

LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE MODULE

# FIFTH EDITION FANTASY #4

WAR-LOCK



MICHAEL CURTIS



# WAR-LOCK

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# WAR-LOCK

By Michael Curtis

*War-lock* is an adventure designed for the 5th edition of the original fantasy roleplaying game. It is intended for four to six 5th-level PCs and can be completed in two or more sessions. In the course of *War-lock*, the PCs discover a legendary warlord has risen phoenix-like from his secret tomb and is assembling a new army to conquer the civi-

lized lands. The party must stop this revived threat before he achieves his full power and gathers a monstrous army to serve him. However, doing so is not easy, as the warlord's life essence is contained in a potent relic known as the *Odium Heart* and secreted in a stronghold protected by traps and guardians.

## BACKGROUND

Afanasi Wyrmburn was born to wage war. He arose from the fearsome woodsmen tribes of the North, fighting his way to civilized lands via countless acts of bloodshed and battle. Afanasi discovered his skill at slaughter was in high demand amongst the mercenary companies that earned their gold by waging war in the border skirmishes and civil wars that commonly erupted in the so-called enlightened kingdoms. Before he was 25, Afanasi commanded his own mercenary band, the feared and formidable Steelwyrms Company.

Although Afanasi and his men never lacked for employers and filled their war chests with wages and plunder, the young commander was incensed by the manner in which war was conducted in the civilized lands. All too often, the Steelwyrms Company had its rightful conquests and associated glory stolen from them by wizards and sorcerers who, deigning to arise from the comfort of their campaign tents, strode atop a nearby bluff and obliterated opponents with fire and lightning—often after the Steelwyrms had decimated their enemy's ranks. The glory and awe went to the magicians and the mercenaries' efforts left forgotten. Afanasi declared this would end.

The warlord followed scraps of legends and weird tales, his search taking him deep into the Bone Mires. There he found what he sought—the witch known as the Eye of Dhzh, the Black Crawler. Under her tutelage, Afanasi made a compact with Dhzh, pledging to serve the Black Crawler in return for supernatural power. Afanasi emerged from the swamps a changed and far more formidable man. The warrior had become the War-lock.

Infused with diabolical power, the War-lock led his men on a campaign of destruction and conquest that ravaged the Western Kingdoms for seven years. Baronies fell to the Steelwyrms, plunder accumulated like snowdrifts in a blizzard, and no single kingdom's army could stop the War-lock's troops, troops that seemed more than mortal. His enemies did not know that Afanasi had discovered a potent magical object known as *Temper's Cauldron*. This relic birthed frightful warriors from whoever was baptized in its bloodied silver waters. These troops, called "warborn," in conjunction with the War-lock's sorcery, proved almost unstoppable. Almost.

Ultimately united by the War-lock's threat, the Western Kingdoms put aside their quarrels and combined their armies to face Afanasi. In terrible battle, the two sides clashed, sundering their ranks against one another as the soldiers waded through a morass of blood-drenched earth. Afanasi was slain at the height of the battle, laid low by a combination of steel and sorcery, brought down by the wizards he despised. But the Kingdoms' victory was not complete: the War-lock's loyal captains spirited both Afanasi's body and *Temper's Cauldron* away from the battlefield, depriving their enemies of their trophies.

In accordance with the War-lock's wishes and following longstanding orders, the Steelwyrms captains brought Afanasi's corpse and the cauldron to a secure holdfast located in the barrens known as the Sere. The War-lock had erected this "swordhold" to serve as safe house and sanctuary—especially in the event of his death. Within its walls, the War-lock prepared safeguards to restore his life by eldritch means should he fall in battle. He placed

a fraction of his soul into an ensorcelled vessel protected by the Swordhold, a container dubbed the *Oidium Heart*. With his life force so preserved, steps could be undertaken to revive the War-lock in the event of his demise.

In the wake of the final battle, the War-lock's captains brought his corpse to the Swordhold, placing it inside the mechanism that would slowly resurrect him as his mortal essence seeped back into his physical form. Unfortunately for Afanasi, his enemies sought out his hidden fastness and his loyal captains had no choice but to take to the field once more and lure them away from the Swordhold. The captains, the last living beings who knew of the War-lock's schemes, perished leading their foes away from their commander's resting place, but by doing so, ensured his corpse remained undiscovered.

For 99 years, the War-lock laid inert, his life slowly returning to the mortal clay. After decades of slow restoration, Afanasi's consciousness reawakened, but with no one to release his body from the device that restored him, the War-lock remained trapped beneath its revitalizing stream of power. His overlong exposure created an intrinsic connection between the War-lock and his repository of power, making him now nearly-immortal...so long as the *Oidium Heart* remains intact.

Despite the unforeseen benefit of exposure to the *Heart's* power, the War-lock remained imprisoned within the Swordhold, bound semi-awake in his tomb and dreaming to conquer the world once more. Two weeks ago, a group of gnolls discovered the Swordhold and sought shelter and plunder within. While exploring the holdfast, the gnolls' shaman discovered Afanasi and the War-lock offered the gnolls a deal: free him and serve as the nucleus of his new army and be rewarded with undreamt-of power and riches. The gnolls, laughing at the prospects of slaughter, readily agreed. The War-lock baptized the gnolls in *Temper's Cauldron* and the first of his recruits emerged reborn.

During the last 14 days, Afanasi's army has grown, its numbers swelling as the humanoid tribes and human outlaws that dwell in the Sere have gathered beneath the War-lock's banner. Afanasi will soon have sufficient numbers to embark on a fresh campaign of evil. Preparing for this event, he sends a scouting party out of the Sere. There, the warborn gnolls' savagery compels them to attack a lonely inn—one in which the PCs are currently staying. This misstep provides the outside world with its first warning of the War-lock's return. If the party acts

swiftly, they can stop Afanasi before he grows too formidable, ending the War-lock's campaign before it begins. If they fail, however, it's unlikely they'll be alive to witness the consequences of the war...

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

*War-lock* begins with the party traveling along a seldom-used trail known as the Sore-Foot Track. The exact location of the lonely trail and the party's purpose for traveling it are left to the GM. The most likely explanation is that it is a shortcut between two large settlements, reducing travel time for those brave enough to journey along it.

The Sore-Foot Track is a rutted, partially overgrown cart path winding its way along the northern border of a large region of broken lands known as the Sere. The Sere is known to be a haven for outlaws and monsters, and few travelers brave the Sore-Foot Track these days. Read the following to the party at the beginning of the adventure:

*The day has been long and exhausting, just another in a string of such days on the road. Your journey takes you along an ill-used and poorly maintained path that skirts the edge of a vast expanse of broken land. Bare hills separated by rocky gullies and the occasional stand of wind-twisted trees stretch out to the south, marking the region of badlands known as the Sere. To the north are empty meadows, with the rare sight of a farmer's field protected by piled stone fences to break the monotony. Aside from the stray sighting of a cow grazing in the meadows or a goat standing atop a rocky knoll, silhouetted against the sky, you've seen no signs of life on your journey.*

*The only excitement on the trip so far was a tremendous evening thunderstorm that wracked the sky three nights ago, sending you scurrying for cover in a shallow hillside cave. You watched the night burn incandescent with lightning and heard the crack of bolts striking in the hills. Come morning, a thin haze of smoke hovered over the Sere, a sure sign of small brushfires kindled by lightning burning in the barrens. The haze of burning grass and trees makes the hills even gloomier and more foreboding, but the fires are likely to burn themselves out soon and pose little threat.*

*The sun slowly crawls towards the western horizon and nightfall is fast approaching. Almost like a granted wish, a slight rise in the track reveals a pair of buildings ahead of you. The structures appear in good repair and a signpost crowned by a battered, whitewashed lantern stands along the roadside: A sure sign of a lonely inn desperate for business. The thoughts of soft beds and hot meals quickly fill your minds.*

A DC 10 Intelligence (History) check allows a character to recall there is an old inn known as the Rusted Gorgon along the Sore-Foot Track and that this is likely it. If the party seems concerned about the brushfires, a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check determines that, given the barren landscape of the southern hills, there is little danger of the fire spreading and it's likely the brushfires will burn out in a day or two.

## THE RUSTED GORGON INN

The Rusted Gorgon Inn is one of the few spots of civilization along the Sore-Foot Track, a place where travelers can purchase a good meal for both themselves and their mounts and spend a night in comfort before enduring the next leg of the merciless route through the wilds. Although the Rusted Gorgon is seldom full, a steady stream of overnight guests keeps the inn running.

The inn was once a farmstead, but when raids of monsters and bandits from the wilds of the Sere grew a bit too commonplace for the owner, he sold the stead to Alro Popper. Popper, then nearing 30 winters of age and having accumulated a tidy nest egg during his career as a guild clerk, dreamed of escaping the confines of the city and saw the potential for an inn along the Sore-Foot Track. Although his wife, Mewlis, had her doubts, Alro turned the old farm into a profitable hostel. The couple has endured nearly 40 years of struggle on the fringes of one of the most inhospitable regions in the land, but without the presence of the Rusted Gorgon, travel along the Sore-Foot Track would swiftly die. The inn also serves as a tavern and meeting place for the handful of hardy farmers and herdsmen that dwell on the plains north of the Rusted Gorgon, and it is considered by them an indispensable part of their hardscrabble lives. If the inn were ever threatened, the locals would band together to assist Alro and Mewlis however they could.

