. Phillyria knows of the party's reputation for heroism and appeals to them for aid. The message she sends to them is, "Vendren needs champions. Thousands are dead, and more shall fall. Time is short. If charity guides your actions, make haste to Pelor's temple in Vendren!"

The city of Vendren should be known to the characters, and PCs from that area should immediately recognize Phillyria as one of the city's high priestesses. A DC 10 Knowledge (local) check can also identify her.

When the characters reach Vendren, read the following:

What was once a vibrant center of civilization, the gleaming jeweled city of Vendren, now looks more like an ancient, monster-infested ruin. An enormous green tree covered with ragged vines and gargantuan twisted branches reaches almost to the clouds from the city's center, surrounded by a forest of similar (though much smaller) plants. Vendren's once shining spires lay in ruins, its cobblestone streets churned and destroyed by the newly born forest's destructive growth. New trees slowly writhe up out of the ground at the forest's periphery, the creaking of their monstrously fast-growing wooden trunks filling the air with tortured cries. Within the forest itself, parties of orcs, trolls, and writhing mounds of animate plant matter stalk the ruins. Mobs of refugees, most carrying little more than the clothes upon their backs, stream from the city.

The temple of Pelor is easy to find, even if the PCs are unfamiliar with Vendren. Built on a site holy to the sun god,

it now stands only a few hundred yards from the relentless advance of the rapidly growing demonic forest. The surviving town guards have rallied here. Large numbers of refugees huddle together on the temple's grounds, fear obvious in their eyes. The defenders are grimaced and bloodied from long hours of fighting off monstrous incursions, but when the PCs arrive, a palpable sense of relief and hope sweeps over them and the innocents they protect.

Phillyria meets the PCs in a small chapel off the temple's main shrine, which has been converted into a crude field hospital. Phillyria is old but still fiery. In her younger years, she took part in many crusades against evil and is a skilled tactician. She offers the PCs the following account of the invasion.

"The assault began last night. That horrid tree appeared out of nowhere with a thundering crackle of energy that shook buildings and shattered windows, bursting out of the Blue Tiger Tavern and growing to a hundred feet tall in the span of a few seconds. Since then, the tree's grown to its current size. Its roots snaked into the city's foundation, toppling buildings and destroying streets. And if that wasn't bad enough, monsters rushed from cavernous holes that appeared at the tree's base. They hit the city armories and garrisons first. Few of the city guards survived this initial attack. Since then, the monsters from the tree have looted the city and taken countless prisoners. Scouts have reported that the passages into the great tree are poorly guarded—the monsters within obviously don't expect anyone to resist their continued assaults. I think that a small group with potent spells and great skill at arms could slip in unnoticed. If someone can get inside that tree and kill the leaders who dwell within, or perhaps even find a way to undo the damage it's done... it'll have to be soon."

Phillyria has little material or magical assistance to offer the party, as the temple is hard pressed to defend and heal the refugees who have taken shelter here.

Before the characters journey into the city, they may wish to make Knowledge checks or use magic to learn more about their foe. Regardless of their actions, Phillyria offers them the information given for DCs 25 and lower for Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (the planes), and Knowledge (religion), as she has already consulted the temple's library and drawn on her own studies. Spells such as *commune* and *contact other plane* can also reveal some of the following information, along with general hints about Malgarius, Gathra, and the tree demon's growing rebellion.

Knowledge (arcana)

- **DC 20:** Many ancient texts speak of a being named Malgarius that is similar to this tree. Once a powerful demon itself, Malgarius was held captive by an unknown demon lord who defeated it in battle long ago.
- **DC 25:** Malgarius can be controlled by an artifact called the *Seed of Malgarius*.
- **DC 30:** Once Malgarius appears in a world, it establishes a link with that world's ambient life force, and can only be defeated if its connection to the *Seed of Malgarius* is destroyed.
- **DC 35:** The only way to break Malgarius's connection to the *Seed of Malgarius* is to transport the seed to another plane after Malgarius has taken root in a world.

Knowledge (nature)

- **DC 20:** The tree seems to be drawing nutrients from surrounding plantlife as much as it is from some hidden source within. Its nature marks it as a creature of evil and thus outside the natural order. The forest around it has driven off all other living things and has supplanted all existing plantlife.
- **DC 25:** The vegetation near the forest's edge already shows signs of ill health. A cancer spreads on the land.
- **DC 30:** Judging by the rate of the forest's growth, it can expand its radius by a mile every six hours.
- **DC 35:** The forest drains the very life from the land. Wherever its taint spreads, it could be years before other plants and animals can thrive there again.

Knowledge (the planes)

- **DC 20:** The great tree resembles a being known as Malgarius, a demon that once ruled a layer of the Abyss. The forest it has spawned will draw the life from the land and kill all living things.
- **DC 25:** Malgarius was defeated by a demon lord of torture and bloodletting named Lazbra'thull, who imprisoned it within an artifact, the *Seed of Malgarius*. Whoever possesses the seed can command the tree.
- **DC 30:** Malgarius is difficult to control. Lazbra'thull never attempted it, but perhaps a mighty being can command its obedience.
- **DC 35:** Malgarius hates its captivity, and it desires freedom and vengeance above all else.

Knowledge (religion)

- **DC 20:** A small cult worships a demon with a name similar to that of this great tree. The demon is named Malgarius—an outsider supposedly trapped within an artifact.
- **DC 25:** Cultists of Malgarius believe that a demon named Lazbra'thull holds it captive. Malgarius's followers hope some day to unleash their patron on its captor. It makes little sense for it to manifest here on the Material Plane, according to cult dogma.
- **DC 30:** Malgarius is known as the Devourer of Worlds. If its forest grows too large, it could overrun the entire planet.
- **DC 35:** Malgarius is also known as a deceptive, vengeful being. It thrives on turning its enemies against each other.

Into the Belly of the Beast

The easiest way into Malgarius is through any of the tunnels that open at ground level. The tunnels into Malgarius are hot and damp. Small puddles of water dot the passage's floor. A thick, loamy stench fills the air, and the floor and walls consist of a tough, fibrous, woody material. If the walls sustain any damage, they "bleed" a thick, sticky sap.

In her arrogance, Gathra believes that Malgarius is fully under her control. In truth, while the tree must obey her direct commands, it also seeks a tool to win its freedom. It hopes to test the PCs while defending against their intrusion. If they

prove worthy, it uses them as a weapon against its mistress. It has only one chance at treachery before Gathra learns that its old personality is far more awake and stronger than she suspects.

The Environs

The air inside Malgarius is damp and hot. The floor is covered with a foot of warm mist, while the walls and ceiling consist of a shiny, almost resinous wooden material. As with the entrance, any damage to it causes it to seep a thick, sticky sap. In some areas, warm water forms in small pools. A DC 15 Knowledge (the planes) check matches the interior to a wet, hot climate similar to the Abyssal layer that Malgarius once ruled.

Malgarius's Defenses

At the start of each round, Malgarius can choose from a number of different effects to alter the air within its body. By shifting the flow of arcane energy in its body, forcing air through different passages, and changing the water pressure in its internal channels, it can produce the following effects, maintaining them as long as it wants.

Vacuum: The chamber empties of air, forcing those within to begin suffocating. Each character must make a DC 10 Constitution check each round to hold his breath. The DC increases by +1 for each previous success. Once a character fails one of these checks, he falls unconscious (0 hit points). In the following round, he drops to -1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, he dies.

Intense Heat: The internal temperature rises to 160° F. Breathing the air deals 1d6 points of damage per minute (no save). Once every 5 minutes, a character must make a Fortitude save (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Those wearing heavy clothing or any sort of armor take a -4 penalty on their saves. Those wearing metal armor or coming into contact with very hot metal are affected as if by a *heat metal* spell.

Intense Cold: The internal temperature of a chamber drops to -50° F. Characters not protected from cold take 1d6 points of cold damage and 1d4 points of

nonlethal damage per minute. Characters who wear cold-weather clothing take damage once per 10 minutes instead of once per minute. Those wearing metal armor or coming into contact with very cold metal are affected as if by a *chill metal* spell.

Battering Winds: Malgarius can produce rain, snow, sleet, and hail, along with winds of up to hurricane force in any direction it desires. Consult pages 93–95 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide* for the effects of precipitation and wind.

Malgarius can't completely close off all of the numerous passageways and chambers inside its body, but it can shift them and reorganize them in a nearly infinite number of layouts. Not only does this allow the tree to force intruders inside its body to take the most dangerous route to its core, but it allows it to alter its interior physically to harass the PCs. It can create sharp slopes to send them tumbling to the ground, grab at them with tendrils, or use a variety of other means to combat them. Roll for Malgarius's initiative during each encounter. The demonic tree has an Initiative bonus of +0. Malgarius's physical attacks are random, reflecting its powerfully chaotic nature, but they never directly impact its allies. Malgarius can activate its physical defenses once every 10 minutes, and can maintain them for no more than 1 minute per activation. As a result, it chooses to maximize the impact of these physical defenses by using them when the invaders find themselves in combat or other precarious situations, rather than hitting the intruders once every 10 minutes. Of course, if the PCs decide to rest inside the demonic tree, they'll soon find their campsite turning against them.

Once Malgarius has activated its physical defenses, roll on the following table once a round to determine how it reacts. Although the action it takes is random, it is always directed in the most efficient way to inflict mayhem on the tree's perceived enemies. Malgarius can target areas and creatures using both tremorsense and blindsense (to a range of 120 feet).

d% Roll	Result
1–10	Acidic sap
11–20	Crushing walls
21–30	Entrapping sap
31–40	Grasping tendrils
41–50	Lashing tendrils
51–60	Pit trap
61–70	Shifting floor
71–80	Slick ooze
81–90	Tremor
91–100	Undulating wave

Acidic Sap: Malgarius rains searing, burning sap upon its enemies in a 60-foot area. It can shape this area as needed to spare its allies the acid damage. Anyone in this area suffers 15d6 acid damage (Reflex DC 22 half). The acidic sap clings to its targets for one round, inflicting an additional 7d6 acid damage the next round (Reflex DC 18 half).

Crushing Walls: Malgarius bends and twists its floor and walls to crush a single target. The demonic tree makes a single +28 melee attack on its victim, inflicting 5d6+24 points of bludgeoning damage on a successful hit. This attack is considered both chaotic and evil for the purposes of overcoming damage reduction.

Entrapping Sap: Malgarius causes thick, sticky sap to well up out of its floor and walls. The entire area becomes difficult terrain for the next 2d6 minutes. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square covered with sap. The sap adds 5 to the DC of Balance and Tumble checks, and adds 2 to the DC of Move Silently checks.

Grasping Tendrils: Thin, fibrous tendrils erupt from the floor, wall, or ceiling, grabbing at a single character. The victim must make a Reflex save (DC 22) or become entangled. An entangled character can break free with a successful DC 20 Escape Artist check or a successful DC 25 Strength check as a full-round action. The tendrils have 10 hit points and hardness 8, and remain active for 2d4 rounds.

Lashing Tendrils: Vicious, barbed tendrils erupt from the floor, walls, or ceiling in a 30-foot-radius area. Any creature that is in this area during Malgarius's turn is attacked by the tendrils, which are a +28 melee attack that inflicts 2d8+16 slashing damage on a hit. The

tendrils persist for one round, and can make attacks of opportunity; a creature is only subjected to one such attack of opportunity, but the tendrils can make any number of different attacks of opportunity in a round.

Pit Trap: Malgarius opens a pit beneath a single target. The victim of this attack must make a Reflex save (DC 22) or fall 100 feet into a small cavity within Malgarius's body, taking 10d6 points of damage from the fall onto a bed of sharp spikes. 1d6 of these spikes make +28 melee attacks against the falling victim, and inflict 1d6+8 points of damage per hit. Once a victim falls into a pit, Malgarius seals the shaft, imprisoning the victim in a tiny room of equal size to the victim's space. Malgarius typically removes the air from these death traps once a victim has fallen into one so the victim quickly suffocates.

Shifting Floor: Malgarius causes the floor to shift and churn like the surface of the sea. Characters walking on the floor must make a DC 25 Balance check or fall prone. Remember that characters without at least 5 ranks in Balance are considered flat-footed on any round they make a Balance check, and are thus susceptible to sneak attacks during that round.

Slick Ooze: Slick, watery sap pours from the ceiling, turning the battlefield into a slippery mess. Anyone who attempts to walk along the floor must make a Balance check (DC 15 if moving half speed or less, DC 20 if moving up to full speed, DC 25 for double move, charging, or running) to be able to move; failing this check by 5 or more indicates that the character has fallen prone.

Tremor: The floor of this chamber shakes and churns violently. Any character who stands on the floor must make a DC 22 Reflex save or be unable to act for that round. Even on a successful save, a caster must make a DC 20 Concentration check to successfully cast spells.

Undulating Wave: A great wave ripples through the chamber. The wave is up to 50 feet wide and moves up to 30 feet. Anyone in this area must make a DC 22 Reflex save to avoid being flung into the air. A character tossed in this manner suffers 4d6 damage and lands

prone 1d6 squares away in a randomly determined direction.

Encounters Inside Malgarius

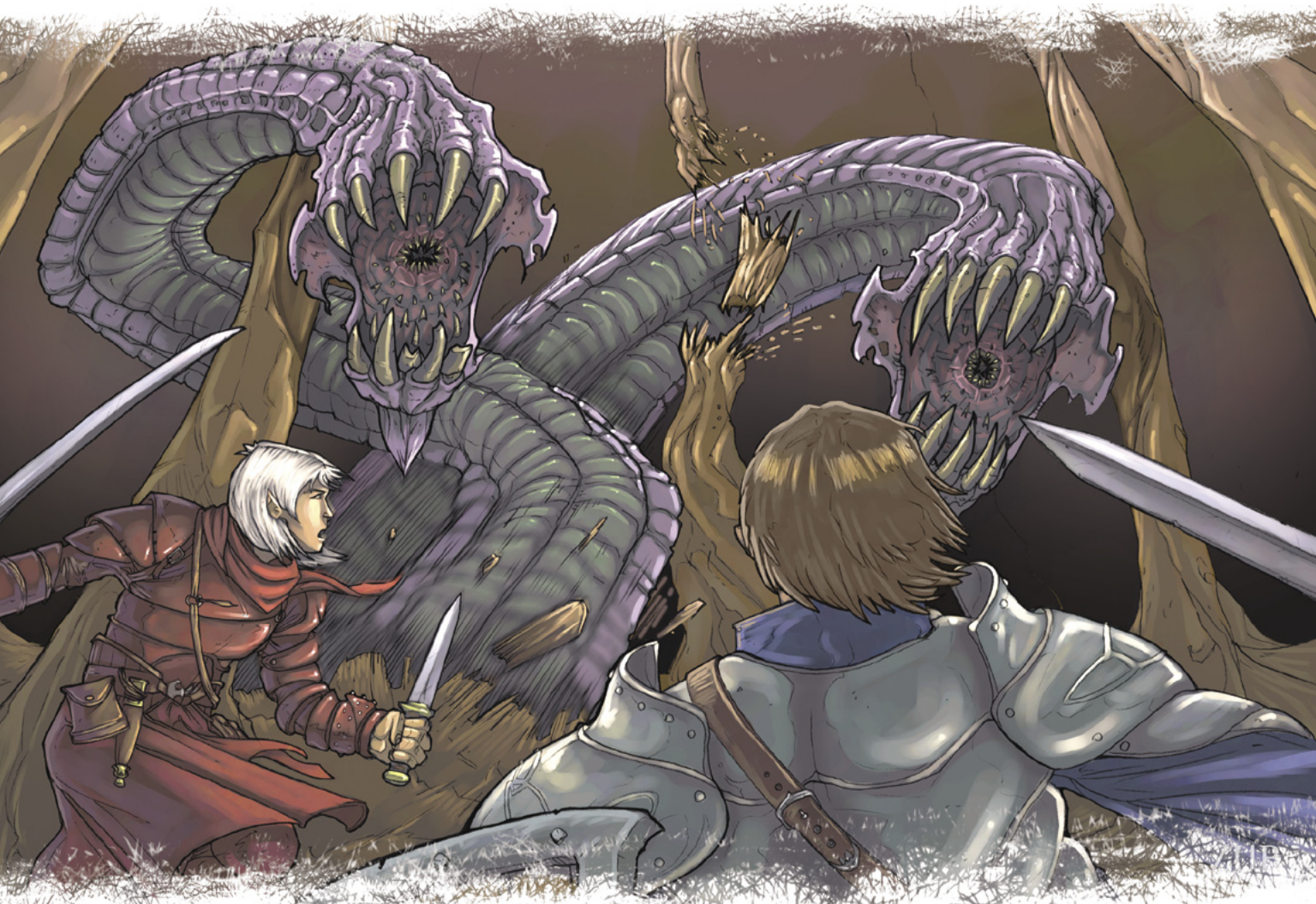
The following encounters should occur in the order in which they are presented, since Malgarius can control where the tunnels inside its body lead. The monsters within each chamber are not especially watchful, as Malgarius lacks the ability to communicate with them. The creatures should make Listen checks to determine if they hear the approaching characters. If they detect the intruders, they ready an ambush or spend time using their magical abilities (if applicable) to prepare for battle.