A signpost topped by a white-painted iron lantern and placard bearing the inn's name stands at the roadside in front of the place. The inn is a two-story building with a fieldstone lower level and a timber second floor, and possesses stout shutters, narrow windows, and reinforced front and rear doors, allowing it to double as a stronghold in times of trouble. The farmstead's original barn is now the Gorgon's stables and storage space.

## GENERAL FEATURES

**Basic Construction/Layout.** The ground floor of the Rusted Gorgon has exterior fieldstone walls 2 feet thick. The inn's second story is timber frame with plastered walls. Ground level floors are smoothed river stones, while the second level has timber floors. Ceilings are high on the ground floor, measuring 15 feet in height, but are only 8 feet high on the second level.

**Light.** The common room, kitchen, and any occupied room are considered in bright light, as are the hallways during the daylight hours. After dark, all hallways and unoccupied rooms have dim light.

**Windows.** The inn's windows are 2 feet wide by 3 feet tall, and each has a pair of wooden shutters than can be closed and barred from inside. A decorative diamond-shaped cut-out in each shutter allows them to double as arrow slits when closed, granting three-quarters cover. A wooden plug allows these cut-outs to be sealed in cold weather to stop drafts. Barred windows can be burst open with a DC 20 Strength check.

**Closets.** These small chambers hold bedding, cleaning supplies, spare lamps and lamp oil, and similar everyday supplies.

**Locked Door.** This door separates the public section of the upper floor from the staff's private rooms. Each of the staff has a key to this door. Others can pick the lock with a DC 15 Dexterity check.

**Rented Rooms.** Most of the inn's rented rooms contain four simple wooden beds with blankets, straw-filled pallets, and feather pillows. A chest or wardrobe is provided for storing clothes, but travelers must supply their own lock (Arlo will lock valuables in his office at a guest's request). Each room also has a small table with pitcher and wash basin, and two earthenware chamber pots. A forged iron candle holder with spare candle provides illumination. The rooms' doors can be locked, but the locks are simple affairs (DC 10 Dexterity check to pick).

**Staff.** The inn has a small staff of four, which is sufficient to attend to the infrequent traveler passing through the region. These individuals are:

Alro Popper, the inn's owner and barman. Alro is old (70 years) and squinty-eyed, but sharp of hearing. His gray, scraggly beard barely conceals a large boil on his left cheek.

Mewlis Popper, the inn's cook and Alro's second wife. Mewlis is thin and stooped, but with streaks of black still in her waist-long gray hair. She is 62 years of age and wears a well-cared for housedress with a much-stained apron draped over it.

Ahlura, the inn's barmaid and chambermaid. Ahlura is plain-looking with a large nose, but possesses brilliant emerald green eyes. She wears a faded forest green bodice and a long purple skirt. Ahlura is in her mid-20s and has worked for the Poppers for five years.

Yovan, the inn's stableman and bouncer. A beefy man in his early 30s, Yovan has a thick black beard and a mop of dark curly hair. He dresses in stained workman's leathers and keeps a short cudgel hanging from his belt. Yovan speaks with a faint accent, identifying him as originally hailing from the western lands.

### PLAYTESTING ANECDOTE

During the playtest of *War-lock*, the party entered the inn and met the staff. As I was describing Alro Popper, one of the players immediately pictured the innkeeper as Tim Conway's Old Man character (do an online search if you're too young to know who I'm talking about), resulting in a storm of chuckling as I took that idea and ran with it. Alro tried to serve the party with a tray of glasses that rattled as he shuffled across the common room floor, and the rest of the staff went to great lengths to avoid an Alro-inspired catastrophe. How you interpret and present the barman is up to you, but as we demonstrated, you can play him for laughs, which could lead to a deeper sense of loss if Alro is slain by the gnolls.

The staff is happy to see customers and welcomes the PCs warmly, offering them seats in the empty common room. The smell of fresh baked bread and simmering stew drifts from the kitchen, and the common room is rustic but comfortable. Meals and lodging are available, and costs are detailed below.

Ahlura happily waits on the party, with both Alro and herself inquiring about the group's trip and destination with honest interest. Starved for business and new faces, both barman and barmaid are eager for news of the outside world and can share a little knowledge of the local area themselves (see Rumors sidebar). Mewlis ap-

pears briefly to welcome the party before returning to the kitchen, while Yovan busies himself with either stabling the party's horses (if they have them) or doing chores in the stables. It is full dark by the time the PCs are fed and their after-dinner drinks served. At this point, life gets dangerous in the Rusted Gorgon.

### RUMORS

Both Ahlura and Alro enjoy talking to customers, but know little of events outside of the local area. The Sere remains a source of both danger and mystery, and dominates any discussion they have with travelers. Inquisitive PCs can learn the following if they allow the two to talk long enough.

Brushfires have been seen in the hills of the Sere since the lightning storm three nights ago. Lightning strikes must have started the slow burn, but none have gotten close to the roadway.

Strangely, there was smoke visible in the Sere even before the brushfires. The staff of the Rusted Gorgon didn't dare venture into the barrens, but surmised the smoke was probably from the campfires of humanoid monsters like orcs or gnolls, or from one of the outlaw bands that regularly hide out in the wilds.

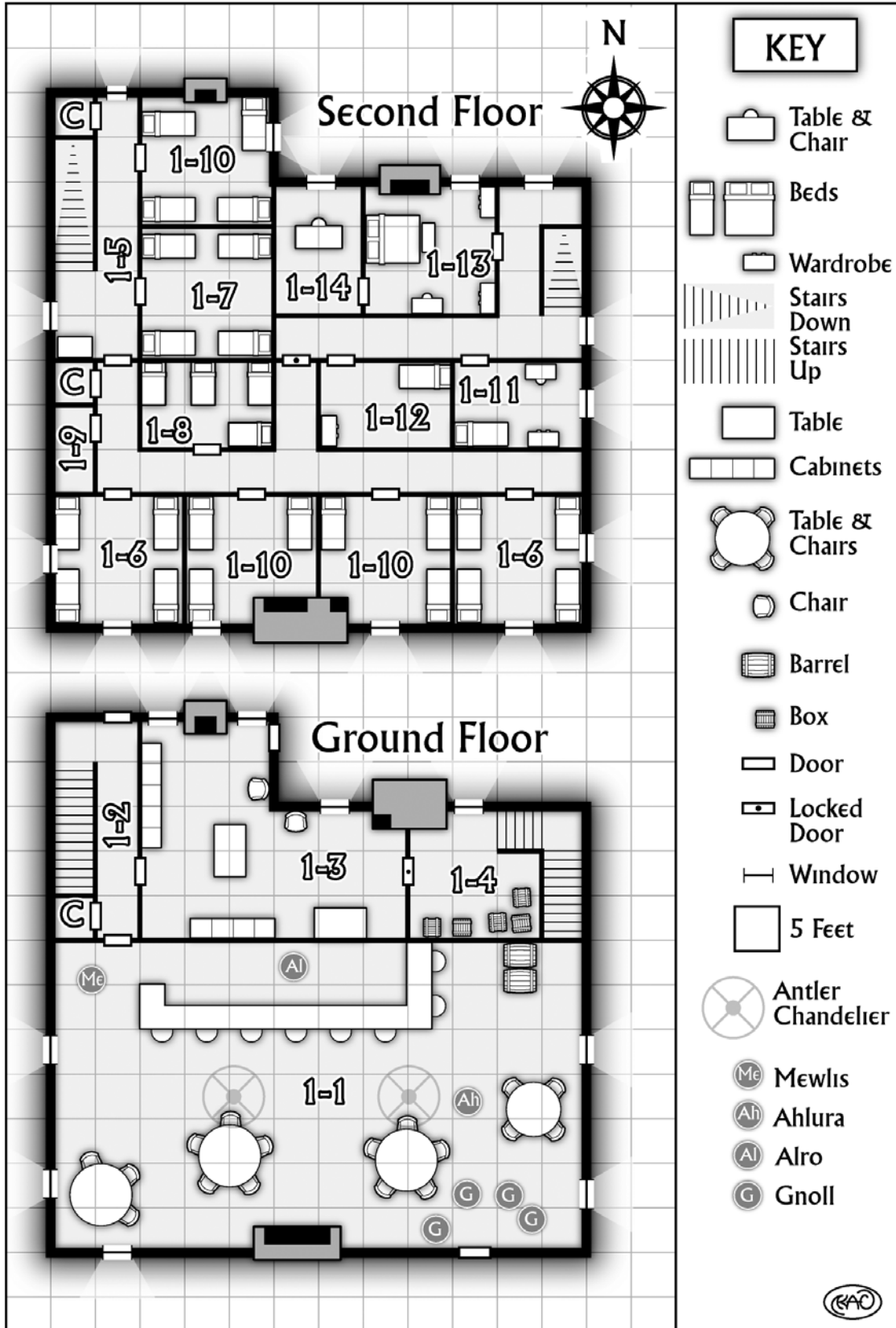
There's a fallen stone building in one of the eastern gullies inside the Sere. Some locals who have braved a trip to visit it claim it's haunted.

The druid, Jaume Hawkeyes, dwells in the Sere. He's often sighted atop hills but never visits the Rusted Gorgon. Nobody knows what he gets up to back there in the wilds, but he's never been known to bother the inn or travelers on the Sore-Foot.

A stone circle stands atop a lonely hilltop in the Sere. It is presumed Jaume protects it or otherwise keeps watch on the location.

Old rusted swords and armor occasionally turn up in the Sere. The old timers say that there was once a great battle in the gullies and hilltops, and these objects are relics of that skirmish.

# The Rusted Gorgon Inn



# THE RUSTED GORGON

## III KEY

### AREA 1-1—COMMON ROOM

The common room consists of a timber plank bar, four rough-hewn wooden tables with chairs, a fieldstone fireplace, two antler chandeliers, and a stack of 40-gallon casks holding brandy and ale. The stone floor is covered with sawdust that is swept out and replaced weekly. It is a comfortable, if rustic space. Arlo is found here from noon to midnight; Ahlura works the common room from early afternoon until midnight if there are customers (which isn't always the case in this out-of-the-way establishment!). Meals run between 3 and 5 sp with drinks costing 4 cp to 1 sp each.

### AREA 1-2—LANDING

A flight of stout timber stairs leads up to the inn's top floor, a small closet situated beneath them. The floor is covered by a well-worn green rug that bears the tattered image of an antlered unicorn. The "rug" is actually an old banner born by armed hosts in the far past. How it came to the Rusted Gorgon or whether it possesses any unusual properties is left to the GM's imagination.

### AREA 1-3—KITCHEN

The exposed rafters of this room bear pots, pans, and aromatic bundles of dried herbs. Two small but hot ovens burn in the north wall and in the northeast corner. A large, knife-scarred work table dominates the rush-covered floor, and several smaller tables and cupboards placed about the room hold crockery, utensils, and additional ingredients for meals. Mewlis and occasionally Ahlura can be found here preparing meals and attending to the myriad small chores and repairs the daily operation of the inn requires.

### AREA 1-4—PANTRY & LARDER

This dimly-lit small chamber is always several degrees cooler than the rest of the inn. Perishable foodstuffs are kept here, and a small collection of vintage wines, gifts given to the Poppers by grateful travelers, rests in the dusty dark under the stairs. The wines have a total value of 60 gp. The staircase in this room grants access to the inn's private rooms overhead. The pantry door has a stout lock (DC 15 Dexterity check to pick) to protect both its contents and the staff as they sleep above. Arlo and Mewlis have keys to this lock.

### AREA 1-5—UPPER LANDING

An open archway leads to the majority of rooms on the inn's upper floor. A small table bearing an earthenware vase filled with wild flowers stands against the wall facing the top of the stairs. A closet with cleaning supplies and linens resides in the northwest corner.

### AREA 1-6—WELL-LIT ROOMS

These corner room have two windows each, making them bright and airy. Fresh rushes cover the plank floors and painted earthenware bowls and ewers stand on the night tables. The rent for one of these rooms is 6 sp per night.

### AREA 1-7—AVERAGE ROOM

This room is neither exceptionally well-lit nor warm, making it perfect for the traveler on a budget. The room rents for 5 sp per night.

### AREA 1-8—DWARVES' ROOM

The Poppers turned this three-quarter-sized room into a popular resting place for dwarves. The beds are sized for the broad shoulders and heavy frames of dwarves, and the walls are decorated with etched iron plates depicting dwarves at war and work. Blackened iron bed warmers lend a touch of heat in the cold months. This room rents for 7 sp per night.

### AREA 1-9—HALF ROOM

This room is little more than a large, dark closet, but the Poppers keep the white-washed plaster walls clean and the candles fresh. A small oil painting of the Sere under a blanket of colorful flowers brings a spot of color to the cramped room. The room is suitable for a single Medium occupant or a pair of Small ones. The rent is 1 sp per night.

### AREA 1-10—HEARTH ROOMS

Each of these rooms holds a small hearth, making them coveted overnight quarters in the colder months. The floors are covered by worn flower-pattern rugs that bear small burn marks from the hearths' stray embers. The rent in each room is 1 gp/ per night.



## AREA 1-11—ALHURA’S ROOM

This room bears a single bed, a dressing table and chair, a wardrobe, and a worn but patched blue rug. Feminine accents such as pressed wild flowers, sachets of sweet-smelling herbs, and a handful of watercolor landscapes depicting the sea give the room a degree of comfort not seen elsewhere in the inn. The dressing table holds simple cosmetics and fragrances, a comb and brush, and scissors. The wardrobe contains home-sewn dresses and other clothes in good repair. Beneath the rug, under a loose floorboard, is a small wooden casket contains all of Alhura’s wealth: 279 cp, 100 sp, 56 gp, and a silver necklace with emerald chip pendant (50 gp value). The loose floorboard can be found with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, but only if the rug is lifted.

## AREA 1-12—YOVAN’S ROOM

The stableman’s quarters are Spartan, bearing little personal touches. The wardrobe holds work clothes, an old pair of second-hand boots, and a well-maintained and cleaned shirt for special events. A palm-sized portrait of a mousy-looking woman with large green eyes and dark hair hangs inside the wardrobe. A locked coffer (DC 15 Dexterity check to pick) containing 23 cp, 45 sp, 33 gp, and a plain gold ring worth 25 gp sits atop a shelf in the wardrobe. Beneath the bed is an old longsword with an intricate family crest depicting a rampant basilisk embossed on the hilt. Whether the longsword or portrait might lead to further events in the campaign in the wake of Yovan’s death is left to the GM to decide.

## AREA 1-13—THE POPPERS’ ROOM

A stout wooden bed, dressing table, two wardrobes, a chest, and a rocking chair occupy this room. The wardrobes and chest hold Arlo’s and Mewlis’ clothes and spare linens for the bed. The dressing table bears Mewlis’ few cosmetics and a jewelry box containing 75 gp is simple silver rings, necklaces, and brooches. A spare set of keys to the various locks in the inn is also in the box.

## AREA 1-14—ARLO’S OFFICE

A large oak desk, battered from use and transport, occupies most of this room. The desk is filled with old papers, ledgers, contracts, and similar documentation necessary for the day-to-day operation of the inn. A trio of ink bottles and a horn quill case rest atop the desk. A banded wooden chest stands nearby. The chest is bolted to the floor, making it nearly impossible to move [DC

25 Strength (Athletics) check]. The chest is locked (DC 20 Dexterity check to pick) and contains the Poppers’ wealth and inn funds: 307 cp, 678 sp, 133 gp, 2 gems (25 gp value each), and a pair of gold wedding bands (50 gp value each). Arlo alone has the key to this chest.

## PART ONE: THE WAR-LOCK’S FIRST SORTIE

Under the cover of darkness, the War-lock sends a band of four **warborn gnolls** out of the Sere to probe the verges of civilization and gather intelligence. As the sole bastion of civilization in the area, the Rusted Gorgon is his first target. The gnolls descend upon the inn, intending to merely observe at first as per their orders, but their savage nature overcomes them. The gnolls stealthily slip into the inn’s yard, slaying Yovan by surprise as he tends to the horses in the stables. Then, dragging Yovan’s corpse with them, the four warborn gnolls burst through the front door of the inn, intent on slaughter.

The party, Alro, Mewlis, and Ahlura are surprised by the sudden attack unless one of the PCs has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher. If surprised, one of the gnolls moves directly to Ahlura (AC 11, 4 hit points) and attacks the barmaid while the rest of the creatures assault the party. Consult the map for the layout of the Rusted Gorgon’s common room and the likely locations of its staff when the gnolls attack.

Mewlis hides in the kitchen during the fight and Ahlura attempts to join her if she survives the gnoll’s attack. Alro huddles behind the bar, terrified, but if the PCs are in dire straits, the GM can have him assist by loading the light crossbow he keeps beneath the bar and firing at the gnolls (use **commoner** stats [see *Monster Manual* p. 345] for Alro, changing proficiency in club to light crossbow).

The gnolls fight until killed or captured. Attempts to interrogate the warborn creatures are unsuccessful as their warborn suicide defense activates if they are taken alive. Should the party manage to successfully negate the poison, the gnolls snarl and bark, claiming only that the War-lock will have their hearts shortly when he rules the land. They seek to either escape or commit suicide as soon as possible.