The characters can gain entrance to Malgarius's body through any of the tunnels and passages that allow the soldiers of Gathra's army to move to and from their barracks as detailed above. If the characters enter through the tunnels at Malgarius's base, start with encounter 1. If the PCs search elsewhere around the tree for alternate entrances, a successful DC 35 Search check uncovers one several hundred feet up, hidden in the demon tree's branches. Each attempt to find an alternate entrance into Malgarius takes an hour of searching. Feel free to liven up these hours of searching with additional encounters... perhaps a flock of a dozen harpy archers lurks in the branches, or maybe a single very old green dragon prowls the demonic boughs above.

Due to Malgarius's interference in combat encounters, all of the encounters listed below are increased by +1 EL to account for the added difficulty. In addition, you should award 125% normal experience points for monsters slain in combats compounded by Malgarius's physical defenses.

1. Entrance (EL 7)

Massive roots the size of dragons' tails sprawl over the ground this close to the monstrous tree. Buildings lie in rubble where these roots have buckled up through the earth, and entire streets are blocked by the enormous growths. At the tree's base, a large number of



cavernous openings gape, entrances to circular tunnels that lead up into the tree's trunk. Dozens of crude tents have been erected near the entrances to these openings.

Creatures: The tents that surround the demon tree's base are used by the orcs and trolls that serve Gathra. Here, dozens of orcs argue over the spoils of war, while trolls sit with their backs against the titanic tree, lazily awaiting new orders. The orcs and trolls pay little mind to the forest around them, and believe that they've utterly conquered all pockets of local resistance.

There are a total of ten separate openings at the tree's base, each of which is 20 feet wide. There are 124 orcs and 15 trolls in the area immediately surrounding the tree's base, with 2d6+6 orcs and 1d4 trolls within a 60-foot radius of any one entrance at a time. Although

numerous, the orcs and trolls should pose little threat to a group of 18th-level characters. Neither Gathra nor Malgarius take note of the PCs until they enter the tree; orcs and trolls are easy to gather and replace, and even if the PCs slaughter them all they'll not raise a reaction from within the tree.

➤ **Orcs, warrior 1 (124):** hp 5; *Monster Manual* 203.

➤ **Trolls (15):** hp 63; *Monster Manual* 247.

Treasure: The orcs and trolls have gathered loot from the city's ruins. A sack of 500 gp, a second bag with 4,000 sp, and a bundle of 4 masterwork longswords lie among the orcs' possessions. One troll carries a small golden statue worth 1,200 gp.

Tactics: The orcs and trolls have some experience fighting powerful foes. The orcs use the aid another action to help the trolls land attacks. Realistically, the party should have little trouble defeating these guards.

2. The Tunnels

The tunnels within Malgarius loop and turn at random. They wind upward and pitch downward, sometimes at up to a 45° angle, while at other times they level off for long stretches. Puddles of warm water, some up to 5-foot wide, dot the floor. Water drips from the ceiling and clings to the walls in great beads. Blasts of wind pulse rhythmically down the length of each tunnel, carrying on them a thick, earthy odor. Each of these passages is roughly circular in shape, with a diameter of 20 feet.

Typically, Malgarius strings 400 to 500 feet of passages between each encounter area. These wind up, down, to the right, and to the left at random. Characters who don't have climb or fly speeds need to make 1d6 DC 25 Climb checks to navigate a length of tunnel between encounter areas. As they wander the tunnels, a successful DC 20 Listen check allows them to hear muted creakings and

groanings as Malgarius alters its interior channels to ensure the PCs encounter whatever menace it has to throw at them next.

As the PCs travel through Malgarius, they may attempt to map the areas they travel through. You can either create passages from whole cloth or randomly determine their direction. Roll 1d4 to determine the passage's general direction, with 1 corresponding to north, 2 to east, 3 to south, and 4 to west. Roll a second d4 to determine if the passage curves up or down. It heads up on a 1, down on a 2, and remains level on a 3 or 4. Check again every 50 feet. If the passageways would seem to indicate the PCs are passing through a section they've already explored, or even passing beyond the tree's expected outer surface, that's okay. Inside Malgarius, things are supposed to be disorienting and confusing.

3. Chamber of Worms (EL 17)

The passage opens into a wide wooden cavern. Thick, gnarled columns run from floor to ceiling. Here and there, shallow pools of water stretch over the floor. A single, jagged strip of dry land provides a path through the chamber. A steady stream of water drips from the domed ceiling twenty feet above.

Creatures: Four purple worms lurk here; parasites that dwell within Malgarius's demonic bark. Two burrow beneath the floor, while the others lurk above, in the ceiling. These purple worms are immune to acid, but otherwise conform to the statistics given in the *Monster Manual*.

☛ **Purple Worms (4):** hp 200 each; *Monster Manual* 211.

Tactics: As the party enters the room, the worms beneath the floor move to attack. One positions itself in the passage the party used to enter this place. The other shifts to block their progress through the chamber. They rise to attack at the same time, both targeting the smallest creatures in the party. One round after the worms erupt from the floor, the two above sense the disturbance and burst from the ceiling to join the attack.

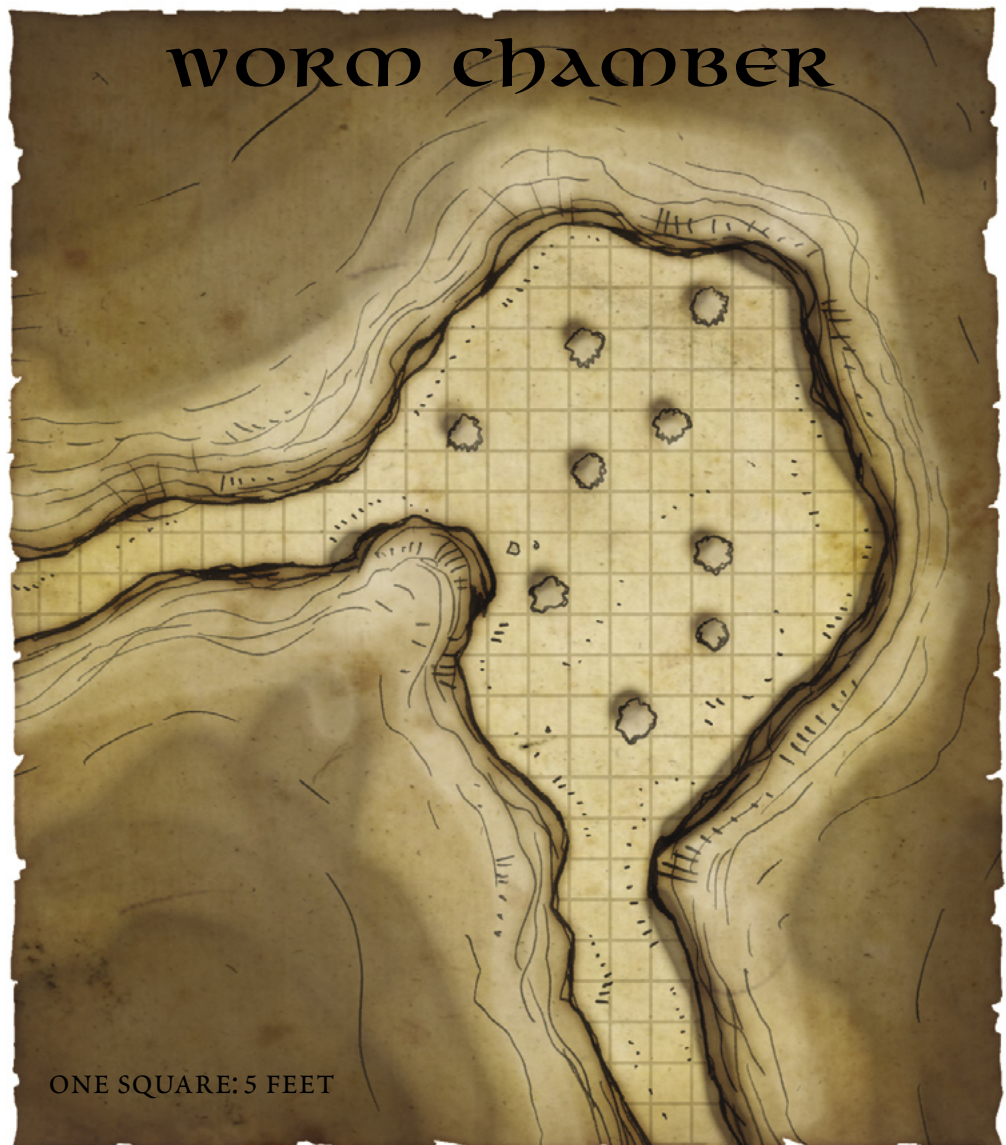
Remember to check each round of combat to determine how Malgarius uses its physical defenses to fight the PCs. If you want to make things particularly rough on the party, don't bother rolling to determine what kind of physical defenses Malgarius activates. Instead, assume it

activates its acidic sap each round; the purple worms are immune to the acid it generates.

4. Guardians in the Dark (EL 19)

The air here has become hot and dry. Small cracks and fissures decorate the floor, walls, and ceiling. Ahead, the cavernous expanse of a great chamber washed in a strangely shadowy flickering light beckons. The strange light emanates from a stone monolith standing in the midst of the chamber.

The flickering monolith is constructed of the pure essence of the plane of shadow. As such, it has several strange effects on the chamber.



The flickering light provides shadow illumination in this room, and overwhelms nonmagic light completely. The monolith also interferes with spells that have the Light descriptor. In order to cast such a spell, a character must make a DC 31 caster level check (similar to the check made to overcome spell resistance). The strange light grants undead creatures 25% concealment from living creatures and a +4 bonus to their existing turn resistance (or +4 turn resistance if they don't have this ability). The monolith's effects function at caster level 30, and can be extinguished for 1d4 rounds by *dispel magic* or similar spells.

Creatures: Two nightwalkers lurk in the north and south areas of this chamber. Make Listen checks for them as the party approaches. If they hear the PCs, they begin to prepare for battle as detailed below. Otherwise, they remain still until they notice approaching intruders.

➤ **Nightwalkers (2):** hp 178; *Monster Manual* 196.

Tactics: If the nightwalkers hear the party approach, they cast *see invisibility* and *haste* on themselves. Given time, they also both cast *detect magic*. One moves forward to attack any obvious warriors, while the second readies *greater dispel magic* to either counter a spell or to strip away any magical defenses on the party.

Malgarius is fond of causing this room to empty of air, since the undead guard-

ians don't need to breathe (but their enemies probably do).

5. Last Line of Defense (EL 19)

This chamber contains a great statue carved to resemble a twisted, gnarled treant standing atop a round dais. Both the dais and the statue are crafted from black stone with faint, diffuse whirls of yellow and white. Aside from the statue, this chamber appears empty.

Creatures: This is the final chamber that Malgarius channels the PCs to in an attempt to kill them off. The

statue is in fact a greater stone golem, a construct formed much like any other organ within Malgarius's body. Like the purple worms, it serves as a sort of immune system to repel intruders. Gathra has augmented this chamber's defenses by hiring a pair of truly horrid umber hulks with promises of gold and magic.

➤ **Greater Stone Golem:** hp 271; *Monster Manual* 136.

➤ **Truly Horrid UMBER Hulks (2):** hp 270; *Monster Manual* 249.

Tactics: The umber hulks attack from both the front and rear. One moves to strike from behind while the other



erupts to flank the golem's opponents. The golem attempts to use its *slow* ability on warriors in heavy armor. If they suffer its effects, it moves past them to strike at spellcasters. The monsters also ignore opponents who suffer from the umber hulks' confusion gaze unless no other targets remain.

Development: Once the characters defeat this chamber's guardians, immediately proceed to "Face of the Enemy." Keep track of initiative and require them to act as if they were still in combat.

Face of the Enemy

Once the PCs defeat the golem and umber hulks in encounter 5, the tunnel that allowed them entrance into the room cinches shut. At the same time, the walls of the room shimmer with strange opalescent energies.

A successful DC 28 Spellcraft check is enough to recognize the fact that a *dimensional lock* spell has engulfed the chamber. This *dimensional lock* functions at caster level 30; if it is dispelled, a new *dimensional lock* rises on Margarius's initiative rank the next round.

Allow the characters to take a round's worth of actions in initiative order. At the end of the round, the stone dais sinks into the floor, creating a pit that instantly fills with what looks like water. This "water" is actually thick, viscous acid that serves as Margarius's sap.



Once the stone sinks into the floor, the sap starts bubbling up into the room while drops of the stuff rain from the ceiling above.

By the end of round one, the entire room is a storm of acidic sap. In round two, every character in the room takes 10d6 acid damage (Reflex DC 22 half). In round three, the acid production increases dramatically and floods the room. Characters suffer 10d6 acid damage (no save) from this immersion, and if they don't hold their breath they might even start to drown.

At the end of the third round, the entire room contracts violently. At this

point, a spherical and mobile *forcecage* surrounds each of the PCs, and they and the acid are shunted down into a new passageway that opens in the pit. For the next four rounds, each PC is forced at an increasingly alarming speed through acid-filled tubes. The spherical *forcecages* protect them from the brunt of the damage, but each round a PC must make a DC 22 Reflex save to avoid 2d6 points of damage from being slammed against the cage's walls. Spellcasting is possible with a successful DC 20 Concentration check. Read the following as the PCs are swept along their course.



A bewildering array of vistas pass before your eyes. Great organs throb and pulse around you. Thick, woody veins twitch and shift, while an unending series of smaller side passages and chambers quickly become a blur. Here and there, you catch a glimpse of enormous purple worms squirming within the thick, viscous acid that surrounds you.

Characters who manage to destroy their *forcecages* find themselves engulfed by acid and carried along by the current. This causes 10d6 points of acid damage and 5d6 points of bludgeoning damage each round (no save). At this point, only teleportation spells offer a chance at escape before the characters are deposited in Malgarius's audience chamber.

After several minutes of travel, the characters arrive in Malgarius's audience chamber. Here, they come face to face with the great, demonic entity. Having been impressed with their skill, Malgarius

now believes they can serve as allies in its struggle against Gathra.

The *forcecages* rise into a perfectly round chamber about 30 feet wide with smooth, glistening walls, and then vanish, depositing the PCs on solid ground in a room filled with breathable (but sour-smelling) air. Shadows play on the walls as hundreds of shallow holes form upon them. With a sickening tearing noise, faces slide from the holes' depths, each regarding the PCs with jet black eyes. The faces break into a babble of tongues. "Slay the intruders!" some yell, "Freedom!" cry others, while still more regard the characters in wooden silence.

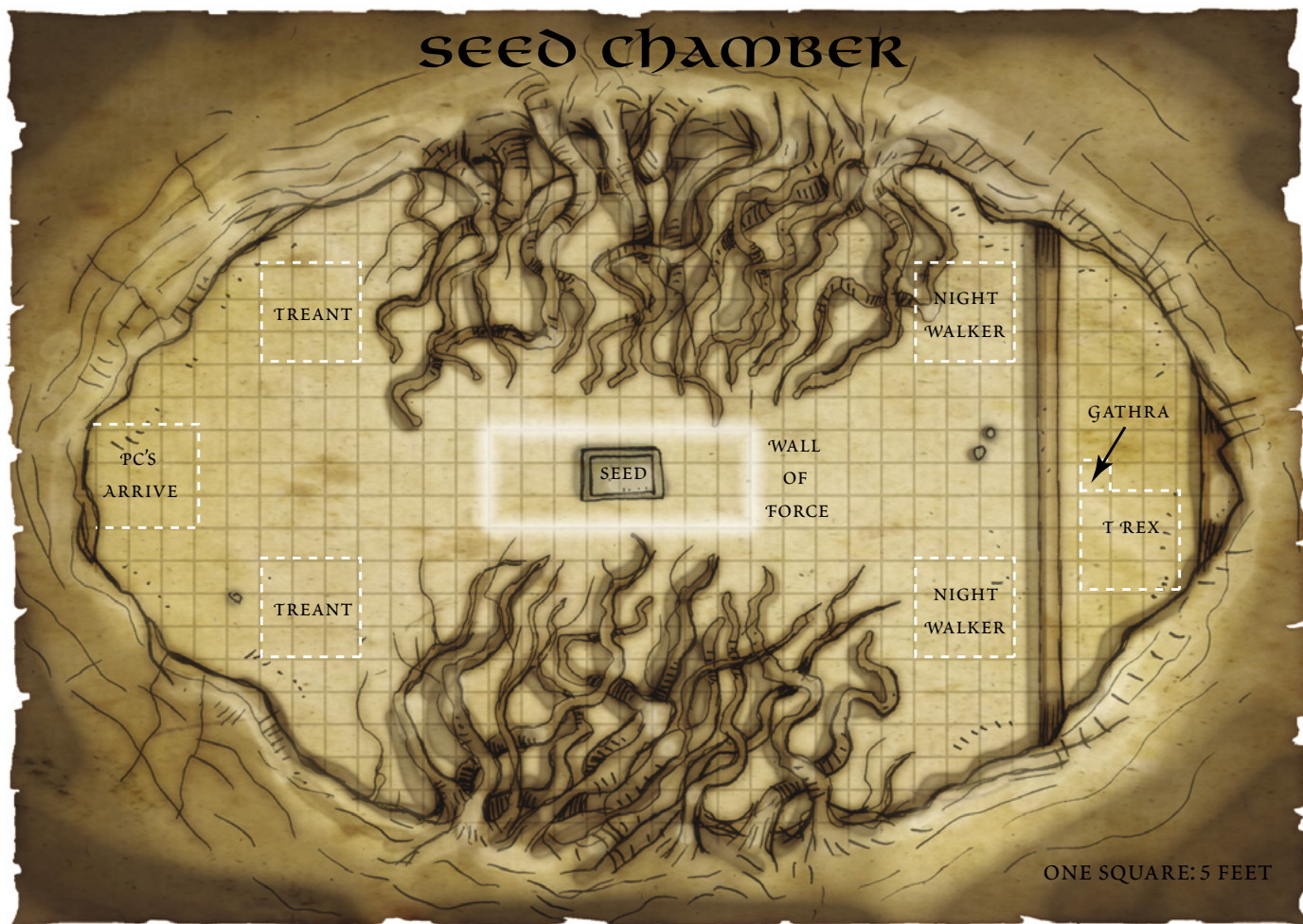
The multitude of faces represent Malgarius's collective mind. Once, these personalities each controlled a section of Malgarius's home plane. When Lazbra'thull defeated Malgarius, the personalities fled into this single chamber. Now, they debate their course of action with the PCs.