Staff members of the Rusted Gorgon who survive the attack thank the party profusely, gratefully providing them free lodging and meals for as long as they wish to stay at

the inn. If Ahlura or other staff are slain by the gnolls, the survivors plead for the party to track the gnolls back to their lair to extract vengeance or at least gauge the threat the humanoids pose to the inn and surrounding lands. The staff does not possess much wealth but can scrape together 100 gp and offer to provide mundane supplies to encourage the PCs to investigate. The staff suggests the party rest and recover, and track the gnolls after sunrise.

## FIGHTING IN THE RUSTED GORGON

The common room consists of a timber plank bar, four rough-hewn wooden tables with chairs, a fieldstone fireplace (currently lit), two antler chandeliers, and a stack of six 40-gallon casks holding brandy and ale. As the melee rages in the room, the PCs may attempt to use their environment to their advantage (the gnolls certainly will!). The following are a handful of potential battle tactics and the rules to adjudicate them.

**Leap and Swing on Chandelier.** Chandeliers are 15 feet above the floor, requiring the PC to be standing on one of the tables and get a running start to have a chance of reaching them. A successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check allows the PC to grab the chandelier and swing up to 15 feet, perhaps dropping behind or landing atop enemies.

**Blind Opponent with Embers and Ashes.** A PC can blind an opponent adjacent to the fireplace by sweeping hot coals and ashes into his face with a weapon. The PC makes an attack roll as if using an improvised weapon. The target must make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to the PC's attack roll or gain the blinded condition for 1d3 rounds.

**Knock over Casks.** The ale and brandy casks are stacked on their sides to form a pyramid. There are three casks on the bottom, two atop them, and the last crowning the pile. Wooden wedges keep the stack from rolling. A character can knock the wooden wedges free with a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check or by hitting them with a weapon and reducing their hit point total to 0 (AC 15, 3 hit points). If freed, the casks roll across the room forcing any creature in their path to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

## WARBORN GNOLL (4)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

*Warborn gnolls appear as oversized gnolls with mirror-like eyes lacking pupils. The steely cataracts covering their eyes are striated with veins of blood-red, a sign of baptism in Temper's Cauldron. Their bodies are resilient to injury and small wounds such as those inflicted by piercing weapons close quickly, stemming blood loss. Warborn gnolls carry weapons of good quality and dress in outdated but well-maintained armor. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check determines the arms and armor are of much greater quality than usually carried by gnoll scavengers. Warborn gnolls die if captured, making interrogation nearly impossible.*

## PART TWO: INTO THE SERE

The ground surrounding the inn is still soft from the recent thunderstorm, making it possible for any PC with the Survival skill to spot the gnoll tracks during daylight hours. (Characters without Survival need only succeed in a DC 10 Wisdom check to locate the tracks.) The footprints lead across the Sore-Foot Track and into the barrens of the Sere. The stony soil of the badlands does not hold the tracks as well as the ground outside its rocky environs, requiring a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to continue following them. The trail winds as indicated on the map, ultimately leading to area 1-6.

From the northern edge of the Sere, the party can make out areas 1-2, 1-3, and the copse of trees, but not the hidden camp, at area 1-5. The rest of the sites within the Sere are concealed by either smoke, distance, or natural obstacles and can only be found by exploration.

The GM is free to spice up the party's exploration of the Sere with random encounters if he so desires. See appendix C, or the random encounters information on pp. 85-87 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

## EVENT ONE: JAUME HAWKEYES, DRUID OF THE SERE

The Sere is home to Jaime Hawkeyes, a human 10th-level druid. Seemingly in his 40s, Jaime has dark hair going gray at the temples, a wild mustache and beard of silver, and skin tanned by wind and sun. He dresses in drab, tat-

tered robes and a cloak whose style suggests broad, feathered wings. Jaime observes but seldom interferes with events in the Sere unless the delicate natural balance is threatened. If necessary, the GM should use **druid** stats (see MM p. 346) for Jaime, but the wanderer departs if a fight seems imminent, rather than engaging in battle.

Jaime spends most of his time in the shape of a black-feathered hawk soaring on the thermals above the Sere and keeping watch over the region. He notices the PCs soon after they enter the barrens, but does not reveal himself at first. Instead, he observes their actions and judges their intentions to better gauge their purpose here. The party can notice the dark bird that seems to follow them with a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check. A DC 25 Intelligence (Nature) check also alerts the PCs that the bird seems to display unusual intelligence and cunning for a normal animal.

The druid reveals himself to the party if they seem intent on heading to the War-lock's camp (area 1-6) or if they ascend Windtop Hill (area 1-2). He descends to the ground 50 feet away from the group and changes back into his human form. Jaime addresses the party warily, asking them their business in the Sere.

Jaime is a druid of the Circle of the Land and true neu-



tral in alignment. He believes that the land as a whole is more important than the disparate forms of life that inhabit it, and therefore refuses to take sides in any of the constant struggles raging across its surface. However, Jaume is also a man and still bears a portion of goodwill toward his fellows. If the party seem they are about to blunder in the War-lock's camp, he warns them of the force encamped there.

The druid has observed Afanasi's activities since he first emerged from the Swordhold two weeks ago. Holding to his beliefs, Jaume has not interfered with the War-lock's raising of forces (aside from slaying a band of scouts that attempted to defile Windtop Circle), knowing that the land, itself, will endure. He informs the party of current events in the Sere if asked, but otherwise will not aid them. Jaume knows the following:

- There is an old stronghold built under a hillside in a secluded glade to the east. It was originally constructed by a human warlord named Afanasi Wyrmburn, also known as the War-lock, roughly a century ago.
- The stronghold remained quiet and undisturbed for as long as Jaume has dwelled in the Sere (more than two decades), but has recently become active. Bands of gnolls, humans, and ogres have been sighted around it and a human male dressed in ancient elven plate armor has emerged from the redoubt.
- This human has assembled a small force of humanoids and men in a hilltop camp to the south. The armor-wearing leader also has a magical cauldron that appears to transform any creature immersed in it, granting them unnatural strength and odd abilities.
- Although the leader and his forces—which number more than two score—seem concentrated at the hilltop camp, a smaller group remains at the stronghold and appears to be guarding it as if it still bears some importance to the mysterious commander.
- Jaume can provide directions to the secluded glade if asked, allowing the PCs to reach area 1-7 without difficulty.

Jaume departs after this meeting with the PCs, warning them to behave themselves and do no harm to the land he loves and defends. If the party encounters extreme difficulty later in the adventure, such as nearly perishing due to a direct attack on the War-lock's camp, the GM can use Jaume to provide non-combat assistance such as healing or advice, but he will not assist the party directly against the War-lock or the Swordhold.

## THE SERE

The Sere is a vast area of broken hills, shallow gullies, sparse thickets of trees, trickling streams, and whistling winds. A lonely place, the Sere is home to outlaws, humanoid tribes, and weird monsters. A handful of hardy hunters and prospectors make their living in the Sere, but nearby residents seldom venture into the barrens out of sight of the Sore-Foot Track. The Sere's many secluded dales and few visitors made it the perfect site for Afanasi to assemble his troops—both now and before his death. The recent brushfires blanket the Sere in a smoky haze, which grows thicker in depressed areas such as gulches and hollows. Although not dense enough to limit sight, it does give the Sere a hazy, otherworldly appearance and the GM is encouraged to make the most of this. It also makes spotting the campfires of area 1-6 impossible as their smoke mixes in with that of the brushfires.

### AREA 1-1—OLD VOICE'S COTTAGE

*Fallen stones and old timbers mark the rough, rectangular boundaries of a ruined cottage. The ruin stands at the end of one of the Sere's many gullies, and the ground surrounding the fallen structure is littered with rocks and scrub vegetation. A broken, but still standing, hearth and chimney point at the sky above.*

This cottage was once the home of a wizard who enjoyed his solitude, taking only a single apprentice at a time as servant and companion. During the long nights, the wizard would instruct his pupil in the magical arts, repeating incantations and the proper pronunciations of magical phrases over and over in teaching drills. Although the wizard is long dead and his home a ruin, the echo of his teaching remains.

Any sorcerer, warlock, or wizard, or PC with Intelligence and Wisdom scores of both 14+, hears a faint whisper if they enter the boundaries of the cottage. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check allows them to comprehend what the voice is saying—a repetition of magical phrases in clear and instructive enunciation. The words are the verbal component of the spell *brand-hand* (see appendix B). An arcane spellcaster who clearly hears the words and makes a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check can add the spell to their repertoire (writing it into their spellbook, etc.) if they spend a short rest within the ruin, memorizing the repeated incantation.

Exploring the ruin combined with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check uncovers a loose stone in the ruined hearth. Beneath the stone is the dead wizard's wealth: a battered wooden box containing 278 sp, 147 gp, 15 pp, and a tourmaline worth 50 gp.