The faces shout and yell in a great cacophony of voices. Most speak Abyssal, but others use Draconic or even Common. The characters face three factions. Each has different goals, and by convincing two of them that they would make good allies the PCs can advance to battle Gathra.

Creatures: The three factions have different agendas. Different appeals or proposals provide bonuses to any Diplomacy checks the characters make to strike an alliance with Malgarius.

The Vengeance Seekers: This faction wants only to destroy Gathra and reclaim its Abyssal lair. It also wants to slay Lazbra'thull. Its starting attitude toward the PCs is indifferent. It has seen that the characters are capable warriors, but it does not want to openly back them until the characters show that they are willing to go along with the gambit.

When this faction speaks, it uses a single calm, calculating voice. Its members represent Malgarius's intellect. They are practical



and cunning. If the PCs' actions in the previous encounters have made it clear that they fight with solid tactics and intelligence, they gain a +5 bonus on checks made to influence the Vengeance Seekers.

The Destroyers: This faction represents Malgarius's basic desire for destruction and death. It also embodies Malgarius's chaotic nature. It speaks in a chorus of echoing voices, each of which uses similar, but different, terms to call for death and destruction. As beings of chaos, they hate any attempt to impose rules on their actions.

This faction starts with a hostile attitude toward the PCs. If the PCs' actions in the previous encounters have been overly destructive or disorganized, they gain a +5 bonus on checks made to influence the Destroyers.

The Conquerors: This faction exults in the destruction Gathra has led it to, but it also craves conquest. Once, it ruled an entire Abyssal layer. Now, it is but a hag's

servant. This faction is perhaps the cleverest of the three. It attempts to trick the PCs into entering a bargain that it has no intention of upholding. It proposes that, if the PCs slay Gathra, it shall return to its native plane and never trouble them again. In truth, it wishes to rule this world free of Gathra's influence. It attempts to portray the Destroyers as a malevolent force that only it can control.

This faction starts with an initial attitude of unfriendly. If the PCs' actions in the previous encounters have made it clear that they are devious, underhanded, and treacherous, they gain a +5 bonus on checks made to influence the Conquerors.

Malgarius has a Bluff bonus of +34 and a Sense Motive bonus of +25.

Development: The characters can parley with Malgarius for up to 10 minutes. Award the characters bonuses to their Diplomacy checks for particularly stirring speeches or

good points they make. In general, a single point or instance of good roleplay is worth a +2 bonus on a single check.

A character can make a Diplomacy or Intimidate check against a single faction once per minute. The PCs must address their arguments and ideas to all three factions, but make separate checks for each with the relevant modifiers as described above. Unlike most situations that involve diplomacy, the PCs should be able to make multiple rolls to advance the three factions' attitude toward friendly. Once the PCs have won over two factions, begin "The Final Enemy." At that point, Malgarius determines that the PCs are willing and able to slay Gathra. During the battle, Malgarius uses its abilities to aid the PCs.

If the characters attack Malgarius, make any other obviously hostile act, or otherwise shift all three factions to hostile, the tree's faces retreat into the walls and it sends them on to battle Gathra, although it uses its



abilities against the party in this case, siding with the hag to ruin the unwelcome intruders.

The Final Enemy (EL 22)

Once the PCs have either secured Malgarius's aid or inspired his wrath, the faces of the demonic tree's factions recede back into the walls and the top of the spherical chamber opens, layers of bark and wood peeling away like a blossoming flower from the inside. At the same time, the room the PCs are in contracts and shrinks. After several minutes of shuddering and shaking, they find themselves at the end of a 20-foot-wide passageway. Behind them, the passageway constantly compresses, forcing them upward for about 60 feet until the peristaltic motion deposits them in a large chamber.

This entire area is bathed in bright white light, exposing a scene of eldritch menace. A silver orb burns like a miniature sun within a bubble of force in the center of the room. Energy arcs from it to blast against the bubble's interior. Long, ropy tendrils extend from the glistening walls to either side, wavering like wheat on the breeze as they reach toward the burning sphere. At the far end of the room rises a platform before an enormous crystalline lens. Images of the ruined city that surround the tree flicker upon the lens.

This is the central chamber within Malgarius, and the glowing silver orb is the seed that contains its demonic essence. The *Seed of Malgarius* is protected by a *wall of force* controlled by Malgarius. It has a caster level of 30 and can create another wall as a standard action, at will. Gathra, as the current commander of the *Seed*, can command Malgarius to raise and lower the wall as well.

The *Seed* itself exudes force energy in a 10-foot radius around it. Any creature in this area suffers 5d10 points of force damage per round (no save). Once the *Seed* is moved or taken into someone's possession, this energy fades.

The tentacles along the walls act as difficult terrain and function as permanent lashing tendrils (see page 61).

Creatures: The chamber also serves as Gathra's stronghold. The green hag druid and her tyrannosaurus animal companion Gyrnthrax lurk on the platform near the lens, which allows her to scry upon the region surrounding the tree as if looking through a window. In addition to her dinosaur companion, a pair of nightwalkers and two evil treants stand guard in the four corners of the chamber.

These monsters are the party's final enemies, yet the true danger here lies in the *Seed of Malgarius*. For if the PCs slay Gathra while the *Seed of Malgarius* remains on this plane, the tree gains its independence and its treacherous nature finally becomes clear.

- **Nightwalkers (2):** hp 178; *Monster Manual* 196.
- **Treants (2):** hp 66, AL NE; *Monster Manual* 244.
- **Gathra, female green hag druid 20:** CR 21; Medium monstrous humanoid; HD 29d8+145; hp 275; Init +9; Spd 30 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC 38, touch 16, flat-footed 33; Base Atk +24; Grp +29; Atk +34 melee (1d4+10, claw with *greater magic fang*); Full Atk +34 melee (1d4+10, claw with *greater magic fang*) and +29 melee (1d4+5, claw); SA elemental wild shape (4/day, size Small to Huge elemental), mimicry, spells, spell-like abilities, weakness (DC 17),

wild shape (7/day, size Tiny to Huge, animal or plant); SQ a thousand faces, animal companion, damage reduction 10/adamantine, darkvision 90 ft., nature sense, resist nature's lure, spell resistance 18, timeless body, trackless step, venom immunity, wild empathy +23, woodland stride; AL NE; SV Fort +25, Ref +20, Will +29; Str 20, Dex 21, Con 21, Int 14, Wis 26, Cha 16; *Monster Manual* 143.

Skills: Concentration +26, Knowledge (nature) +25, Handle Animal +23, Hide +28, Listen +33, Spot +33, Survival +23, Swim +28.

Feats: Alertness, Augment Summoning, Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Natural Spell, Quicken Spell, Spell Focus (conjuration).

Languages: Common, Abyssal, Giant.

Druid Spells Prepared (caster level 20): 0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic, flare* (DC 18), *read magic, resistance, virtue*; 1st—*entangle* (DC 19), *faerie fire, goodberry, jump, longstrider, obscuring mist, produce flame* (+29 ranged touch); 2nd—*barkskin, chill metal* (DC 20), *flame blade, flaming sphere* (DC 20), *heat metal* (DC 20), *spider climb, summon swarm*; 3rd—*cure moderate wounds, greater magic fang* (2, both already cast on her and Gyrnthrax), *poison* (DC 21), *protection from energy, sleet storm, spike growth* (DC 21); 4th—*air walk, cure serious wounds, dispel magic, flame strike* (DC 22), *ice storm, rusting grasp* (+29 melee touch), *spike stones* (DC 22); 5th—*animal growth, baleful polymorph* (DC 23), *quicken entangle* (DC 19), *wall of fire, wall of thorns*; 6th—*quicken barkskin, quicken bear's endurance, quicken cat's grace, greater dispel magic, wall of stone*; 7th—*fire storm* (DC 25), *heal, maximized flame strike* (DC 22), *transmute metal to wood, true seeing*; 8th—*quicken flame strike* (DC 22), *reverse gravity, whirlwind* (DC 26), *word of recall* (2); 9th—*quicken baleful polymorph* (DC 23), *antipathy* (DC 27, already cast), *quicken stonkskin, shapechange*.

Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 9): At will—*dancing lights, disguise self, ghost sound* (DC 13), *invisibility, pass without trace, tongues, water breathing*.

Possessions: *Druid's vestment*, lavender and green *ioun stone* (32 spell levels remaining), dusty rose *ioun stone, periapt of Wisdom* +6, *ring of freedom of movement,*

greater ring of acid resistance, bracers of armor +6, *cloak of resistance* +3, three vials of diamond dust worth 250 gp each, jade circlet worth 1,500 gp, two doses of *true seeing* ointment worth 250 gp.

➤ **Gyrnthrax, Gathra's tyrannosaurus animal companion:** CR 8; Gargantuan animal; HD 20d8+120; hp 210; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 15, touch 6, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +15; Grp +36; Atk or Full Atk +29 melee (3d6+24, bite with *greater magic fang*); Space/Reach 20 ft./15 ft.; SA improved grab, swallow whole; SQ damage reduction 10/magic, evasion, link, low-light vision, scent, share spells; AL Neutral; SV Fort +23, Ref +16, Will +12; Str 37, Dex 11, Con 26, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Skills: Hide -7, Listen +15, Spot +15.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Run, Toughness (x3), Track.

Note: The stats above assume the tyrannosaurus is under the effects of Gathra's *animal growth* spell. If this effect is prevented or dispelled, Gyrnthrax's statistics change as follows: Huge animal, hp 250; Init +1, AC 16, touch 9, flat-footed 15; Atk or Full Atk +22 melee (3d6+13, bite); SV Fort +17, Ref +13, Will +8; Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; Str 29, Dex 11, Con 26; Hide -2. The dinosaur also loses its damage reduction if this spell effect ends.

Tactics: Given the vast number of spells and magic items that Gathra has access to, this battle requires a fair amount of management on your part. Use the following suggested tactics to help guide your decisions.

The treants and the nightwalkers try to prevent the PCs from reaching Gathra or attacking her for as long as possible. Gathra tries to avoid injuring them with her spells, but she is willing to sacrifice them to land a telling blow against the PCs.

Remember to account for the magical items that Gathra carries. Her lavender and green *ioun stone* can absorb 32 more spell levels, with a maximum spell level of 8. Her *greater ring of energy resistance* also gives her acid resistance 30, a useful tool against Malgarius's attacks (see Development, below).

Gathra casts *antipathy* against lawful good creatures on the seed every day. Once Malgarius starts transporting the PCs to this chamber, the accompanying sounds that echo throughout the tree's interior are unmistakable, giving Gathra 4

rounds of prep time before the PCs arrive. Given this warning, she casts the following spells on herself in anticipation of the coming conflict. The effects of these four rounds of spellcasting are incorporated into her stat block above.

Round 1: *True seeing* and *quicken stonkskin* (damage reduction 10/adamantine for 150 points of damage).

Round 2: *Animal growth* on Gyrnthrax and *quicken barkskin* (+5 to natural armor).

Round 3: *Air walk* and *quicken bear's endurance*.

Round 4: *Shapechange* (to assume the form of an astral deva, a form similar enough to her true form that her equipment need not be absorbed into the new form) and *quicken cat's grace*. In astral deva form, Gathra has the following statistics: Medium outsider (angel, extraplanar, good); HD 29d8+145; hp 304; Init +8; Spd 50 ft., fly 100 ft. (good); AC 42, touch 16, flat-footed 42; Base Atk +24; Grp +30; Atk or Full Atk +35 melee (1d8+14, slam with *greater magic fang*); SA spells, spell-like abilities; SQ animal companion, damage reduction 10/evil, damage reduction 10/adamantine, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to acid, cold, and petrification, low-light vision, nature sense, protective aura (since this provides *protection from evil* to all creatures in a 20-foot radius including her enemies, Gathra generally doesn't activate this power), resistance to electricity 10 and fire 10, resist nature's lure, spell resistance 30, timeless body, tongues, trackless step, uncanny dodge, venom immunity, wild empathy +23, woodland stride; AL NE; SV Fort +26, Ref +21, Will +29; Str 22, Dex 22, Con 22, Int 14, Wis 26, Cha 16.

Once combat begins, Gathra begins with her various wall spells to separate the party, seeking to trap a single PC against two or more opponents. She also uses *quicken flame strike* and *quicken baleful polymorph* in the first two rounds of combat. As long as she's in deva form, she can't use her weakness touch attack. Gathra uses *whirlwind*, *quicken entangle*, *spike growth*, and *flaming sphere* to harass the party as they engage her guards once combat begins in earnest.

If hard pressed, she uses one of her *word of recall* spells to escape, heal herself and further enhance her Strength, then returns using her second *word of recall*. One is

attuned to an isolated mountain aerie far from Vendren, while the other returns her to this room. If possible, she brings her animal companion along for the ride.

If the party makes an effort to recover the *Seed of Malgarius*, Gathra attempts to stop them with various wall spells and other barriers.

If things grow really desperate, remember that she can assume other forms with *shapechange*. If the PCs are hitting her with lots of fire spells, she might turn into a pit fiend to gain immunity to fire and regeneration. If the PCs are surrounding her and using touch attacks, she could assume the form of a nymph, which allows her to add her Charisma bonus to her Armor Class as a deflection bonus, while her blinding beauty could very well blind all her enemies. If trapped in a small area by a *forcecage* or wall spells, she could become a blink dog and blink to freedom.

Development: If all three of the factions of Malgarius support the PCs, the demonic tree waits for the PCs to attack; on the following round, it begins using its physical defenses to aid the PCs, targeting the effects on Gathra and her minions. This causes the green hag to rage and screech in anger, but as she realizes she can't quite control Malgarius she focuses her attention on the PCs, hoping that by slaying them she'll win back the demon tree's favor.

If the *Seed of Malgarius* is transported to a different plane, the tree immediately begins

shuddering. A tremendous crashing noise echoes from the city as the surrounding forest collapses, dies, and crumbles into dust, leaving behind only the ruined buildings. The great tree of Malgarius itself sways and pitches wildly. All creatures within must make DC 15 Balance checks each round to remain standing. After 5d6 minutes, the entire tree collapses. Creatures within it suffer 10d6+40 damage (Reflex DC 25 half) from the fall. Remember that any creature that takes more than 50 points of damage must make a DC 15 Fortitude save to avoid being slain outright. Once the tree collapses, its numerous passageways and tunnels relax, allowing characters to exit the tree after a few minutes of exploration.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs defeat Gathra and send Malgarius's seed to a different plane, the armies of the realm gather in a few days to defeat the surviving orcs, trolls, shambling mounds, and purple worms that remain behind in the ruined city. The refugees of Vendren gather in a great celebration. The characters are made guests of honor at a series of great feasts, and are hailed as heroes. As a reward, they receive the following from the gathered lords and ladies: 50,000 gp in gems, jewels, and coins, a *Daern's instant fortress*, and a *crystal ball*.

You can also create a suitable treasure of your own. The total value of the reward should equal about 150,000 gp. In addition,

if appropriate for your campaign, the PCs might be granted honorary noble titles, membership in exclusive societies and guilds, and so forth. Needless to say, many movers and shakes in your campaign world will now pay attention to their every move.

If Gathra survives the adventure, she may still plot against the PCs. If Malgarius still stands, the characters may have to plot another expedition into it to seize the *Seed of Malgarius* and defeat the horrid plant once and for all. **A**

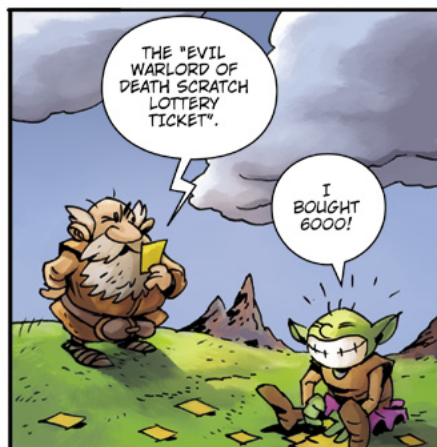
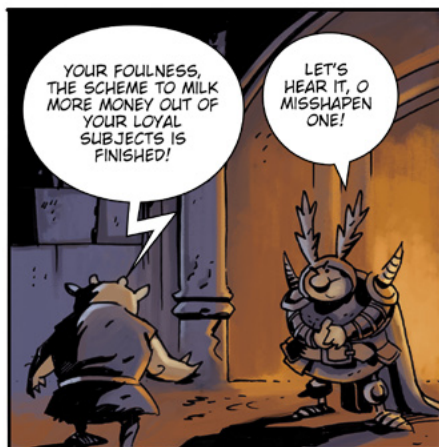
Mike Mearls began playing D&D in 1981 and has been a full-time freelance RPG designer since 2001. Unlike 98% of gamers, he can and will play the cleric. He still can't believe that people pay him to write D&D stuff.