## AREA 1-2—WINDTOP CIRCLE

*Tall talons of stone protrude from the top of this lonely hill. These 15-foot-tall pillars of granite are tapered towards their tips, giving them the appearance of slender claws reaching up from beneath the earth. The stones are worn smooth by wind and blowing grit, and arranged in a broad oval shape. There are 11 standing stones in total. The space inside the ring is bare.*

This hilltop circle is a place where the power of the earth collects. Once this site served as a druidic temple, but only Jaume visits Windtop these days to enact the Old Rites. Carved discreetly into the stones on the outside-facing sides is a message in Druidic reading, "Welcome are they of the Old Faith who honor the land and those oath-bound to the Ancients." Druids notice the message automatically; other must make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice, but not comprehend, the writing.

A party visiting Windtop Circle attracts Jaume's attention, summoning the druid to investigate who is at the temple. He appears in bird form, triggering Event One (see above) if the party has not already encountered him. If the PCs have met Jaume previously, he descends and warns them away from Windtop, stating they tread on sacred ground. He allows fellow druids and paladins of the Oath of the Ancients to commune with the power of Nature, however (see below). Jaume keeps a close watch over the party in bird form until they depart.

Windtop Circle provides an excellent vantage point to observe the surrounding landscape. PCs atop the hill can see areas 1-1 and 1-3, the trees at area 1-5, and area 1-6, but there is some risk. The forward observers at area 1-5 spot the PCs on the hill with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, or an opposed Wisdom (Perception) vs. the party's worst Dexterity (Stealth) check result if they attempt to hide themselves. If the observers detect the party, a band of warborn human soldiers are dispatched to deal with them. These troops attempt to ambush them at area 1-4 (or another fitting location if the party is moving overland instead of the trails).

## WINDTOP CIRCLE BENEFITS

Any druid or paladin of the Oath of Ancients completing a short rest inside the circle communing with the natural world regains expended spell slots. This effect is identical to the Circle of the Land ability Natural Recovery (PH p. 68). Druids already possessing the Natural Recovery ability are treated as if their level was +2 greater when determining the number of spell slots regained.

## AREA 1-3—BRUSHFIRE

*The smell of smoke is strong here and the air hazy and hot. Ahead of you is an area that once held a large copse of trees and a scraggly meadow. Now, both are scorched by flames dancing in the breeze. The treetops are blackened and bare, as if each wears a crown of horns. The dancing fires and shimmering, flame-heated air create mirages of sinuous forms slinking through the smoke. You also spy a pile of glittering stones within the fire as if a small hoard of jewels has spilled amongst the flames.*

The slithering forms are no heat-born illusion, but a **salamander** and a two **fire snakes**. The fire snake eggs were laid in the earth centuries ago and are only now hatching thanks to the heat of the brushfire. Sensing the birth of the newborn creatures, a salamander arrived to usher them into the world. Both the salamander and fire snakes are aggressive against intruders and attack anyone approaching the wildfire.

## SALAMANDER

*Large elemental, neutral evil*

**AC:** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 90 (12d10 + 24)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

**Damage Vulnerabilities:** cold

**Damage Resistances:** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities:** fire

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10



**Languages:** Ignan

**Challenge:** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Heated Body:** A creature that touches the salamander or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

**Heated Weapon:** Any metal melee weapon the salamander wields deals an extra 3 (1d6) fire damage on a hit (included in the attack).

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### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The salamander makes two attacks: one with its spear and one with its tail.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack, plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

**Tail:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, the salamander can automatically hit the target with its tail, and the salamander can't make tail attacks against other targets.

## FIRE SNAKE (2)

*Medium elemental, neutral evil*

**AC:** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 22 (5d8)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

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**Damage Vulnerabilities:** cold

**Damage Resistances:** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities:** fire

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages:** understands Ignan but can't speak

**Challenge:** 1 (200 XP)

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**Heated Body:** A creature that touches the snake or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 3

(1d6) fire damage.

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### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The snake makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

**Tail:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Any creature within the flames lacking fire protection suffers 2 (1d4) fire damage at the start of its turn. The creature can end this damage by exiting the fire and succeeding in a DC 10 Dexterity check to extinguish the clinging flames.

The glittering stones are the pair of fire snake eggs, melon-sized obsidian spheres similar to geodes in appearance. Inside the broken-open eggs are a number of gemstones—agates, garnets, chalcedonies, etc.—lining the interior of the stones. Each fire snake egg is worth 500 gp.

## AREA 1-4—CROSSROAD

*A trio of hills forms a roughly T-shaped dell at this location. Animal tracks and old footpaths meet in middle of the vale. The soft soil holds many footprints, indicating the recent passage of numerous parties.*

Even the untrained eye can determine that majority of the traffic heads southwest from the crossroads and it's a simple matter to follow the signs to the War-lock's camp from this position. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check notices much fainter and fewer humanoid tracks heading to the southeast. These footprints were left by the guards traveling to and from the Swordhold and can be followed to area 1-7.

## AREA 1-5—WATCH POST

A small copse of trees crowns a high hill at this location. The War-lock has stationed a squad of warborn human soldiers, former bandits who flocked to Afanasi's banner, here to keep watch over the trail and the neighboring hilltops. Their camp and tree-top observation posts (little more than boards nailed to tree branches and obscured by woven leaf screens) are well-camouflaged and require a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice.

There are six **warborn human soldiers** in the copse of trees, two of whom keep watch at all times. If the party is spotted by the observers (such as if noticed on Wind-top Hill), four of the soldiers are dispatched to deal with them.

### WARBORN HUMAN SOLDIER (6)

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 67 (9d8 + 27)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Saving Throws:** Str +5, Dex +4, Wis +2

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage

on saving throws against being charmed.

**Reckless:** At the start of its turn, the soldier can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The soldier makes two melee attacks.

**Longsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

*Warborn human soldiers are brawny warriors equipped with outdated but well-kept arms and armor. Their eyes lack pupils and appear covered with steely cataracts veined with blood-red striations. Their bodies are resilient to injury and small wounds such as those inflicted by piercing weapons close quickly, stemming blood loss.*

The copse contains three two-person canvas tents covered with sparse vegetation to hide them. Aside from enough rations to feed six men for 1 week, the camp contains bedrolls, six spare quivers of arrows, 69 cp, 26 sp, 13 gp, and a moss agate worth 10 gp.

## AREA 1-6—THE WAR-LOCK'S CAMP

*A low, rocky hill rises in the western half of a broad meadow. Walls of loose shale form three sides of the hill, while the fourth is a steep slope. The crown of the hill is encircled by a crude stone wall of roughly chest-height. A single visible gap in the wall at the top of the steep slope allows entrance. Within the wall you spy a number of shelters and tents. A large, tattered-looking pavilion tent, a pennant whipping in the wind above it, dominates the campsite.*

Afanasi is fast rebuilding his army as humanoid bands and human criminals flock to his side, either desiring plunder and power or coerced into servitude by warborn forces. At the time of the PCs' investigations in the Sere, he has nearly 50 soldiers of various races under his banner. Most of them are present here at his headquarters camp.

Afanasi chose this easily-defended hilltop as the marshalling point for his would-be army. Only the eastern side of the hill is readily ascendable; attempts to scale the loose shale cliffs on the other sides require both a DC

15 Strength (Athletics) check and a DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check to reach the top without alerting the inhabitants by sending loose stone clattering. The hill is 50 feet tall.

A 4-foot-high stone wall surrounds the camp with only a 10-foot-wide gap facing the eastern slope allowing entrance. Four warborn human soldiers keep watch over the entrance during the day, relieved by three warborn gnolls during the night.

The camp contains a dozen tents, mostly of stitched hides and canvas. At the moment, the camp is home to three dozen troops: 18 **warborn human soldiers**, 12 **warborn gnolls**, and six **ogres**. The camp is small, measuring only 100 feet in diameter, and there is always activity occurring within the walls. PCs attempting to enter the camp by stealth must make DC 25 Dexterity (Stealth) checks every minute to avoid being discovered. If they are seen, they are immediately attacked by 1d6 + 1 random troops and an alarm alerts the encampment. Each round the PCs remain within the camp and the inhabitants are alerted to their presence, 2d4 new troops of randomly determined type attack the PCs. The **War-lock** himself emerges from his pavilion on the fourth round to deal with the party. Unless they possess immense magic, a party that stands its ground is doomed.

If the party does somehow avoid discovery and makes it to the pavilion, they find an opulent if outdated campaign command post. Tables bearing maps of the region, old military texts, written reports, weaponry, and an 8-foot-diameter iron cauldron embossed with arcane symbols fill the tent—along with the War-lock, himself! The War-lock immediately shouts an alarm if he discovers the party and then blasts them with spells and invocations. The iron cauldron is *Temper's Cauldron* (see appendix A); the other material is pertinent to Afanasi's campaign. There is also a locked (DC 25 Dexterity check to pick) chest containing 400 cp, 800 sp, 604 gp, 100 pp, and six rubies worth 100 gp beneath Afanasi's sleeping cot.

## WARBORN HUMAN SOLDIER (18)

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 67 (9d8 + 27)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

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**Saving Throws:** Str +5, Dex +4, Wis +2

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

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**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Reckless:** At the start of its turn, the soldier can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

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### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The soldier makes two melee attacks.

**Longsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

## WARBORN GNOLL (12)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10

+ 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

## OGRE (6)

*Large giant, chaotic evil*

**AC:** 11 (hide armor)

**Hit Points:** 59 (7d10 + 21)

**Speed:** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	7 (-2)	7 (-2)

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

**Languages:** Common, Giant

**Challenge:** 2 (450 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Greatclub:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Javelin:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

## AFANASI WYRM BURN,

### THE WAR-LOCK

See Part Four: Confronting the War-lock for stats and description.

### AREA 1-7—SECRET ENTRANCE GLADE

*The narrow animal path you've been following terminates in a dead-end valley. Sheer walls of loose shale soar up around you and the floor of the vale is filled with toppled scree, sickly-looking bushes, and a shallow pond surrounded by animal tracks.*

There is a narrow defile leading out of this canyon, but it is difficult to spot. If Jaume told them of its existence, a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check allows them to notice the thin path hidden by an outcropping at the rear of the gulch. A DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check is needed if the party is unaware of the egress' existence. If the party has successfully followed the tracks from area 1-4, they discover the hidden trail automatically. This path leads to area 2-1 below.

The trail can also be spotted from atop the walls of the canyon, but ascending the treacherous, 60-foot-high cliff requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. Failure leads to the PC suffering (1d6)d6 damage from the fall.

## PART THREE:

### THE SWORDHOLD

The War-lock constructed this stronghold as both a safe house and as a measure to cheat Death. It was here that he entrusted the *Odium Heart*, the eldritch vessel that holds his essence, and the sorcerous chamber with the power to revive his corpse. Afanasi's captains had strict orders to convey his body to this place should he ever fall in battle. His men fulfilled their orders, but soon perished protecting him from discovery. The War-lock remained imprisoned within the Swordhold until recent events allowed him to return from the grave, strangely revitalized and nearly immortal.

The Swordhold is well-concealed, situated beneath a hill and entered solely from a secluded dale accessible by an easily-overlooked path. This obscurity allowed the holdfast to remain undisturbed until recently (although Jaume was aware of its presence from his many aerial patrols of the region). The gnoll band that discovered it lost half their numbers to the fiendish traps left in place to guard the War-lock's corpse, but these deaths merely urged them deeper, convinced that only fabulous riches would be defended by such extreme precautions. Their perseverance led to the awakening of Afanasi and the return of the War-lock.

The War-lock, deeming it best to put distance between himself and his Achilles' heel, has left the *Odium Heart* securely hidden within the Swordhold, protected by his troops and the complex's traps. Afanasi hopes that these defenses combined with the secrecy of the Swordhold will prevent any of his enemies, present or future, from destroying the *Heart* and rendering him mortal. If it were not for Jaume's spotting of the holdfast and the activity around it, the War-lock's scheme might have worked.

#### GENERAL FEATURES

The Swordhold was excavated by the Steelwyrms' engineers and sappers, assisted by prisoners of war who were later killed to protect the stronghold's secret location. It was dug out of the hillside, its tunnels and chambers shored up with baked clay bricks and stout timbers. These materials did an adequate job of ensuring the Swordhold's stability, but they will not last the ages. Already the first signs of structural failure have appeared.

The War-lock only intends to utilize the Swordhold until a more secure and durable fastness can be located or built. In the meantime, he's had the traps of the stronghold reset and his most dependable (or expendable) troops stationed there to defend his steel heart. These guards are unaware of what they defend and only Scraw the gnoll shaman (see area 2-10) knows why the Swordhold is of vital importance to the War-lock's campaign.

**Doors.** The doors of the Swordhold are rough-hewn timbers reinforced with old armor plating, discarded swords, and other scrap metal pounded flat and nailed to the portals. A locked door can be burst open with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check unless otherwise noted.

**Secret Doors.** Secret doors in the stronghold can be detected with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

**Illumination.** The interior of the Swordhold is largely dark and unlit as most of the guardians possess darkvision. Only areas 2-7 and 2-19 have illumination sources.

#### AREA 2-1—SECRET DALE

*A narrow vale surrounded by steep, rocky bluffs rests at the end of the constricted defile. A pond, its banks lined with bulrushes, occupies the center of the small valley. To the north is a rocky, upward-slanting path rising 30 feet up to a short ledge. A dark tunnel mouth leads into the side of the northern bluff from the ledge. On the far side of the vale is a short staircase leading into a dark alcove in the eastern bluff wall.*

The rocky bluffs are 50 feet tall and require a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to scale. The pond is shallow (6 feet deep) and contains muddy, but potable, water fed by a subterranean spring. If tracks are sought in this area, a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check detects a trail leading up the path to the ledge. There are no tracks heading towards the staircase.

#### AREA 2-2—STIRGES AND STATUE

*A roughly 10-foot-square chamber hewn into the bluff face rests at the top of the short stairs. A 10-foot-tall statue, its head brushing the roof of the cavity, occupies most of the alcove. The statue depicts a human male dressed in plate armor that bears draconic flourishes: overlapping, scale-like plates, winged cheek-guards, and a dragon-head decoration rising above the open face of the helm. The figure's right eye is a blank orb as if affected by cataract or other blindness. Aside from a few patches of lichen, the statue appears in good condition.*



The statue depicts the War-lock dressed in elven plate armor, a bit of plunder he looted long ago from a high elf adversary. It was carved by one of his men and, while no masterpiece, adequately represents Afanasi. The statue has no special properties.

Behind the statue and easily overlooked in the gloomy niche is a crack in the far wall. The crack is only 2 feet wide by 3 feet tall and runs 8 feet to a shallow cave. A flock of 10 **stirges** occupies the cave during daylight hours, departing to search for food after nightfall. The guardians of the Swordhold allow the beasts to remain undisturbed, acting as additional protection, but take precautions to keep them out of the complex. The stirges smell fresh blood if a living creature enters area 2-2, stirring and flying out to attack 1 minute after the alcove is entered. They fight until half their number is slain, then flee back into their dark lair.

## STIRGE (10)

*Tiny beast, unaligned*

**AC:** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 2 (1d4)

**Speed:** 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	2 (-4)	8 (-1)	6 (-2)

---

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

**Languages:** –

**Challenge:** 1/8 (25 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Blood Drain:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the stirge attaches to the target. While attached, the stirge doesn't attack. Instead, at the start of each of the stirge's turns, the target loses 5 (1d4 + 3) hit points due to blood loss. The stirge can detach itself by spending 5 feet of its movement. It does so after it drains 10 hit points of blood from the target or the target dies. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach the stirge.

The cave holds only old bloodstains and stirge guano.

## AREA 2-3—THE FRONT DOOR

*A wide wooden door bars passage further down the tunnel. Its surface is covered with rusting armor plates and broken sword blades hammered flat and nailed to the wood. A wrought iron pull ring hangs on the right edge of the door.*

The door is trapped to injure intruders and alert the guardians at area 2-4. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices thin gaps in the bricks on either side of the doorway. The gaps conceal spring-loaded scything sword blades that whip out to slash anyone standing in front of the door. The three blades are staggered, capable of striking targets even crouching low. Any creature before the door failing a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw is struck for 22 (4d10) slashing damage. A loud clattering accompanies the trap when triggered, alerting the gnolls in area 2-4. The successful DC 15 Dexterity check disables the springs, disarming the trap.

There is a lever in the corridor beyond the door and a number of battered helmets strung together on a chain. The lever arms and disarms the door trap and the helmets rattle and clank whenever the trap is sprung.

A PC listening at the door and succeeding in a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check hears high-pitched, snickering voices speaking in Gnoll. These are the warborn gnoll guards in area 2-4.

## AREA 2-4—ENTRANCE HALL

*A 30-foot-square room stands 20 feet beyond the front door. The brick-lined walls and floor are bare of decoration and cracked with age. A flight of stairs leads up and out of the room through the middle of the north wall and a pair of passages exit the room to the east and the west. A trio of towering, hyena-headed creatures dressed in chain mail of an older age rush to attack, howling and snickering in high-pitched voices.*

The three **warborn gnolls** are members of the band that discovered the Swordhold. They are under strict orders to prevent outsiders from entering the Swordhold. However, if two of the gnolls perish in battle, the third flees, rushing towards area 2-6 to summon help. The gnolls in area 2-6 are accustomed to fights amongst themselves and treat any sounds of battle coming from this area as just another intra-species skirmish.



### WARBORN GNOLL (3)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body

creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

#### AREA 2-5—OBSERVATION POST

The door to this room is trapped. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check spots a thin chain connected to the top-right section of the door. Opening the door without disarming the trap (simply breaking the chain with a weapon or DC 10 Strength check) causes the trap in the room beyond to arm. The trap goes off 2 minutes later.