Scaling the Adventure

Since "Root of Evil" uses mostly stock monsters from the *Monster Manual*, scaling this adventure is easy. For 15th–17th-level parties, remove one purple worm from encounter 3, replace one or both nightwalkers with nightwings in both encounters 4 and 7, and remove the treants from encounter 7. For higher-level parties, add two more purple worms to encounter 3 and replace the nightwalkers with nightcrawlers.

THE PORTENT

by Peter Bergting



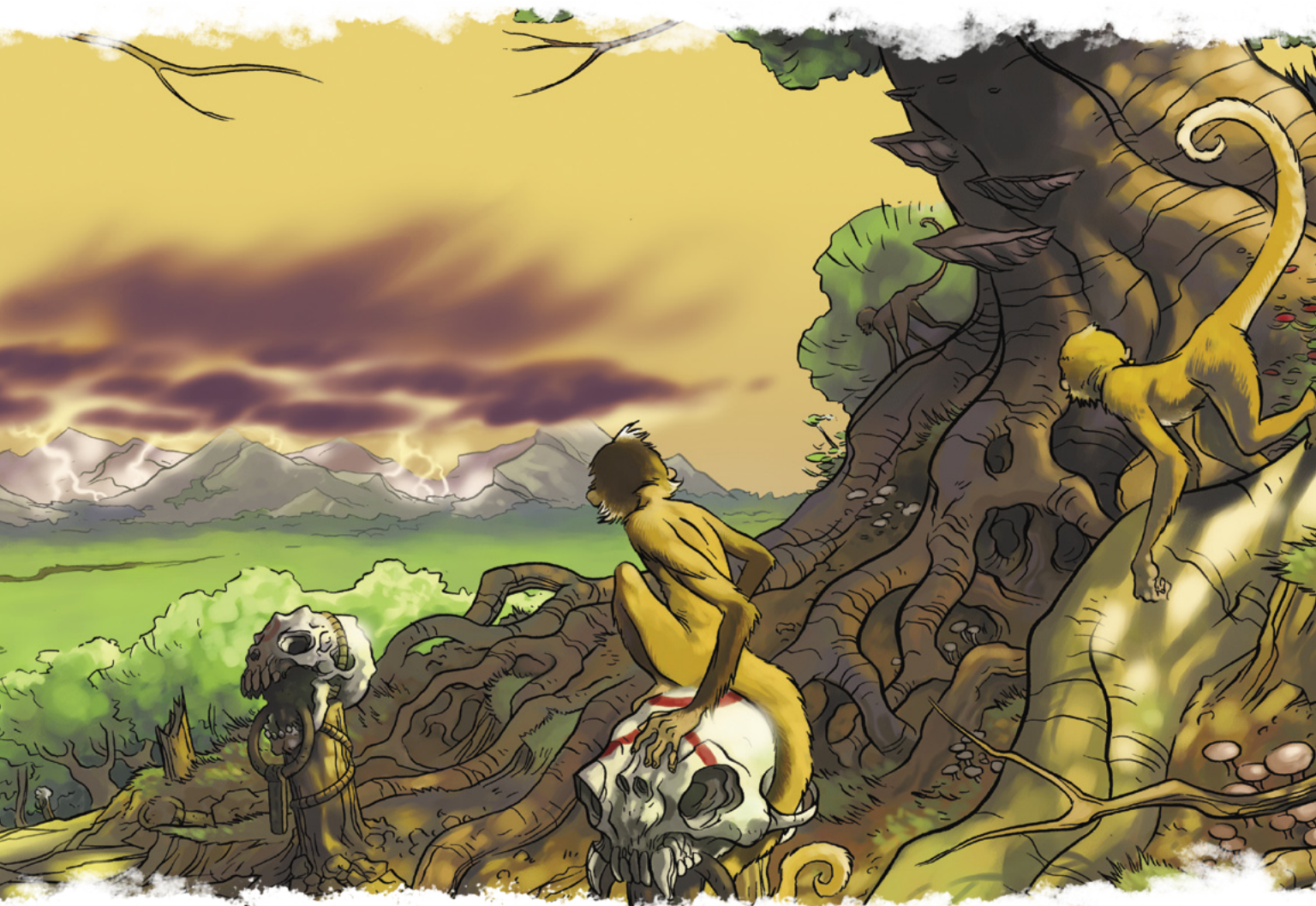
The Portent 9 ©, '05 BERGTING



THE RING OF STORMS

BY KEITH BAKER

BY RAMÓN PÉREZ



EBERRON's land of Xen'drik holds many secrets, wonders long forgotten by the children of the modern age. Cyclopean ruins recall the heyday of an empire of giants, whose savage descendents lurk in the shadows of their former glory. Many have heard of the giants of Xen'drik, laid low by dragonfire and creatures of nightmare. But only the most erudite sages know of the Qabalin, the first necromancers of Eberron, who were said to have been struck down by the gods themselves.

To date, no one has found the ruins of the Qabalin. Their shattered cities lie in the depths of Xen'drik, hidden within a ring of mountains and shrouded by a perpetual storm. Terrible power lies within the Ring of Storms, awaiting adventurers clever enough to find the

hidden land and bold enough to seize its secrets.

The Ring of Storms is the setting for *Dragonshard*, a new real-time strategy game produced by Atari, Liquid Entertainment, and Wizards of the Coast. In *Dragonshard*, the forces of light and darkness clash for control of a source of immense magical power. This article describes the region prior to the events that unfold in *Dragonshard*, in order to allow your party of adventurers to discover this realm with all of its mysteries intact. The Ring of Storms is located on the continent of Xen'drik in the *EBERRON Campaign Setting*. Due to the Ring's remote location, it is a simple matter to transport it to other settings. The Qabalin simply become a long forgotten offshoot of

the dominant elven culture, while the Heart of Siberys could be a shard of another plane that slipped through the space between dimensions, seething with extraplanar energies.

Gather together your bold explorers and set forth: the secrets of the Qabalin await!

BACKGROUND

In the second age of Eberron, giants dominated the continent of Xen'drik. In addition to raw physical power, the giant kingdoms possessed vast mystical knowledge, arcane secrets beyond the ken of any modern wizard. This land was also the birthplace of the elves. Compared to the giants, the elves were savage and primitive. But there were a few exceptions—

and the greatest among these were the Qabalrin.

The Qabalrin were a reclusive sect, feared by giant and elf alike. Prior to the discovery of the Ring of Storms, the Qabalrin were known only through vague references in elven legend and cryptic passages in texts recovered in the ruins of Xen'drik—and many scholars still question the veracity of these sources. According to these tales, the giants learned magic from the Sovereign Lord Aureon, whom they knew as Ouralon, Bringer of Light and Law. But Aureon had a nemesis: the Shadow, said to be the animate shadow of the god himself. The legends say that as the giants embraced the teachings of Aureon, they drew the Shadow to the land, and that the darkness found a home in the heart of a small sect of elves: the Qabalrin. Consumed by the darkness and the thirst for power, these elves built a massive city-state in a mountain refuge. Following the path of the Shadow, these elves grew mighty and terrible. Their powers were the equal of those of the giants, but they were dark arts requiring blood and sacrifice. As the giant nations spread across Xen'drik, the long-lived elves remained in their mountain refuge. Over the course of tens of thousands of years, their cities dug deeper into the earth, just as their wizards delved further into the darkest arts of magic. In the outer lands it was whispered that the Qabalrin consorted with demons, and that they had broken the power of death itself. At times, both giant and elf sent forces into the dark ring to eradicate this blot on Xen'drik, but no force—be it army or simple scout—ever returned from the hidden vale.

Left unchecked, the Qabalrin might have emerged from their hidden sanctuary to dominate the land. But fate—or divine providence—intervened. Over forty thousand years ago, a massive dragonshard plummeted from the sky, smashing into the greatest city of the Qabalrin. The impact and the resulting fallout—both magical and natural—completely destroyed the

Qabalrin. Remarkably, the damage did not extend beyond the mountain ring. The giants called it a miracle, the harsh justice of Ouralon, and a warning to those who would traffic with the Shadow. Following the disaster, a shield of storm clouds rose over the ring, a fierce tempest that continues to this day. Faced with quori invasions and elven rebellions, the giants turned their eyes from the cursed land of the Qabalrin—and the Ring of Storms was lost from history.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

The Qabalrin are an obscure legend, and most characters will know little or nothing about them. Use the following table for Knowledge (history) or bardic knowledge checks; a character can make a single check, with the result reflecting his knowledge. An elf with Aerenal or Valenar as his region of origin can make the same check using Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (religion). Optionally, if a historian has specifically defined Xen'drik as his area of expertise, the DM may choose to give a +5 circumstance bonus on the check. In addition, if a character has the Research feat and access to either the Library of Korranberg, Morgrave University, or the vault of any of the great families of Aerenal, he can get all of this information with a DC 10 Research check.

DC Information Known

- 20** The Qabalrin comprised an elvish sect in Xen'drik. They were never enslaved by the giants, but they were shunned by elf and giant alike, and the legends always refer to them fearfully. Their ancient city-state was destroyed prior to the collapse of the giant nations, and its ruins have never been found.
- 25** The Qabalrin were said to be disciples of the Shadow, one of the evil deities of Eberron. They possessed arcane knowledge rivaling that of the giants, but this magic was said to be dark and terrible.

Legend says that the Qabalrin were the first wizards to practice the art of necromancy, and that the elves of the line of Vol based their work on Qabalrin tradition. According to the tales, the gods destroyed the Qabalrin as punishment for their blasphemous practices and their allegiance to the Shadow.

- 30** While the majority of the legends say that the sovereign deity Aureon destroyed the Qabalrin, one obscure account tells a different story. The sage Kichintis claims that “Siberys himself was angered by the practices of the followers of the Darkness, and the lord of the sky tore out his heart and cast it down upon the vile city, slaying them in the thousands. The children of Siberys bound the souls of the Qabalrin in the heart, and called an endless storm over the region, so that those who followed the Shadow might never see the light.”

SECRETS OF THE RING

When the Qabalrin first settled within the mountain ring, there was little to distinguish them from the many tribes of primitive elves found across the land. But over time, the wisest of these elves became aware of a force within the land. The records hidden deep within the ring speak of a dragon formed of shadows, which spoke to the wise in dreams and whispered arcane secrets in the dark of night. Soon the Qabalrin embraced the worship of this Shadow. A temple arose, then a city; as centuries passed, a sprawling metropolis spread across the valley and down into the depths. Not content with the secrets of the Shadow, the Qabalrin pushed even further into the darkness in search of power. They trafficked with rakshasas and fiends from the outer planes, and dabbled with the corrupting energies of the evil planes Xoriat and Mabar. But one cannot toy with darkness and remain untouched, and the vile work of the Qabalrin began twisting the spirits of the people. Paranoia, cruelty, and greed became the driving passions of the Qabalrin, and

in time these traits turned the elves against one another. Factions formed around different magical traditions, and arcane duels and deadly feuds took their toll on the lords of the valley. If not for this infighting, the Qabalrin might have emerged from the mountains to conquer the lands beyond—but the elves were always their own worst enemies.

While there were a dozen factions within the valley, two stood out in power and prominence: the Unspoken and the Shapers of Night. The Unspoken were the preeminent conjurers of the Qabalrin, and had amassed great power through their dealings with spirits and fiends. The Shapers of Night scorned the Unspoken for relying on others; the Shapers sought to gain personal power, not to bargain with others to achieve their ends. It was this quest that led the Shapers to the arts of necromancy, and it is believed that the first vampire was spawned in the darkness of the Ring. The Unspoken feared this new power, and this led to a bitter struggle between the two factions; the Unspoken decried the undead as being an unforgivable corruption of the elven spirit, while the Shapers scoffed at the idea that the Qabalrin should fear corruption. Ultimately the Unspoken triumphed and the Shapers of Night were laid low. Instead of destroying the leaders of the fallen sect, the Unspoken chose to seal the vampires in tombs deep beneath the earth, there to suffer for eternity. Little did the victors realize that they were actually saving their fallen foes from the destruction that was to come.

The Unspoken had little time to savor their victory. Barely a week after the last vampire had been buried, the sky fell on the valley of the Qabalrin. A hail of dragonshards pelted down, shattering buildings and killing hundreds. But the worst was yet to come. The largest shards of the first wave were the size of a man's fist. The final dragonshard to fall on the valley was the size of a castle. This was the largest dragonshard that had ever been seen—The Heart of Siberys. This vast shard

landed directly on the first church of the Shadow, shattering the ancient city of the Qabalrin. The shockwave spread out across the valley, and the Qabalrin were destroyed.

Or so it seemed. While the wizards could not shield their people from destruction, they managed to weave one last enchantment as the final shard fell. Fueled by the raw fury of the dying race, this spell drew the souls of the elves together into a vast well of darkness—a spiritual entity with the power of a newborn god. But despite its power, the Qabalrin shadow was fragmented and disoriented. It took time for the multitude of voices to coalesce into a single force—and by the time the voices were united, it was too late.

The dragons of Argonnessen had long studied the sky, seeking answers to ancient prophecies in the movement of the stars and moons. Their seers predicted the fall of the Heart of Siberys and the power that would emerge, and a force of dragons arrived in the valley shortly after the great shard had shattered the land. Dragon sorcerers caught the lingering spirits of the Qabalrin and channeled them into the vast dragonshard. To bind the darkness, the dragons drew energy away from the Silver Flame, filling the Heart of Siberys with a perfect balance of light and shadow. The wyrms seeded the land with reptilian guardians, and charged these creatures to guard the Heart of Siberys from any who might seek its power. Finally, the dragons filled the sky with a terrible tempest—an eternal storm that would shield the valley from prying eyes and wings.

Forty thousand years have passed since the era of the Qabalrin. The age of giants is now long forgotten, and the ruins of the Qabalrin are buried beneath earth and weeds. The lizardfolk remember their charge only as a distant and distorted legend. But the storm still rages overhead. And the Heart of Siberys remains in the center of the realm, pulsing with untold power...

REACHING THE RING OF STORMS

Xen'drik is intentionally unknown and unmapped. It is a mysterious realm where anything can happen, and we intend to leave that mystery intact. As a result, it is up to the Dungeon Master to decide exactly where in Xen'drik the Ring of Storms can be found. If it suits the needs of the campaign, the Ring could be set against the shore of the Thunder Sea, allowing explorers to reach it with only a short sea voyage from Sharn. Alternately, it could be hidden deep in the southern edge of Xen'drik, requiring a long and treacherous journey through the hostile land.

Regardless of its location, the valley of the Qabalrin is protected by sheer cliffs, a howling tempest, and local superstition. To date, no Khorvairian explorer has found the Ring and returned to speak of it. Here are a few ways that a DM can draw adventurers into the Ring.

Intrepid Explorers: Xen'drik is a land of adventure, and it is entirely possible that the PCs have chosen to explore this forgotten world of their own accord. If the party is already in Xen'drik, there are a variety of ways to lead them to the Ring. They could find a tome in the crumbling ruins of an elven sanctuary, or discover a stone map carved into the floor of one of the temples of the giants. Alternately, they could stumble upon a drow that has found the gate to the Path of Marble and Ice (see page 77) and is willing to share this knowledge—for a price. Or the party could stumble upon the gateway on their own. Perhaps they are pursued by a tribe of savage thri-keen; as they race through the jungle, one step ahead of the deadly pursuit, keen eyes spot the outlines of a gate on the mountain wall...

A tome or map could provide information equivalent to a DC 20 Knowledge check using the table on page 74. A local guide refers to it as a cursed land haunted by ancient spirits. To tempt adventurers, either source could hint at the legendary wealth and power of the Qabalrin, sadly lost when the gods struck them down.

Scholarly Expedition: If the party won't strike out on their own, they could be asked to accompany an expedition that has just learned of the location and significance of the Ring. Groups that could fund such an expedition include Morgrave University, the Library of Korranberg, the Twelve, and the Church of the Silver Flame. The party could simply be hired as guards, or they could be tempted with offers of increased influence within the funding organization; if the adventurers owe the group a favor, it may simply be that the marker has been called in.

In this scenario, one of the greatest challenges for the party is keeping their weak NPC companions alive. Adventurers who lead doomed expeditions yet return unscathed are quickly blacklisted by the academic community. Consider *Jurassic Park* and *Aliens* as examples of a cocky team getting in over its head. Can the PCs protect their companions from the dangers of the Ring, or will you pick them off one by one?

Mysterious Patron: Instead of serving as part of a larger expedition, the party could be approached by a mysterious patron and given the information that they need to find the Ring. It may be a simple reconnaissance mission—confirm the identity of the location—or the patron may have a specific agenda in mind. Possible patrons include the Chamber; a cardinal of the Church of the Silver Flame who wants the light of the Flame released from the shard; or one of the Lords of Dust who hopes to release the burning shadow from its ancient prison. These NPCs provide adventurers with the location of the Ring, transportation, and a specific task to focus on, while freeing them from having to worry about protecting weak NPCs.