*A 20-foot-square room is located beyond the door at the top of the stairs. Raised ledges circle the room, situated beneath long narrow strips of canvas that hang flush against the walls, dependent from the ceiling. The brickwork here is cracked and stray roots dangle from the crevices, creating a thin forest of tendrils.*

If the party failed to notice and/or disarm the trap, add the following:

*A thin, slow stream of sandy soil patters down from a crack in the roof, creating a small pile on the floor.*

This room served as an observation post, allowing watchmen to view the surrounding countryside. The 15-foot-long, 3-foot-high canvas strips cover observation slits looking outside. The exterior of the canvas is painted a camouflage pattern, making it difficult to detect the slit when covering the windows. The 4-foot-tall ledges are for watchmen to stand on and peer out the 10-foot-high observation slits.

The ceiling of this room is designed to collapse if the door trap is triggered. The falling sand is emptying from a counterweight that keeps the roof intact. After the counterweight is emptied, a process taking 2 minutes, large brick slabs fall. The slabs inflict 33 (6d10) damage to all within the room. A successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw reduces the damage by half. The collapse alerts the guards in area 2-6 spurring them to investigate the noise.

## AREA 2-6—BARRACKS

*The roughly L-shaped chamber located here holds bunks, tables, chairs, and T-shaped racks intended to hold armor. A curtained doorway stands immediately to the right of the entrance. The stink of fur, filth, and blood is strong in this chamber.*

This room was intended to house the War-lock's elite warriors, but it's now home to the warborn gnolls. There are five **warborn gnolls** currently present.

### WARBORN GNOLL (5)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

The room contains bunks for up to 18 medium humanoids, although it is obvious not all are in use. Scarred tables, rickety chairs, and empty armor stands complete the room's furnishings. An old footlocker is stored beneath one of the bunks and contains the gnolls' accumulated loot: 2,000 cp, 130 sp, 70 gp, five quartz (50 gp value each), two *potions of healing*, one *potion of mind reading*, and two *potions of vitality*.

The curtained door leads to a small 10-foot-square space containing a pair of two-holed, wooden latrine benches with partially filled chamber pots beneath each. The air is foul and reeks of gnoll waste.

## AREA 2-7—FALSE WATCH POST

Before you is a 20-foot-square chamber containing a table, two chairs, and a sealed barrel. A single torch burns in a sconce next to a door set in the north wall. As elsewhere, the walls and floor are lined with old clay bricks.

This room is actually a pit trap disguised as a watch post. With the exception of the narrow walkway that circles the western half of the room (see map), the floor is made of thin clay tiles manufactured to resemble the bricks and mounted on a light wooden frame. Stepping onto the frame causes the tiles to collapse, dropping the unfortunate into a 15-foot-deep pit lined with spear points. The table, chairs, and barrel are mounted atop 15-foot-tall stilt-like support posts. The barrel is empty.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notice the bricks covering the pit seem slightly different from the ones along the western half of the room. A PC falling into the pit is allowed a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling by grabbing the ledge or one of the supported pieces of furniture. Failing the save results in 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and 11 (2d10) piercing damage from the pit.

The torch is normal, albeit of special military manufacture that extends its burning time to 3 hours.



## AREA 2-8—CAMPAIGN ROOM

A long, wide table flanked by a dozen chairs dominates this chamber. Rows of shelves and pigeon-holed nooks line the walls and hold rolled parchment scrolls. The tabletop is covered by a thick layer of sand held in place by a tall wooden lip that runs around the edge of the table. The sand is molded into miniature hills and valleys and a number of small metal and wood figures are arranged on the tiny terrain.

This chamber is where the War-lock once met with his captains to plan campaigns during the winter months. The shelves and pigeon-holes contain a vast array of maps detailing the Western Kingdoms in varying scales and quality. A thorough investigation of the maps combined with a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check determines that maps detailing the immediate area of the Sere and surrounding lands are missing (Afanasi has them in his camp for ready reference).

The sand table was used by the War-lock to strategize his attacks. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check identifies the terrain molded on the table as representative of the Sere and surrounding countryside. PCs making the connection can easily locate the landmarks given in Part Two of this adventure on the table.

The small figures are 500 miniature soldiers (total 100 gp value). Not all are currently in position on the sand table, but those that are indicate a sizeable force at the hilltop campsite (area 1-6).

## AREA 2-9—FORMER DINING HALL

The stink of great unwashed bodies cloys your noses as the door to this room opens. Broken trestle tables and overturned benches indicate this was once a dining hall, but it no longer serves that purpose. Piles of bedding lie by the far wall and several barrels, their tops pried open and reeking of spoiled wine, rest against the southern wall. Three large humanoid dressed in furs and holding great clubs turn to face you as the door opens.

The occupants are three **ogres**, the personal bodyguards of Scraw the Shaman. Too large to baptize in *Temper's Cauldron*, they are kept in line by the gnoll's magic and the promise of violence and plunder.

## OGRE (3)

*Large giant, chaotic evil*

**AC:** 11 (hide armor)

**Hit Points:** 59 (7d10 + 21)

**Speed:** 40 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	7 (-2)	7 (-2)

---

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

**Languages:** Common, Giant

**Challenge:** 2 (450 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Greatclub:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Javelin:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Combat in this room alerts Scraw in area 2-10 that intruders are present and he prepares himself for battle (see below).

Each of the ogres carries a large pouch tied to its belt. The sacks contain 1) 19 cp and 10 gp; 2) 13 sp and 6 gp; and 3) 14 sp. The wine in the barrels has spoiled and is unpalatable by anyone other than an ogre. One of the barrels, however, contains the ogre's true treasure: 2,000 cp, 70 sp, and 11 pp.

## AREA 2-10—LIBRARY/SHAMAN'S QUARTERS

*Old wooden bookcases line the walls of this L-shaped chamber. A stout oaken table and a pair of chairs rest by the southern wall. A crude bed fashioned from rough-hewn logs and piled with old clothes stands against the north wall.*

Once the library of the War-lock, **Scraw the warborn gnoll shaman** commandeered this room as his quarters. He dwells here with his magically-enslaved pet, a fearsome **grick**. Unless the party have overcome the ogres in area 2-9 quickly and silently, Scraw is alerted to their presence and has prepared the following spells: *mage armor* and *stoneskin* (spell effects reflected in stat block).

Scraw's grick lurks atop one of the bookcases, its stone camouflage helping it remain undetected amongst the brickwork. The grick strikes out to attack any creature attempting to melee its master.

## SCRAW, WARBORN GNOLL SHAMAN

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points:** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

---

**Skills:** Arcana +3, Survival +3

**Damage Resistances:** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons (from *stoneskin*)

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages:** Gnoll, Giant, Common

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Special Equipment:** Scraw possesses a *wand of magic missiles*, a spell component pouch, a pouch containing 300 gp worth of diamond dust, a brass key (unlocks iron chest in this room), an iron key (unlocks door to area 2-15), an iron circular medallion depicting a weird armored millipede creature (see areas 2-15 & 2-17), a *potion of healing*, and a crossbow bolt case with 20 bolts.

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds,



if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

**Spellcasting:** Scraw is a 7th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). Scraw knows the following spells:

- Cantrips (at will): *blade ward*, *fire bolt*, *friends*<sup>C</sup>, *poison spray*, *true strike*<sup>C</sup>  
1st level (4/3\*\* slots): *burning hands*, *charm person*, *mage armor*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *suggestion*<sup>C</sup>
- 3rd level (3 slots): *fear*<sup>C</sup>, *lightning bolt*
- 4th level (1/0\*\* slot): *stoneskin*<sup>C\*</sup>

<sup>C</sup> indicates a spell requiring concentration

\* indicates spell already cast if Scraw is alerted to intruders

\*\* spell slots remaining if Scraw has cast spells prior to the start of battle

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### ACTIONS

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**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

**Dagger:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

**Light Crossbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

## GRICK

*Medium monstrosity, neutral*

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**AC:** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 27 (6d8)

**Speed:** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	5 (-3)

---

**Damage Resistances:** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities:** fire

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** –

**Challenge:** 2 (450 XP)

---

**Stone Camouflage:** The grick has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in rocky terrain.

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### ACTIONS

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**Multiattack:** The grick makes one attack with its tentacles. If this attack hits, the grick can make one beak attack against the same target.

**Tentacles:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

**Beak:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Scraw allows his grick to engage the party in melee combat for as long as possible, using his crossbow, wand, and spells at a distance. If cornered, he uses *misty step* to move behind the party, following it with a *lightning bolt*.

The shelves hold a multitude of books, largely concerning military matters—the strategy, history, and logistics of warfare, for example. Mixed in amongst the bound volumes is a leather packet filled with handwritten sheets of parchment, each heavily annotated and bearing mystical diagrams and plans. Although poorly organized and seemingly written partially in code, a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a *comprehend languages* spell deciphers the pages' meaning. They detail Afanasi's history and the measures he undertook to overcome death. A party reading the pages learns of the creation of the *Odium Heart* and its purpose to house Afanasi's life force. The notes also state that destroying the *Heart* would allow the War-lock to be killed permanently. The pages hint

the *Oidium Heart* is hidden in a secret room somewhere within the Swordhold, hopefully spurring the party on a dedicated search to discover its location.