The primary question is whether the party is simply hired for the job or whether their motivation is more personal. If they have an existing relationship with the patron, this personal request could buy them a favor in the future. On the other hand, a paladin

or other follower of the Church of the Silver Flame could simply be ordered to explore the region—a request that comes directly from the Keeper of the Flame herself, compelling the faithful to action.

APPROACHING THE RING

The narrow mountain ridge that forms the Ring's border is high and deadly, and crossing these peaks should prove a challenge for even the most experienced climber. Aside from the challenge of scaling these sheer cliffs, explorers face exposure to severe cold—a seemingly unnatural extreme in temperature that seems to cling to the mountains, defying the jungles on either side. As adventurers scale the cliff, they eventually come into contact with the storm itself. Those on the surface of the mountains must deal with snow and strong winds; the wind imposes a -2 penalty on all ranged attacks, Climb, and Balance checks. Snow rarely falls in the Ring, but it is common at the mountain peaks.

ENCOUNTER TABLE: RING VALLEY

Roll	Monster	Average EL	Source
01	2d4 lizardfolk, 1d4 lizardfolk champions (barbarian 4), 1 lizardfolk shaman (druid 4)	9	<i>Monster Manual</i> 169
02	1 tyrannosaurus	8	<i>Monster Manual</i> 61
03–05	2 lizardfolk champions (barbarian 4) and 1 lizardfolk shaman (druid 4)	8	<i>Monster Manual</i> 169
06–08	1d4 megaraptors	8	<i>Monster Manual</i> 60
09–12	2 pteranodons ridden by poison dusk lieutenants (ranger 4)	7	<i>EBERRON Campaign Setting</i> 280 and <i>Monster Manual III</i> 96
13–15	1d4 poison dusk lieutenants	6	<i>Monster Manual III</i> 96
16–20	1d4 pteranodons ridden by poison dusk lizardfolk	6	<i>EBERRON Campaign Setting</i> 280 and <i>Monster Manual III</i> 96
21–24	1d4+1 giant wasps	6	<i>Monster Manual</i> 285
25–30	1d4 deinonychuses	5	<i>Monster Manual</i> 60
31–37	1 giant constrictor snake	5	<i>Monster Manual</i> 280
38–43	1d4 giant soldier ants	4	<i>Monster Manual</i> 284
44–49	1 centipede swarm	4	<i>Monster Manual</i> 238
50–59	2d4 lizardfolk	4	<i>Monster Manual</i> 169
60–65	1 giant crocodile	4	<i>Monster Manual</i> 271
66–70	1 huge viper	3	<i>Monster Manual</i> 280
71–75	2d4 fastieth	2	<i>EBERRON Campaign Setting</i> 280
76–79	1 wasp swarm	2	<i>Fiend Folio</i> 172
80–85	1 crocodile	2	<i>Monster Manual</i> 271
86–92	1d4 poison dusk lizardfolk	2	<i>Monster Manual III</i> 96
93–100	1d4 lizardfolk	2	<i>Monster Manual</i> 169

Moving through a snow-covered area costs 2 squares of movement, while areas of deep snow require 4 squares of movement.

Approaching through the air is far more dangerous, since the storm is unpredictable. While any observer can see the dark clouds hanging over the region, the wind strength rises and falls as if it has a will of its own. The winds drop just long enough so that flying creatures may consider it to be safe to enter—then rise up to tornado strength without warning. Any attempt to influence the storm with *control wind* or *control weather* requires the caster to make a DC 22 caster level check. Failure indicates the spell is ruined and lost. A success allows the spell to function—but for only 1 round per caster level, and only within a 150-foot radius around the caster.

Remarkably, the storms have little impact on the valley that lies below. The winds form a shield high above the valley. While there is significant

precipitation from the storm clouds, it is rare for the harsh winds to touch the valley below.

Given the imposing natural (and supernatural) barriers to entry, the simplest path into the valley is to go through the mountains instead of over them. Long ago, the Qabalin carved a passage through the mountains—a fortress tunnel they called the Path of Marble and Ice. The gateway to the Path is carefully hidden, but adventurers may be led to the doorway by the same source of knowledge that brought them to the Ring—or if they are fleeing pursuit, they could stumble upon it by pure chance. The Path of Marble and Ice is a Qabalin ruin, drawing its name from the black marble and ever frozen ice embedded into the walls of the natural cavern.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Those who penetrate the mountain ring find a lush valley awaiting them.

Over the course of tens of thousands of years, swamp and dense rainforest have risen up in the Ring, devouring and burying the ancient Qabalin structures. In many places, the foundations of shattered buildings can be seen beneath deep layers of moss and mud, and lumps of glass are scattered about, worn smooth by time. Qabalin architecture seems to be remarkably fragile; the walls are thin, often curved and rounded. The elves used darkwood, black marble, and glass to build their homes, but the structures were preserved by magic—and when the Heart of Siberys struck the valley, it shattered these preserving spells along with the buildings. Few surface structures remain—it is the subterranean ruins that are of most interest to explorers.

The eternal storms bring a great deal of rain to the region, so the air is moist and damp. The forests teem with insects and reptiles, though there are a few mammals to be seen. Few species

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survived the fall of the Heart, and some monsters have emerged from Khyber to take residence in the Ring. But most of the creatures that inhabit the region are the children of the *bolatashi* (“great mothers”). These bizarre creatures, a creation of the sorcerers of Argonessen, were brought to the region to repopulate it after the devastation of the shardfall. The *bolatashi* are cornucopias of life, capable of spawning a vast array of reptilian and amphibious creatures. A *bolatash* is a vast, bloated lizard; it is incapable of movement and self-defense, and unless it is tended it starves and dies. The *bolatashi* are scattered throughout the valley, each tended by a tribe of lizardfolk who see the creature as the source of all life.

While much of the valley is filled with jungle, the center of the Ring is a barren wasteland. A relic of the devastation caused by the falling shard, this waste extends for fifteen miles in all directions around the Heart of

Siberys. Nothing grows here, and there is a strange feeling in the air—an eerie sense of latent energy, almost like an electrical charge. All forms of magic are enlarged and extended in this region, but spells that rely on or create plants, such as *entangle* or *stalker*, automatically fail. The entire region has a weak universal magical aura. In addition, creatures cannot heal naturally while they are this close to the Heart. This has no impact on magical healing. Due to the disturbing aura and the impact on growth and healing, most living creatures avoid the waste of the Heart.

THE LIZARDFOLK OF THE RING

While there are various creatures scattered across the valley or lurking in the ancient ruins, the dominant species in the Ring of Storms are lizardfolk. These creatures are children of the *bolatashi*, and a local lizardfolk community is always centered around a great mother. The lizardfolk are surprisingly skilled, and their communi-

ties include barbarian warriors, druidic shamans, and rogues and rangers (who serve as scouts and hunters). While traditional lizardfolk typically serve as soldiers and shamans, the scouts and laborers are typically poison dusk lizardfolk (from the *Monster Manual III*, these lizardfolk are Small and dexterous, and have a +5 racial bonus on Hide checks while unarmored).

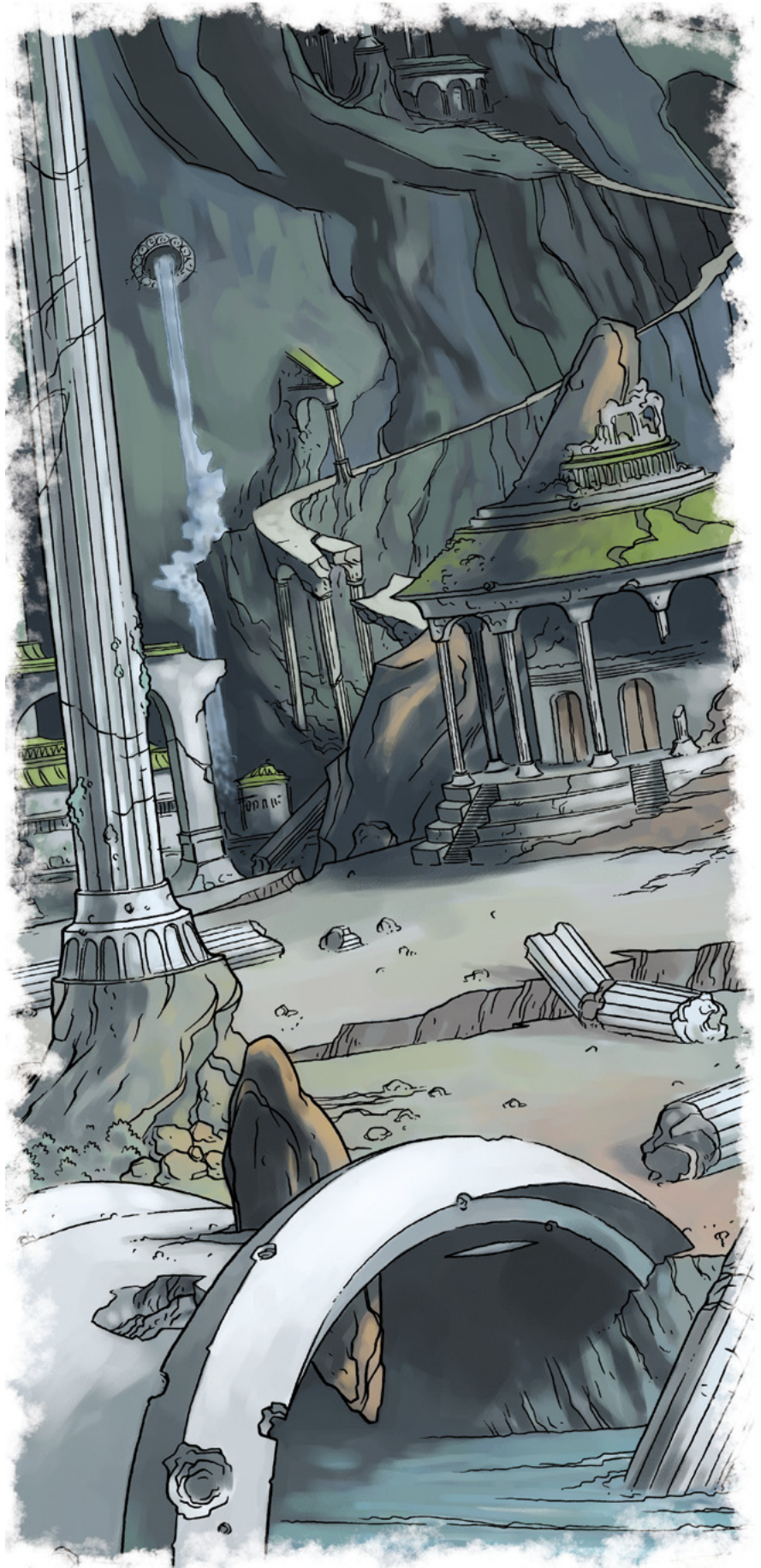
A *bolatash* produces beasts of burden to assist its guardian lizardfolk. Pteranodon-mounted scouts patrol the skies above the jungle while staying as low as possible to avoid the deadly storm winds. Another common beast is a giant spitting turtle, a heavily armored creature capable of spitting vast gouts of acidic venom. Lizardfolk legends say that when intruders come to the land to threaten the great heart, the shamans call on spirits of the land and even dragons to defend the valley – but it’s up to the DM to decide if the explorers pose enough of a threat to trigger these supernatural defenses.

QABALRIN RUINS

The cities of the Qabalrin extend deep beneath the surface of the valley. When the Heart of Siberys struck the Ring, the physical and mystical shockwaves killed all of the Qabalrin—but their catacombs and vaults remain largely intact. Braziers of *continual flame* still burn, shedding dim light across subterranean plazas. The vast majority of these ruins are based on natural caverns that were reinforced with the magic of the Qabalrin; thus beautiful spires and elven structures are set against plain stone and underground rivers. The architecture is based on elaborately carved spires and arches, and the most common building materials are black marble and plain gray granite. In addition to spires and columns, many of the ruins are filled with massive statues, monuments to the power of Qabalrin wizards and warriors now long dead. More than a few of these statues are also guardians, ready to spring to life should the unwary adventurer trespass on the territory of the forgotten elves.

Despite the fall of the Qabalrin, these ruins are anything but abandoned. Over the course of millennia, many strange creatures have emerged from Khyber and taken residence in these dungeons. The restless spirits of the Shapers of Night still haunt the ruins, along with mindless undead that continue in echoes of their long-forgotten lives. Due to the paranoid nature of Qabalrin society—and the frequent feuds between elven factions—many of these dungeons are filled with magical traps and deadly guardians, including golems and fiends bound into service over forty thousand years ago. Recently, a new force has taken an interest in the ruins of the Qabalrin: the Cult of the Dragon Below. Expeditionary forces of aberrations have been scouring the dungeons in search of artifacts, and unwary adventurers could run afoul of illithids or beholders.

While any Qabalrin ruin could be a source of treasure and powerful magic, the most dangerous are the prison vaults holding the first vampires. The Unspoken bound the vampire lords in



ENCOUNTER TABLE: QABALRIN RUINS

Roll	Monster	Average EL	Source
01	1 marilith	17	<i>Monster Manual</i> 44
02–03	1 horned devil	16	<i>Monster Manual</i> 55
04	1 truly horrid umber hulk	14	<i>Monster Manual</i> 249
05–07	1 iron golem	13	<i>Monster Manual</i> 136
08–12	1 beholder	13	<i>Monster Manual</i> 26
13–15	1 stone golem	11	<i>Monster Manual</i> 137
16–25	1 dread wraith	11	<i>Monster Manual</i> 258
26–30	1 shadesteel golem	11	<i>Monster Manual III</i> 73
31–35	1 mind flayer and 1d4 umber hulks	10	<i>Monster Manual</i> 187, 249
36–40	1d4 umber hulks	9	<i>Monster Manual</i> 249
41–50	1d4 spectres	9	<i>Monster Manual</i> 232
51–56	1 mind flayer, 1 dolgaunt monk and 2d4 dolgrims	9	<i>Monster Manual</i> 187 and <i>EBERRON Campaign Setting</i> 282–283
57–62	1 mind flayer	8	<i>Monster Manual</i> 187
63–67	1d4 chain devils	8	<i>Monster Manual</i> 53
68–72	1 dolgaunt monk and 2d4 dolgrims	7	<i>EBERRON Campaign Setting</i> 282
73–80	1 dolgaunt monk and 1d4 rune hounds	7	<i>EBERRON Campaign Setting</i> 282 and <i>Monster Manual III</i> 145
81–85	2d4 shadows	7	<i>Monster Manual</i> 221
86–95	1d4 wraiths	7	<i>Monster Manual</i> 258
96–100	1d4 bearded devils	5	<i>Monster Manual</i> 53

the ancient fortresses of the Shapers of Night. These caverns are draped with the trappings of necromancy, charnel pits and sacrificial altars scattered among the ancient structures. The deadliest threats the realm has to offer are concentrated in these regions. The Unspoken set constructs, bound demons, and mystical wards in these dungeons, and these are also a focal point for restless spectres and wraiths. Should a group manage to penetrate these vaults and free one of the first vampires, they release a menace on par with Vol herself. These vampires could have up to twenty character levels—potentially even more, if you feel the need to unleash a new epic threat into the world. A Qabalrin vampire most likely seeks to destroy the Heart of Siberys, searching for a way to unleash the shadow of its people and to find new vessels for the Qabalrin ghosts.

The table above provides possible encounters for Qabalrin ruins, but traps will be as great a danger as monsters. Magical traps are scattered throughout the depths, and these can be as deadly as is required to meet the

needs of the campaign. The Qabalrin possessed vast magical power, and any level of spell could be unleashed upon unwary adventurers.

THE HEART OF SIBERYS

The great dragonshard lies at the center of the region, pulsing with power. It is not simply a massive Siberys shard; it is a unique form of dragonshard, unlike any other on Eberron. Its power is beyond measure. Anyone who touches the shard suffers 3d6 damage (no save) per round of contact as pure magical energy courses through his body; however, any spell he casts while touching the shard is maximized. Those who seek to abuse this power find it has other risks; every time a character casts a spell while in contact with the shard, he must make a Will saving throw (DC 10 + the damage inflicted by that round of contact). If he fails, he is possessed by a Qabalrin ghost that emerges from the shard; this is identical to the malevolence ability of the standard ghost. Because of the balance of spiritual energy within the Heart, only two ghosts can escape in

this manner at one time; to release additional ghosts, the Heart must be destroyed.

Destroying the Heart is a difficult challenge, and the effects are highly unpredictable. It might release Qabalrin spirits and a flood of the energy of the Silver Flame. It could unleash one of these forces while the other remains bound in the myriad shards. Even if all of the power is unleashed, the results are uncertain. A DM using *The Book of Exalted Deeds* or *The Book of Vile Darkness* might want to transform nearby creatures through an infusion of darkness or light; a paladin of the Silver Flame might become a saint, while an evil character could become an unwitting channel for the dark power of the Qabalrin. The full effects are in the hands of the DM: what power do you want to unleash on a hapless world? ☞

Keith Baker is the creator of the EBERRON campaign setting. Check out “Steel Shadows,” in DUNGEON #115 and “Fallen Angel” in DUNGEON #117. His first EBERRON novel, “The City of Towers,” came out in February.



TWISTS AND TURNS

PLOTTING THE CAMPAIGN (PART 2)

BY MONTE COOK

BY KYLE HUNTER

Planning out a campaign ahead of time affords a DM many luxuries. If you know generally what's coming, either next session or ten sessions from now, you can plant clues or plan plot twists regarding those future events in the present session. You can foreshadow coming events, devise interesting plot twists, and even create a villain intended to rear his evil head more than once.

FORESHADOWING

Underused but almost always effective, foreshadowing alone can be the difference between an average campaign and a great one. Although its literary meaning is far broader, in the sense of campaign structure the basic idea with foreshadowing is that you set up something early on that doesn't come to fruition until much later.

- In the little town where the PCs start the campaign, they hear rumors of random, spontaneous fires starting in the area. Investigation turns up nothing. When the PCs reach 10th level and have moved on, they learn that a rift to the Elemental Plane of Fire has opened near that town, and all the surrounding people are imperiled.
- At the end of the PCs' first adventure fighting goblins, they learn that the goblins had a mysterious benefactor but they never discover who it is. Later, after defeating a lich, they learn he was the one supporting the goblins

and their raids. Using this information, they realize that the locked room they could not enter back in the goblin lair is where the lich hid his phylactery and they must return to their old stomping grounds to finish him off.

- The PCs meet a kindly old woman early on in their careers who helps them with advice and healing. Months (and many levels) later, in the course of their adventures, they uncover a powerful magic item—one that the "kindly old woman" greatly desires and attempts to wrest from them by force. Her advice and help were really only to steer them toward finding the item for her. (This is, technically, a plot twist that uses foreshadowing—for more about plot twists, see the next section.)

Foreshadowing is great because it makes the players realize that you had the arc of the story planned all along. As the proverbial lightbulb goes off over their heads, the players get a sense of awareness of the scope of things around them. The campaign feels more like events in a real setting, or like a good novel or movie. Everything wraps together and the campaign doesn't feel like a bunch of unrelated, random events.

You can make foreshadowing obvious or subtle, as you desire. Whether the PCs realize that what they have learned or experienced will become important later doesn't really matter, unless you want it to matter.


The trick to good foreshadowing is to do it in a way that people will remember.

It's clunky if you have to remind the players that if they'd paid attention, they could have seen the current events coming. You can do this by creating multiple instances of the foreshadowing. In the example of the fire elemental rift given earlier, one rumor about a strange fire is easily

The Moment of Realization

One of the great rewards of being a DM is seeing a player experience the "moment of realization." This is when a player suddenly realizes that the far side of the pit trap that he's leaping over is covered by a *grease* spell and his plan for bypassing the trap has landed him right smack into it. This is when a player realizes he's had the key to the vault where the artifact is kept all along—it's the pommel of the sword that his mentor gave him years before. This is when a player realizes that the paladin helping them hunt the werewolf *is* the werewolf, and even the paladin himself doesn't know it.

The moment of realization is when the player catches on to what's really going on. He becomes aware of your hard (and sometimes devious) work and planning. And because he realized it on his own, he is all the more likely to think that what you've created is something really great and entertaining. Even if the player doesn't say anything, when you see his eyes light up as he figures it all out, you can take that as a compliment and a reward for what you've done.



forgotten. Three such rumors, all about different instances and spread out throughout the entire time the PCs are in the area, probably won't be.

Ultimately, perhaps the best foreshadowing isn't imperative to the flow of the campaign, but serves as a reward for those players that do pay enough attention to remember. To use an inelegant and obvious example, if the players find a passage in an old book saying "the password is 'umber hulk'" and then, many sessions later they come to a place (created by the writer of the old book) where they need a password to get by, the situation is made easy if someone remembers "umber hulk," but it's not impossible if no one remembers the relatively innocuous reference.

PLOT TWISTS

Plot twists are actually fairly simple to create, but end up making an adventure or a campaign far more memorable. When you outline the campaign, you just look at what the obvious cause or effect of an event might be and you make it something else.

- After the PCs have saved a village from a rampaging basilisk, they learn that in fact it was the mayor of the town that set the basilisk loose, originally intending for it to slay his rival.
- When the characters reach the end of a trap-filled dungeon, they learn that the traps don't protect some valuable treasure, but in fact the whole place was created to test applicants for a prestigious thieves' guild.
- The PCs confront the evil wizard in her castle but discover a clue that she in fact was not the creator of the golem that murdered the high priest, despite all previous evidence. Only much later do they learn that it was in fact a powerful demon that hated both the evil wizard and the good cleric, murdering one and framing the other.

There's a danger in using too many plot twists. They're only interesting if they're a surprise. If there's always a twist, there's no surprise when it comes. And you don't want the players questioning everything they're told because it always turns out to be wrong

in the end. You don't want them to assume that whatever they believe must be wrong.

Further, you don't want to design too many "gotcha" type twists. Plot twists should be entertaining and interesting surprises, not ways to cheat the players out of what they want or trick them just for the point of tricking them. Too many of these kinds of twists can make it seem like you are abusing your DM power. You are the players' eyes and ears—they can't know anything about the campaign world or what's going on in it unless you tell them about it. Tricking the players just makes it seem like you aren't telling them the right things, or worse, are lying to them. Once or twice and this can be an effective (albeit usually anticlimactic) way to end an adventure. More than that is just annoying.

From a campaign perspective, the best twists are those that involve not just an adventure, but a series of adventures. To use a classic example, after fighting their way through a series of adventures involving giants, the PCs learn that their real foes aren't the giants at all, but the drow inciting them to attack the surrounding lands. Or, once the PCs gather all the pieces of the shattered artifact, they learn that doing so creates unwanted effects, like opening a permanent portal to the Abyss. These are campaign-level plot twists. They radically change long-held assumptions. They alter player perspectives on where they think the campaign is going.

These kinds of plot twists are good because they are engaging over the long term. They make the players not just react to events, but wonder why they are happening. When things are always clear-cut and straightforward, they can become dull. A surprise twist livens things up. (But to reiterate the danger of using too many twists, never really knowing what's going on can be frustrating.) If the players learn about the evil undead horde in the mountains early on, they're going to assume that eventually they'll have to fight against it. However, if, in the end, they have to use a powerful spell that will use the undead horde against an even worse foe, that's an interesting twist. That kind of thing keeps the players coming back each session, wondering what it might hold for them and their characters.

Reactive Plot Twists

Sometimes, DMs will wait until the players figure some mystery out and then change the solution, calling that a plot twist. Really, what you're doing is reacting to what the players think and making sure that they're wrong. This is a frustrating practice from a player's point of view, and woe to the DM who is caught doing it. Ultimately, it's almost always a bad idea. If the players figure something out, don't get petulant—reward them for their intuitive thinking.

Lastly, keep in mind that if the PCs are looking for a twist, sometimes the absence of a plot twist is, in itself, a twist.

RECURRING VILLAINS

It's common in heroic fiction for a villain to return time and again to plague the heroes. In a roleplaying game, this is much less common because it's so difficult to pull off. The PCs might face down a big bad guy, but more than likely when they do, either they or he isn't going to be walking away from that fight—and if it's the PCs, the campaign is over, so it'll probably be the villain who lies in defeat once the last round of initiative plays out. In order to create a recurring villain, there's got to be a villain who can be encountered more than once.

There are ways to bring a villain back, though. Minions that recover the body and use *raise dead* is an obvious way. Allowing the villain to escape before defeat is another—spells like *expeditious retreat*, *haste*, and especially *teleport* are also useful in this regard.

Less Obvious "Escape Plans"

But there are other ways to enable a villain to be able to fight another day. For example, if the villain is smart enough to know that the PCs will best him, he might just leave before the fight even starts and use allies or minions to keep the PCs busy to cover his retreat. This is particularly interesting because in the players' minds, the opponent is "untested." They still don't know what he can or cannot do.

Another escape plan might involve the villain engineering another event that the PCs must deal with rather than dealing

with him. For example, just before the PCs charge up to attack, he reveals a friend of theirs that he has captured and placed in immediate mortal peril. Or he places the artifact the characters seek on a burning raft in the pool of lava. Or the villain standing atop the mountain starts an avalanche that will crush the village below. And so on. For this to work, it's important that the situation created is one that the PCs can deal with. (Be aware, however, that sometimes the PCs just won't go for it. They'll ignore the endangered village to get at their foe, or—since there's a number of them—the PCs split up to deal with both the situation and the villain who engineered it.)

It's more complicated, but you can also set up situations where the villain can't be defeated by force of arms and spells, but can still be defeated. Imagine, for example, an evil blackguard who has, through spells or items, given himself impressive DR and SR. The PCs battle him for a few rounds, and find that their attacks and spells just aren't affecting him much. In desperation, they bull rush him into the next room and slam the iron door—the only exit—after him. Then, one *arcane lock* later, they've bested him. The PCs have won hands down, but the villain is still alive. Eventually, he'll get out, probably hungry for vengeance.

Lastly, you can even engineer situations where the villain can come back because when he encountered the PCs, he won, not them. The engineering comes in as you design a way for the PCs to survive the experience. Perhaps like in the previous example, the villain shuts the PCs up in a sealed area. Or maybe there's a good reason why the villain doesn't slay the defeated characters—he needs the humbled adventurers to carry a message back to the queen, he needs them to perform some task for him (whether they are aware of it or not), or he just doesn't care enough about them to take the time. This is a tricky situation, of course, because you don't want the players to think that he's leaving their characters alive just for the sake of keeping the campaign going. You want them to either know why they've been spared or to worry about the reason why. Either way, it should seem like even as they realize they are still alive, the characters are worse off.

Of course, if he can just get the PCs to retreat from the fight, that solves the

whole problem, but it doesn't take too much experience as a DM to realize that PCs almost never run away.

THE EMOTIONAL VALUE OF A RECURRING VILLAIN

Why bother with the trouble of a recurring villain? Because it can encourage a meaningful reaction in the characters (and the players), and perhaps begin a meaningful *interaction* between the characters and the villain. Players get to know a recurring villain. To some extent, they understand him. Maybe even respect him a little. Encounters with recurring villains are likely to involve roleplaying as well as combat, at least as the opposing sides hurl insults and threats at their ongoing enemies.

Something that authors like Stephen King use to great effect is that they have the antagonist of the story abuse the protagonists so badly in one way or another that when it comes time for the villain's ultimate defeat (which almost always involves his demise as well), the reader cheers. So strong are the emotions that the villain's actions have stirred up that we delight in the villain's own eventual suffering and death. It would be a laudable goal to try to accomplish this in your campaign as well. Make it so that not only do the characters profit in the defeat of their enemies, but the *players* rejoice as well. The villain's death means more than simply success—it's payback.

This is tricky to do in a roleplaying game, though. If an NPC does bad things to the PCs, the PCs usually just kill him. (Harsh but true.) Most opponents aren't around long enough to really stir up hatred in the players. There are two ways to solve this problem.

1. **Minions.** If Lord Zakis's mercenaries plague the PCs' lives, the PCs will learn to hate Lord Zakis. Perhaps they have something he wants, and he sends his minions to attempt to get it. If the minions attack them and interrupt a well-earned rest here, or spoil a feast in their honor there, the PCs will get tired of that very quickly. If the mercenaries start ruining the PCs' adventures, stealing the treasure before they get there or waiting until right after they've finished the

big fight with the dragon to attack, Lord Zakis will certainly earn their enmity.

Best of all, though, the PCs can defeat the minions time and time again. They'll get a short-term victory out of it, and you won't have to try to engineer an escape or anything of the sort. The defeat of his minions doesn't affect Zakis' own personal power or his status in any way.

The only drawback to this plan is the risk that after defeating his minions a dozen times, Lord Zakis becomes a joke rather than a threat. The minions need to really inflict serious harm to the PCs—and that doesn't mean hit points. The minions should steal some really good treasure, hurt the PCs' reputation or possibly even kill one or more of the characters. Those are stings that really hurt.

2. **Careful Plot Engineering.** It's a lot more work, but you can engineer direct encounters with a villain in such a way that it's likely that he won't just be defeated. If the PCs appear before the king, the evil Lord Zakis could appear in court as well—his own reputation unsullied—and discredit the characters with lies and half-truths. Or, his minions could capture one PC and Zakis could torture him for information. When the rest of the characters show up to rescue their friend, Zakis is long gone, but the scars left on the tortured PC remain. Perhaps Zakis attacks and humiliates (or even slays) one character when he is off doing something alone. Often, it's effective to have the villain interact with (and cause harm in some way to) just one PC at a time. Not only is a lone PC vulnerable, but it's satisfying when the PCs work together to defeat an enemy that they have learned to hate (but could never overcome) as individuals.

Looking at the campaign in the long term just as things are starting, before the first die roll is ever made, grants a DM opportunities to create villains, plots, and meaningful events that he could not otherwise implement into the campaign. 🗡️

Next Time: Designing the campaign around the characters.

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ATYPICAL ENEMIES

BY CHRIS SIMS

BY KYLE HUNTER

Heroes fight evil. From slaying cannibalistic giants to thwarting vile priests of unspeakable religions, the iniquity of her foes is what makes a champion of decency shine. Or is it that simple?

What really makes a hero is the courage to do the right thing, no matter what the cost.

But what does a good guy do when the enemy is not evil? The personal consequences of facing a foe of good alignment or virtuous motivation can be devastating, but resolving moral dilemmas can make for some compelling gaming sessions. Players must think carefully about their characters' motivations, lest they also end up on the wrong side of good intentions.

Next time you want to throw a little conflict at your PCs, pick one or more of the following archetypes, and let your imagination go.

ALIEN

We never meant to harm you. This is simply how we greet others.

Not all creatures think in human (or humanoid) terms. Certain forms of behavior may be acceptable to one race but appalling to another. On the other side of this equation, a seemingly innocuous act by a PC may be a terrible offense to a member of an alien culture. A truly alien creature might not see its actions as harmful, even if they involve killing people.

ARROGANT

"My plan will unite the world in peace. The thousands who will die are an acceptable sacrifice."

Also known as the sympathetic madman, the arrogant villain is certain that he knows better than anyone else how things should work. Invariably, he has a plan, grand or small, for a major change in the lives of others. Often, if the scheme

works, the change is a gainful one. But does anyone have the right to sacrifice people for a cause, no matter how noble it may be? Even if the villain intends to die himself, what right does he have to make that decision for countless others?

COMPELLED

“If I hadn’t done what he said, we’d all be dead now.”

Coercion is a powerful tool, and many bow to intimidation rather than face the other possibilities. An antagonist with this archetype always acts at the behest of someone who can be legitimately called a villain. The actual blackheart gains the compelled character’s complicity through some form of duress, whether he is holding a loved one hostage or using simple blackmail. Compelled characters often turn against their compeller, if they can.

CONTENDER

“The Scepter of Arjazba is the only thing that can heal our dying king. Stand aside, for our quest is righteous!”

When one group of heroes wants something sought by another similar party, conflict is often inevitable. This is true even if both sides know the altruistic nature of their opposition. Further, building on the misguided and misunderstood archetypes, one group may be tricked into opposing would-be allies. A really unfortunate twist occurs when both sides actually need whatever it is they seek, especially if the ones who come up empty-handed can’t meet their goals any other way. This type of scenario gets worse when the opposing force is made up of loyalists or fanatics.

DESPERATE

“My sister and I needed to eat. I admit I was poaching, but I shot the warden in self-defense!”

Extreme anxiety or need can make folks do wicked things. A desperate person, whether starving or penniless, often considers taking actions his alignment might normally prohibit. Survival is king, and you can’t live on ideals. What’s worse, a single desperate act might lead to even more wrongdoing, either to prevent undesired consequences or as an unforeseen result.

ENCHANTED OR CURSED

“I woke up naked, with the taste of blood in my mouth....”

A clever enchanter can weave many diverse scapegoats into her web of deception. This tactic works especially well against heroic characters if the enchanted victims are also good. Such situations leave the PCs unsure whom to trust and unable to act decisively. Violence may even be out of the question.

Curses can compel and create desperation. They can make a blameless person crave something abominable. Ending the curse may have horrible effects, as well. But what if what seems to be a curse is merely obfuscation created by an actual villain to throw would-be heroes off the correct trail?

FANATIC

“It is the will of St. Cuthbert!”

Blind devotion can be a dangerous thing. The fanatic believes in something so fiercely he can’t be swayed from his course of action no matter what. Furthermore, a fanatic often believes some greater authority sanctions his actions, absolving him of responsibility for anything that might be considered evil by mere mortals. Some die at the hands of legitimate authorities, still believing in their own righteousness.

IGNORANT

“Those creatures are evil monsters! We should burn them out, before anyone else gets hurt!”

Good-hearted folks have weaknesses, and some suffer from prejudices or other forms of ignorance. Simple people tend to look for the most likely cause of their problems and act quickly on whatever notion strikes them as true. They do so not out of a desire to hurt others (which would be an evil act), but to protect themselves and those they love. Combined with misguidance or desperation, ignorance can turn deadly.

LOYALIST

“My lord has never failed me or my people!”

Like a fanatic, a loyalist is an extremist, but she places her trust in a leader or nation instead of a belief or value. This person does what’s advantageous for her homeland or as she is ordered by her superiors. Upright persons do serve evil empires, believing the propaganda of their government or falling to their own

ignorance. The other side of this coin is the rebel who knows those loyal to the oppressive regime aren’t evil, just badly informed. Still, she must fight. Loyalists, like fanatics, sometimes stand for an evil tyrant to the bitter end.

MISGUIDED

“But Erenfel told me the baron did it! Oh gods, what have I done?”

A person who takes an action may not bear complete responsibility. Anyone can be deceived. Many well-meaning souls have been duped into performing destructive deeds by unscrupulous manipulators. Still others misinterpret information or evidence they find, and thereby act hastily from false assumptions. Enchantment needn’t be part of the mix. Those with extreme principles are often the easiest targets for exploitation.

MISUNDERSTOOD

“I wanted the key to close the gate, too. I can’t believe we’ve been fighting.”

Sometimes, the story isn’t clear to those who play it out. The misunderstood villain is actually trying to do the right thing, but it doesn’t look that way from the outside. Perhaps she believes the PCs are agents of some opposing force and never takes the time to talk the situation out. It could be that the heroes have misinterpreted her role in preceding events. Maybe there’s just no time to figure out who’s who. Such misconceptions can end badly for everyone involved, the best possible outcome being the discovery of an unexpected ally.

UNFORTUNATE

“We broke in to free the imprisoned animals. How could we have known?”

Benevolent people can find themselves in circumstances beyond their control. While doing something righteous, even a hero can unleash unanticipated repercussions thanks to the law of unintended consequences. From the reckless wizard who opens an extraplanar gate he can’t close to the huntsman who shoots and kills a wild-shaped druid, some “villains” are merely victims of good deeds gone awry. Unfortunate villains combine well with desperate ones. Actual evildoers often manipulate such luckless coincidences to their advantage. 🗡️



A TOWN IN THE AFTERMATH

BY MARK A. HART

BY KYLE HUNTER

The adventuring band known as the Dragon Company trudges into the village of Wayreth. They carry with them their wounded comrades, overstuffed bags of loot, and enough tales for a dozen bards. Despite grim odds, the Dragon Company has cleansed the undead-infested Tomb of Volgrath. For the next two days, they sample local ales, heal their wounds, and spend a small fortune in gold and gems. Their spirits restored, the brave adventurers depart Wayreth and move on to their next great quest.

The scenario described above, although mundane on the surface, represents a plethora of campaign development opportunities and future plot hooks, as well as introducing a living, evolving world to your players. Player characters usually go to a town or village to rest and recover between adventures. They seek local healers, replenish their supplies, and swap stories at the tavern. Once the characters have what they need, they leave. The town becomes a waypoint or rest stop but little more.

The next time your adventurers descend upon a town, use their visit

to develop your campaign and plant seeds for some future adventures. Consider what happens to the town left behind. How does the adventurers' visit affect the community? If the characters return to that town or village a month or even a year later, how has it changed? When answering these questions, consider the following ways a party of adventures could influence a community.

THE LOCAL ECONOMY

When adventurers swagger into town, they carry more wealth than most families see in ten lifetimes. Characters purchase expensive equipment such as weapons and armor and blithely pay top silver for rooms and meals. Unless a community regularly experiences an influx of adventurers (and their bags of gold and gems), so much wealth suddenly entering the local economy wreaks havoc. On a simple level, such wealth could either harm the town's economy or bolster it significantly. As a guideline, if the characters spend more than three times a community's gold piece limit,

assume they impact the town or village's economy with their largess.

How could money be bad? Well, too much gold flushed into a small community can cause a spike in commodity prices and labor costs. Local citizens lose their jobs and businesses, or have less to eat, as the people who did not receive money from the adventuring party can no longer afford the higher prices. Alternatively, the flood of wealth could create new jobs, expand businesses, and attract new citizens. If the characters spend enough gold, the town may experience impressive (and possibly painful) growth over the next year. The party could depart the sleepy village of Wayreth only to find that upon their return a year later the village has become a bustling small town.

IMPRESSIONABLE YOUTH

Without a doubt, everyone in town hears tales about the party's exploits. Even if the PCs avoid telling stories, the locals fabricate their own. How do these stories affect the community's youth? Young men and women could run away from local farms in search of adventure. If even one or two people run away from a small village, everyone remembers and probably blames the characters for their bad influence. As adventuring is a hazardous occupation, runaways often perish. When the characters return to the village, they might face an unfriendly or even hostile reception.

You could also have one of the locals hire on with the party as a pack bearer or torchbearer. Such an individual provides a link between the party and the community and gives a possible reason to return in the future.

NEW MONSTERS FOR OLD

In the course of adventuring, characters may slay a powerful monster or a group of weaker ones. Consider what new monsters move in because of the available lair. For example, after the Dragon Company clears the undead from the Tomb of Volgrath, a band of ogres and gnolls moves in and takes up residence. Some locations, especially ruins, dungeons, and tombs, act like monster

magnets. Once the characters leave the region, these new creatures could terrorize the nearby village, providing a reason for the party to return.

THE RULING CLASS

Some rulers may be unfriendly or even hostile to the PCs. Imagine a region plagued for several years by a group of manticores. The local baron is unwilling to stop the monsters, or perhaps is incapable of doing so. How does he feel when a band of adventurers sweeps in, slays the monsters in one day, and earns the local peasants' gratitude? Likewise, how do the local citizens now feel about their ineffective baron? After all, he never dealt with the manticores in three years, yet his tax demands never wavered.

If the characters rid an area of a powerful monster or similar threat, consider how the local ruler reacts. On the surface, he may greet the characters as heroes. Behind his handshakes and smiles, however, he might detest their meddling. If the characters return to the region, he may have them waylaid by hired brigands or stalked by assassins. If his resentment extends to those the characters aided, he may raise taxes or punish anyone who dared show gratitude to the party. The characters could return to find a grim, forlorn town where people refuse to help. A more powerful ruler might enact laws to punish adventurers for interfering with his local rule. Such laws could include excessive taxes (such as 50% on all loot) and onerous weapon restrictions (only noblemen may carry longbows and crossbows, for example). A religious leader might even enact laws to outlaw certain faiths—such as the one practiced by the party cleric.

Another possibility is that the local ruler may have benefited from a monster's presence. The brigands dwelling within the Bleak Forest could have been secretly working for the baron. If the characters drive these brigands off, they also eliminate a source of the baron's revenue.

REVENGE IS SWEET

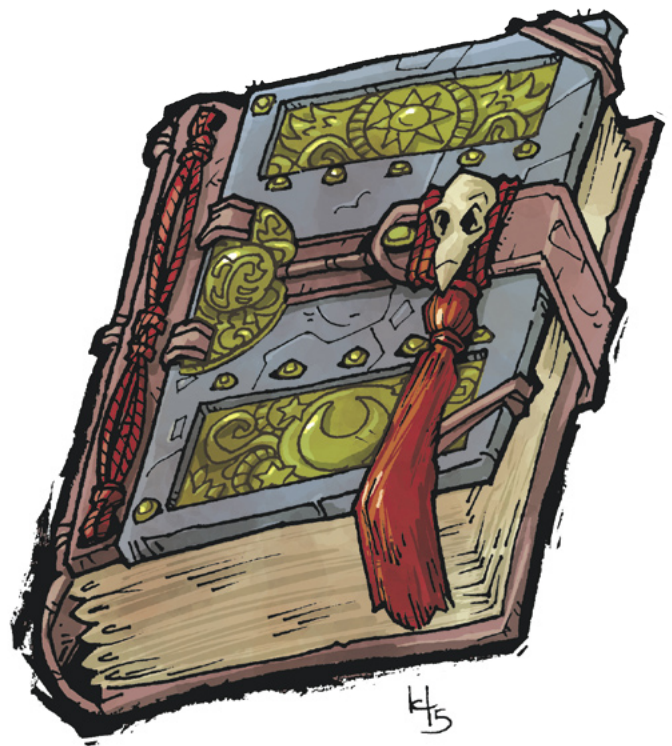
Adventurers often leave behind loose ends. For example, the evil necromancer's

lieutenant may have escaped, or one of the necromancer's close friends may have learned of his demise. Surviving villains could punish the villagers for helping the characters. Once the characters depart, the villains unleash their vengeance against the commoners. Alternatively, the villains could infiltrate the community and lay a trap for the returning party.

CHANGE IS CONSTANT

The most important thing to remember is that the party's actions impact surrounding communities, even if just in small ways. If the characters eliminate the Bleak Forest brigands, traffic along the road returns to normal, or even expands. Merchant caravans can now travel the road without fear. If the characters destroy an evil necromancer and his undead legions, the nearby town loses its fearful, desolate nature. Whether the characters perform heroic deeds or dastardly ones, their actions change the world—or at least one corner of it. A local village or town could explode in growth, or find itself withering and forgotten. With an influx of outsiders, a town might grow and become a different place within a year. The citizens may thank the characters and remember them fondly, or they could curse the day the party arrived.

As you evolve a community in the wake of the PCs' visit, recall how they behaved during their stay. Even if the party's arrival later brings sorrow to a community, the citizens should nonetheless remember the good deeds the party accomplished. If, however, the characters acted like mercenaries and thugs, the locals should remember them as such. As your campaign progresses, balance the changes you make to towns and villages. Some of the changes should make life better, with the characters remembered as brave heroes. Other changes, however, should inflict some loss, anger, resentment, and even fear of the party amongst locals. The characters should enjoy their share of successes and glory, but at the same time, remember their actions always have consequences, intended and otherwise. 🗡️



ESSENTIAL WORKS

BY HAL MACLEAN

BY KYLE HUNTER

Dreams live in books. Books represent dooryways into a multiverse of worlds. They can entice the imagination, delight the senses, and chill the heart. Books possess their own special kind of magic. It is this magic that sets them apart from most other forms of dungeon dressing.

When a group of PCs stumbles upon a library, a bookshelf, or even an isolated volume carelessly tossed upon a villain's night table, they often spend a moment or two skimming the pages. Each of the books detailed below comes with a description and a built-in plot hook, enabling you to use them as springboards for further adventures, or just to give a bit of color to a forgotten bookshelf.

WELL MET IN GLIFTEN

The pages of this musty book are mottled with dark, yellowish water spots. Its cloth binding creaks each time a page is turned, and it seems to be a magnet for dust and mildew. The book itself recounts a series of mildly amusing adventures that befell a young man as he makes his way through a bustling fair in a market town called Cliften. The story includes chapters about a talking bear, and being turned into a mouse and drafted as a wizard's familiar. Eventually, the story creeps to its inevitable conclusion where the hero finds himself reunited with his one true love. The author of the book, evidently impressed with his own mastery of the Common tongue, crams all sorts of unnecessary words into the story.

Anyone making a careful study of *Well Met in Cliften* might (DC 15 Spot check) notice all sorts of tiny marks under some of the words. A more thorough investigation (DC 25 Search check) allows the reader to identify the marks of several different inks, enabling him to isolate a number of competing streams of words buried within the text. The book is in fact a key to a numerical code based on the page number, line number, and then specific word on that line. Each ink mark denotes an earlier attempt to decipher a message in the code. PCs who enjoy word puzzles might gain several strings of words to try to piece together into coherent sentences while those who favor intrigue gain the enmity of whatever group uses the cipher and intends to keep its secrets close.

🔍 **Well Met in Cliften:** 2 lbs.; 75 gp.

TURTHO'S CHRONICLES

This book contains a number of thick, water-stained pages crudely stitched together between two plates of crumbling shale. The title, chiseled on the front cover, slopes downward as it advances across the page. Handwritten in Common, with numerous spelling and grammatical errors, *Turtho's Chronicles* describes a series of signs and portents preceding some terrible calamity. Perhaps the ravings of a madman, perhaps a desperate attempt to make sense of the incomprehensible, the final page contains a crude sketch and description of a creature that anyone making a DC 20 Knowledge (arcana) check recognizes as the Tarrasque.

"Turtho's Chronicles" actually does present a fairly accurate description of the signs preceding the Tarrasque's rise. In fact, the book is accurate enough to greatly offend a nihilistic cult that worships the monster they refer to as the Chosen of Chaos. They have managed to destroy the entire original print run of the book, along with nearly everyone who read it. Only a few crude copies remain. The minions of the cult continue to hunt for these copies and the blasphemers who have read

them. Depending upon the scope of the campaign, this could evolve from an occasional skirmish with assassins and bounty hunters loyal to the cult to an eventual attempt to prevent the next rising of the Tarrasque itself.

🔍 **Turtho's Chronicles:** 3 lbs.; 150 gp.

FACES OF THE AGE

This thin, portfolio-sized book contains a number of excellently rendered color portraits of influential humans from several centuries in the past. Each picture comes with a full page of text in Elven on the opposing page explaining the significance of the person depicted. The regularity of the text and the fine detail of the pictures suggest some sort of manufacturing process was involved in the book's creation.

Despite the book's apparent age, several of the people depicted in it are still alive. At a minimum, the pictures show people who strongly resemble important NPCs from the current campaign world. This could represent anything from a strange coincidence to a secret cabal of immortals. These might be humans using some unknown magic, or shape-changing monsters (such as rakshasas) playing out a complex game over the centuries.

🔍 **Faces of the Age:** 3 lbs.; 450 gp.

THE RITES OF ASCENSION

This thick, leather-bound book reeks faintly of a chemical laboratory. Spidery script written in a dialect of Infernal outlines a detailed, step-by-step process by which a mortal may mingle his essence with purest evil and transform himself into a fiend. Starting with inoffensive rituals such as the cutting of flowers beneath the light of the full moon, the book gradually leads its reader down an increasingly blood-curdling path. Culminating in the orchestration of a great act of cruelty such as engineering a war or a famine, the sheer body count needed to complete the ascension ensures that only the most ruthless, powerful, and depraved reader has any hope of success.

The Rites of Ascension may or may not actually work, but what matters is

that the forces of evil certainly believe it does. Anyone reading the book that pays attention to gossip and current events (Knowledge [local] DC 15) notices patterns in the behavior of certain NPCs and the organizations they lead. Eventually, it becomes obvious that that someone is following the procedure outlined in the book. This advance knowledge gives the PCs a chance to anticipate the villain's next move and an opportunity to thwart his evil machinations before they come to fruition.

🔍 **The Rites of Ascension:** 4 lbs.; 750 gp.

EXOTIC CUISINE

Pages of elegant, creamy white paper lie tightly pressed between two burnished copper plates. Ornate runes stretch across the front and back cover of this book, which proudly bears its title in fancy script. The interior contains a selection of mouth-watering recipes, all written in Common and most requiring some sort of monstrous body part as a critical ingredient. Since many of these recipes demand ingredients from intelligent creatures such as unicorns and centaurs, it's evident that a truly gluttonous and wicked person penned this cookbook.

While a book itself is non-magical, the front cover of *Exotic Cuisine* radiates an almost undetectable aura of transmutation magic. Careful examination of the cover, requiring both a *detect magic* spell and a successful DC 15 Spellcraft check, reveals a magical inscription made by some more potent version of the *arcane mark* spell. The inscription reads: "To Lord Tempest, long may the Trenchermen feast!" This single clue, hinting at some sort of secret society of powerful and amoral gourmands, offers a glimpse into the decadent underbelly of the ruling class. By itself, this book is enough to draw the ire of both the members of the Trenchermen and those who simply wish to preserve the status quo.

🔍 **Exotic Cuisine:** 6 lbs., 1,200 gp. 📖

HAZARDS OF THE TRAIL

✂ BY RICHARD PETT

✂ BY KYLE HUNTER

Overland travel is fraught with difficulties. A huge network of broad roads, muddy trails, and dusty footpaths crisscrosses every campaign world. Although some of these trails, particularly those between larger cities, have a semblance of maintenance and may be patrolled, others are simply muddy tracks worn and rutted by the passing of people and animals. The more remote the track the less likely it is to be maintained, and with the inherent dangers of wilderness travel roadside hazards may remain for many years, steadily growing worse as the road slowly deteriorates.

Here are a few hazards that might develop along a remote trail. Most of them give the PCs a chance to use skills such as Craft and Jump to good effect. Each situation has a number of possible solutions, but expect your players to come up with their own ideas as well.

THE FALLEN BOARDWALK

The trail winds around a lazy bend as it skirts the edge of a large meadow. Recent rain has caused sections of the meadow to flood, and the floating carcasses of two large beasts are visible in the mud. A murder of crows pecking at the bodies suddenly scatters into the surrounding trees, revealing that the carcasses are not those of wild beasts, but horses. A timber boardwalk stretches across the meadow and has collapsed under the weight of the horses that now lie dead, partially buried in the meadow's muck.

The road ahead crosses a boardwalk (a raised timber walkway like a flat bridge) that is 100 yards long and stretches across

a soggy meadow. The water table underneath the meadow has risen to the point that the soil has taken on the consistency of quicksand (see the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, page 88), which now covers the entire meadow. PCs approaching the dead horses can see that a 15-foot section of the walkway has collapsed into the mud.

The remaining boardwalk is not safe. Anyone making a DC 15 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check or a DC 25 Spot check can identify a 5-foot section on the far side of the collapsed area that is also rotten. Anyone stepping on this section causes more of the boardwalk to collapse, depositing anyone on it into the meadow and subjecting them to the effects of quicksand. The meadow is bereft of other plantlife save the occasional scrub or bush. The boardwalk continues past the meadow for 40 yards. The nearest alternative safe path through the marsh is several miles away.

The heroes might try to jump across the collapsed section (DC 15). If one of them manages to cross, transferring the rest of the party using rope is a fairly straightforward process, requiring 70 feet of rope and a DC 10 Use Rope check. Finally, the bloated horse corpses could make serviceable (if gruesome) rafts.

THE STRANDED MERCHANT

A merchant's hefty six-wheeled cart is stuck in a huge muddy rut in the road ahead. The horses attempting to pull it free whinny frantically.

There are four horses attached to the cart. Two of them are being crushed by the front of the cart, which will break their back legs in three rounds unless they are freed from their tack. Anyone making a Handle Animal

check (DC 10) recognizes this immediately. It takes a full-round action to release a horse.

If the characters manage to free the horses before they are injured, the merchant (a gnome called Renquin Longstone) and his guards gather around the characters asking for help. Renquin's guards each have 13 Strength. Renquin himself does not stoop to manual labor under any circumstances.

The cart can be lifted (Strength check DC 40) or clever characters could dismantle part of the wagon using a DC 10 Craft (carpentry) check to create a makeshift lever. This decreases the DC of the required Strength check to 25. Freed horses could also be encouraged by DC 15 Handle Animal or wild empathy checks to pull the roped cart out of the rut, allowing them to add their Strength bonus to the effort.

THE SWOLLEN RIVER

The pathway ends at the top of a gully some fifty feet wide. At the bottom of the gully, a raging torrent of white water courses from left to right. It looks as though the narrow path normally crosses the river below via a ford, but the waters are so torrential that simply wading across them may no longer be possible.

The ford is submerged to a depth of 6 feet. Large creatures attempting to force their way across the river must make a Strength check (DC 15) each round or be washed away. For Small or Medium creatures the river is simply too deep to wade across, forcing them to swim. The Swim check for the torrent is DC 20. Swimming characters move 10 feet downstream per round due to the current unless they use 10 feet of their swim speed to swim against the current. Thirty feet downstream a set of jagged rocks makes the equivalent of an attack each round against anyone who remains in the water. The rocks have a +8 melee attack bonus, and inflict 2d6 points of bludgeoning damage on anyone they strike. These rocks are found upstream as well as downstream for some 300 yards in each direction.

THE BOGLAND

The trail simply ends at a large expanse of grey-green bog hundreds of yards across.



By the looks of it, other travelers have attempted to cross the bog by an ever widening circle of routes. Unsettlingly, one of the trails simply stops about a third of the way around the bog. Several small stumpy bushes are the only plants that grow here.


This floating bog is extremely deep. Anyone attempting to cross it who weighs more than 50 lbs. begins to suffer the effects of quicksand (see the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, page 88). A character that makes a DC 15 Spot check can make out large pathways of open mud trailing ahead into the gloom. These are the marks of makeshift rafts; anyone examining the bushes (Spot DC 15) can see that they are stumpy because many branches have been broken off. A DC 10 Craft (carpentry) or DC 15 Survival check allows a PC to create a small makeshift raft to float over the bog.

THE ROCKFALL

The road has collapsed ahead, leaving a giddy scree slope descending some three hundred feet to the river below. A rope has been pegged across the slide to allow travelers to cross this dizzy fall and regain the road on the far side. In all, some seventy feet of the trail ahead has collapsed.

The rope is frayed, as is visible to anyone making a DC 15 Spot check. If more than 100 lbs. is anchored to the rope, it snaps, swinging the character into the valley below. Falling characters can keep hold of the rope with a DC 15 Strength check, otherwise they drop off the rope and slide down the long slope. A sliding character falls 60 feet per round, taking 3d6 damage each round. A successful DC 15 Reflex save stops the slide. With the rope gone the PCs must attempt a DC 15 Climb or Balance check to cross the collapsed section. Once a rope is established across the fall a Use Rope check (DC 10) ensures that the knot does not come undone as everyone crosses.

OTHER HAZARDS

With so much diverse terrain to cover, the possibilities for other hazards on the trail are endless. Heroes could face snow-covered mountain passes, collapsed bridges, trails that have fallen into the sea, or flywalks that run along perilous cliff faces. Natural hazards are often incorporated into part of an organized ambush. Cunning bugbear highwaymen could fell trees across trails, or perhaps orc brigands alter or remove road signs to misdirect travelers to an ambush they have prepared in a box canyon. 

DOWNER: PART 22

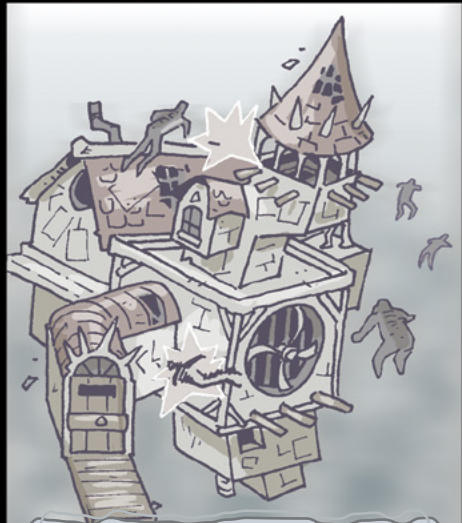
After **Downer's** brother **Aristide** and his devils raided **Kalro's** gaming parlor, he secured what he thought to be the relic, but was only its empty vessel. The **Ulolok**, in fact, appeared to be a strange larva that dwelled in the urn. The high priestess was not amused, and leveled her full wrath at **Aristide**. **Downer** is set to rendezvous with his guild brothers.



KALRO KEEPS A LOT OF SAFE HOUSES, BUT NONE ARE AS REMOTE AS THE GRAY LODGE.



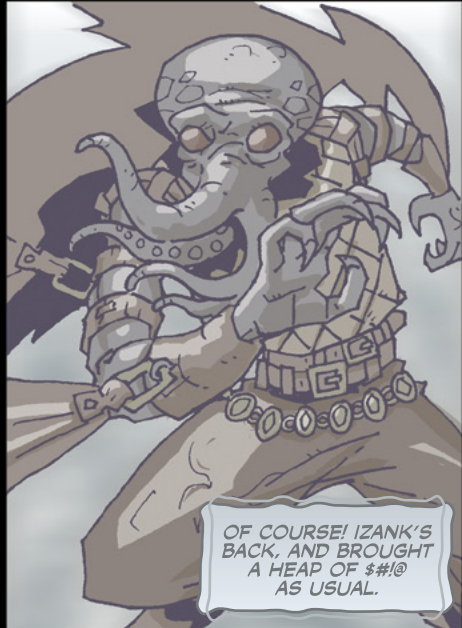
I USUALLY DON'T DIG MAGIC, BUT I CAN READ A SCROLL. WELCOME TO THE ASTRAL PLANE. THIS PLACE IS A LOT OF LAUGHS.



BORING AS ALL HELL, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE MY MATES HAVE ALREADY STUMBLERD ONTO SOME ACTION.



GITHYANKI, ONLY ONE LEFT, BUT THOSE BLIGHTERS ARE VICIOUS. WHAT WOULD THEY WANT WITH US?



OF COURSE! IZANK'S BACK, AND BROUGHT A HEAP OF \$#@ AS USUAL.



BOTH SIDES HAVE TAKEN SOME HITS. THE NEEDLEMAN ISN'T AT HIS BEST IN THIS KIND OF LIGHT.



THEN THINGS GET BLOODY STRANGE.



⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️



NEVER DID I THEENK I VOULD ZEE THE TITAN OF CHAOS. VE HAFF MADE A TERRIBLE MEESTAKE.

KEEL ME IF YOU MUST MY LORDS, BUT I NOW SERVE THE ULOLOK.



DAMN STRAIGHT! GUT THAT SHREW!



SHUT UP, IDIOT! YOU BROUGHT THIS ON US, AND THE LAST THING WE NEED IS MORE YANKIS ON OUR ASS.

LOOKS LIKE WE'VE DRAFTED A FIGHTER.



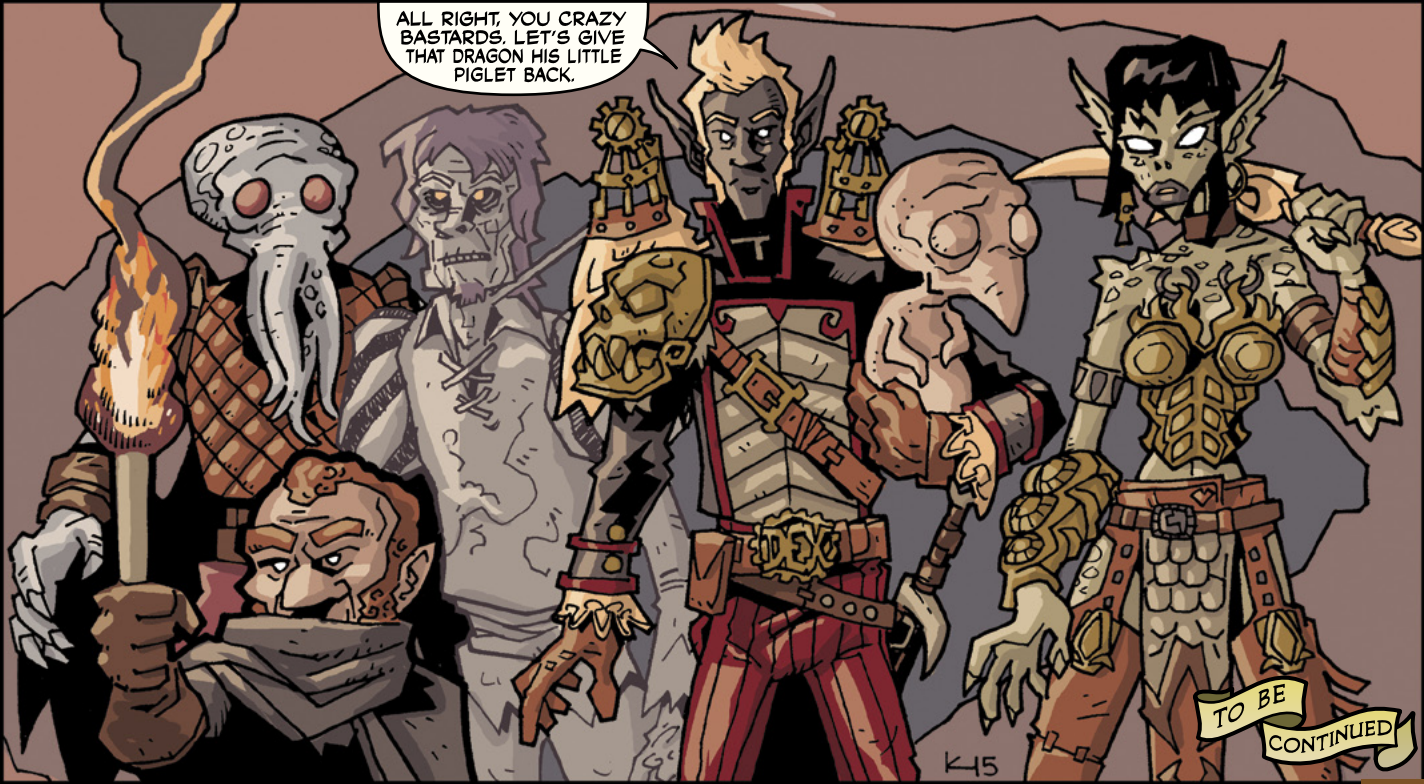
SO KALRO AND THE CRAZY BROAD TALK FOR AN HOUR, AND SHE SIGNS ON. IZANK MUST BE THRILLED.



SORRY I CAN'T JOIN YOU, BUT THE DEVILS AND GITHYANKI HAVE TAKEN TOO MUCH OUT OF ME.



MAKE ME PROUD MY SONS, OFF YOU GO.



ALL RIGHT, YOU CRAZY BASTARDS. LET'S GIVE THAT DRAGON HIS LITTLE PIGLET BACK.

TO BE CONTINUED

TRUE SEEING

The village of Hommlet was in trouble. A brutal wizard known only as the Faceless One had turned a local tribe of normally docile lizardfolk into homicidal killers. Their raids had recently grown more and more violent, and the people of Hommlet were in grave danger. The Faceless One now demanded a tribute of 700 gold pieces before the Harvest, or the village would be destroyed. The villagers were afraid, but they did not give in. Instead, they sought assistance from a group of brave adventurers: a cleric, a wizard, a fighter, a rogue, and a bard. Would they help? *Could* they help? Would they journey north, and confront the Faceless One in his secret lair beneath the ruins of Castle Sable?

The mood in the Welcome Wench Tavern was grim. Local villagers quaffed drinks and swapped stories as the party sat at an ale-soaked table. Serving wenches shared rumors (and more than a few blushing smiles) with the potential saviors. While the cleric and the fighter bartered with the tavernkeeper about weapons and potions, a young maiden approached the bard and asked for a song, and sing to her he did. He sang a song so charming, so charismatic, so memorable that she gave him a gift, and promised to speak of him to all who passed through the tavern's doors... but only if the Faceless One was defeated. Would this rag-tag group return victorious? Or would they follow so many before them to their doom?

The hour grew late. The party bought weapons and supplies, and left the Welcome Wench Tavern at dawn. After a day's travel north, they made camp, and prepared to confront the wizard that night.

It would be a night filled with heroics and danger, clever riddles and hideous monsters. Though survival was uncertain, one thing was not: It would be a night to remember.

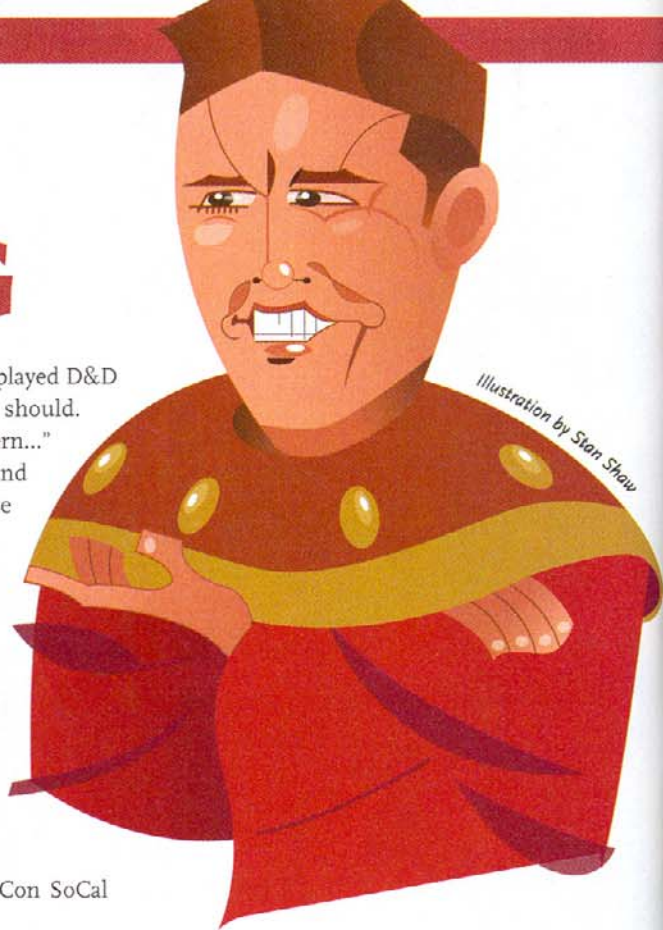
Sound familiar? If you've played D&D for any amount of time, it should. Seriously. "You meet in a tavern..." Rumors about lizardfolk and evil wizards who live in the ruins beneath an ancient castle. "You make camp after a day's journey..." These are some of the building blocks that have formed the foundation of D&D for 30 years, so it should be no surprise that the tale I just told you is actually a faithful retelling of the first few minutes of my journey into the True Dungeon, at Gen Con SoCal back in December.

I was the bard, and I really did improvise a song all about "the fair Mirinda" who "came from far across the seas and stole away my heart," or something like that. I really got into it, with the dancing and the singing and the hamming it up, which paid off when she gave me two fistfuls of treasure tokens that I could redeem for weapons and potions at the "bar" in the "tavern." She also gave me a masterwork bard instrument that would give me +2 if I ever needed to sing and dance to inspire my party during battle. I thanked her, pocketed my loot, and looked around this "tavern." It was really cool. I easily forgot that I was in a hotel in Anaheim. I was really glad that I took a chance, and made the drive to check it out.

"That sounds an awful lot like LARPing," I said, when my friend Cal told me about it, "and I don't have the ponytail or trenchcoat for LARPing."

"It's not LARPing," he said. "Come with me. You'll have fun." He was right.

When I was a kid, my friends and I often played D&D in the park. The playground equipment would be transformed into a castle, and the picnic tables would turn into sarcophagi. True Dungeon takes all those images we built in our



imagination and makes them real. When you cast a *detect evil* spell, a DM gives you a blacklight, and you use it to search for runes that are marked in fluorescent paint on the hilt of a sword (maybe you should just leave that alone). The dungeon is dark and creepy, so you'd better carry a torch (a flashlight, with an orange bulb and some flickering silk flames). If you spring an acid trap, you'll get sprayed with a cold jet of water. When the DM says, "You have about 10 seconds before the wall closes," you'd better make a quick decision, because there is an actual door sliding shut in front of you. When you carelessly charge into the giant spider's lair and get caught flat-footed, the webs that come flying at you and pin you to the walls are Silly String.

And when the bard pulls out his masterwork instrument (+2) to inspire his party as they fight the giant spider? He decides to breakdance and sing a humorous song about how he's had to pee since the second room. The cleric laughs so hard he forgets to heal him, so the giant spider hits the bard for 17 points and kills him.

Thanks for that, Cal. ☞

Check out Wil's blog at wilwheaton.net.