On the bottom shelf of one bookcase, covered by the torn spines of texts arranged to seem like a row of books, is an iron chest. Noticing the chest requires a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The container is locked (Scraw has the key; otherwise DC 20 Dexterity check to pick the lock). The chest contains Scraw's wealth: 2,200 cp, 100 sp, 140 ep, 220 gp, 7 pp, a *potion of flying*, and a *Quaal's feather token (swan boat)*.

## AREA 2-11—KITCHEN

*This area is a dusty, disused kitchen. Bare, open shelves, barren tables, and old barrels fill most of the space. A wooden trough with a rusty water pump rests in the northeast corner. A door exiting the room stands in the south wall. Despite the lack of contents in the room, the smell of rot is thick in the air.*

A blanket of dust covers most of this room, with the exception being the water trough and floor leading to it (the guards draw their water here). The pump pulls water from deep natural cisterns and is potable and cold. The rotting smell comes from the pantry (area 2-12) and the contents therein. Aside from a few discarded kitchen implements in poor condition and empty barrels, this room holds nothing else of interest.

## AREA 2-12—PANTRY

*This area is lined with niches cut into the surrounding rocky soil and shored up with bricks. The floor is a swampy, uneven morass of vile, unidentifiable piles covered in reeking green goo. The contents of the niches have likewise mostly succumbed to this slimy decay, but one high compartment in the southeast corner appears untouched by the rot. A few old sacks, small kegs, and metal cases lie dust-covered in the niche.*

The green goo is a large green slime colony, consisting of 7 patches, that fills the room. Originally spawned by the rotting foodstuffs contained within this room, the green slime has proved especially robust and remains a threat. The swampy piles are partially dissolved boxes and crates covered by the slime. Anyone entering the room is in danger of coming into contact with the stuff.

## GREEN SLIME (7 PATCHES)

*Hazard*

**Size:** 5-foot patch

**Senses:** blindsight 30 ft.

**Speed:** 0 ft., but drops from walls and ceiling when it detects movement below it

**Avoidance:** A creature aware of the slime's presence can avoid being struck by it as it falls with a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. Otherwise, the slime can't be avoided as it drops.

**Destruction:** Sunlight, any effect that cures disease, and any effect that deals cold, fire, or radiant damage destroys 1 patch of green slime.

**Effect:** A creature that comes into contact with green slime takes 5 (1d10) acid damage. The creature takes the damage again at the start of each of its turns until the slime is scraped off or destroyed. Against wood or metal, green slime deals 11 (2d10) acid damage each round, and any nonmagical wood or metal weapon or tool used to scrape off the slime is effectively destroyed.

Cold and radiant damage successfully destroys a single patch of the slime. The green slime can also be burned as normal, but doing so fills this room, area 2-11, and area 2-9 with foul, choking smoke. Creatures in these areas must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or suffer 3 (1d6) poison damage. Beings in area 2-9 make their saves with advantage due to distance. A fire here also alerts Scraw of area 2-10 of the party's location and he may choose to attack them from behind. Igniting the slime also causes the casks on the shelf to combust, forcing any creature in this room to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be struck by splattering, burning oil (damage as alchemist's fire). The heat generated by the burning casks also destroys the contents of the metal boxes.

The intact niche holds two burlap sacks of rotted onions, six two-gallon casks of lantern oil, and two rusting iron boxes containing six small ceramic jars holding saffron, cinnamon, cumin, and anise worth 200 gp in total (box one); and an *alchemy jug* and three *potions of healing* (box two). These potions are normal magical elixirs and do not affect good characters as the potions in area 2-15.

## AREA 2-13—COLLAPSED STAIRS & STORAGE

*A set of brick stairs descends to a broad landing before turning right and continuing out of sight. Barrels, boxes, and sacks are piled helter-skelter on the landing.*

These stairs once led to the second level of the Swordhold, but that section is now unreachable. Structural failure caused the staircase's lowest section to collapse, filling the tunnel with rubble below the landing. With the storage rooms on that level inaccessible, the War-lock's followers use the landing as a small storage area.

The sacks and barrels contained dried and pickled vegetables and meat, enough to feed three dozen men for 4 weeks. The boxes contain 200 long-burning torches (each the size of a large club and capable of burning for 3 hours), 400 arrows, spare spear points and axe heads, and armor and weapon maintenance supplies. There are also two barrels filled with a mixture of raw venison and charcoal—foodstuffs for the hell hounds in area 2-15.

The stairs beyond the landing are choked with fallen bricks, collapsed soil, and broken rocks and requires a hundred man-hours to clear. If the GM wishes to expand on the Swordhold, either now or for a return visit, he can create and stock the sealed lower level as desired, being sure to include extra barracks, officers' quarters, store-rooms, armories, and other military facilities.

## AREA 2-14—SPIKED JAW TRAP

A pair of spiked frames are concealed in the ceiling above this area. Both are mounted on hinges allowing them to drop 90 degrees to clap together like a pair of jaws, spearing anyone unlucky enough to be caught within them. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the signs of a pressure plate on the corridor floor. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from springing (or the plate can be avoided by walking around it).

The two spiked frames almost fill the corridor, making them difficult to avoid when triggered. The jaws slam closed on any PC in the party's front rank unless a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw succeeds. PCs in the second rank must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being grazed by the spring-loaded jaws as they slam together. Characters caught between the jaws suffer 22 (4d10) piercing damage; PCs grazed by the jaws take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage as they're bashed by the frame.

## AREA 2-15—SHRINE TO DHZH

The southern doors leading to this room are locked (DC 20 Dexterity check to pick open) and reinforced, requiring a DC 20 Strength check to burst open. Scraw (see area 2-10) has the key to these doors.

*An unseemly hot blast of air greets you as you open the doors. Darkness fills this space, a blackness so thick it seems to contest your lights for dominance. A massive form appears at the far end of the room, cloaked in shadows that lend it a menacing air. The floor is tiled with armor plates battered flat and the smell of ashes is heavy in the air.*

A pack of **hell hounds**, gifts to the War-lock from the Black Crawler, defends this room from intruders. They emerge from the darkness and attack.

### HELL HOUND (3)

*Medium fiend, lawful evil*

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**AC:** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 45 (7d8 + 14)

**Speed:** 50 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

---

**Skills:** Perception +5

**Damage Immunities:** fire

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

**Languages:** understands Infernal but can't speak it

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

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**Keen Hearing and Smell:** The hound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

**Pack Tactics:** The hound has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the hound's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

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### ACTIONS

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**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

**Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6):** The hound exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire

damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The gloom in this room is magical in nature, but it is not as inky as magical darkness. However, the gloom is sufficient enough to cause ranged attack rolls to be at disadvantage. Treat the room as lightly obscured for purposes of Perception and hiding.

The metal plating on the floor amplifies and reflects the hell hounds' fire breath, increasing the Dexterity saving throw to reduce damage from the blast to DC 14.

The form at the far end is a 15-foot-long, 8-foot-tall statue of Dhzh, the Dark Crawler. The idol resembles a long millipede covered with a plate armor carapace and possessing legs resembling jagged-bladed longswords. It has no visible eyes and is depicted in a coiled state, seemingly ready to strike at any creature standing before it.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers that three of the idol's foremost legs are in truth levers. Throwing the leftmost one opens the door to area 2-16, while throwing the center lever opens the secret door to the north. The rightmost lever is trapped, requiring a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to notice the odd internal rigging connecting it to the trap. Unless deactivated with a DC 15 Dexterity check, throwing the lever causes a cloud of acidic vapor to spray from the idol's mouth. Any creature within a 20-foot-square area directly in front of the idol suffers 22 (4d10) acid damage (a DC 14 Constitution saving throw reduces the damage by half). The lever also opens a compartment in the idol. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers the compartment's presence as well, but only the lever opens it. The compartment contains an iron circular medallion depicting Dhzh in a spiral coil; a twisted black stick crowned with a shard of red-veined, glossy black stone; and a quartet of glass vials filled with lavender liquid.

The medallion is a nonmagical unholy symbol that bypasses the trap at area 2-17. The stick is a *wand of chains* (see appendix A). The four vials contain *potions of greater healing*—with a slight variation. Brewed by the sorceries of Dhzh's priests, the potions are tainted with a faint evil. Good PCs drinking the potions must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to keep the potion down long enough for its magic to take effect. A failed save indicates the PC vomits up the elixir and gains no benefit from drinking it. The potion also loses its magical properties if regurgitated.



## AREA 2-16—AFANASI'S QUARTERS

*It is apparent that this room served as living quarters for an individual both prestigious and martial. Fine wooden furniture, now covered by a patina of dust, is arranged over a crimson-and-gold thread rug. The western wall is covered by tall bookcases bearing only a few tomes. Numerous swords and axes hang on the north wall. A large bed with an entwined dragon headboard rests against the southern wall.*

Afanasi carried back to his camp most objects of value or use that once lay in the room, leaving little for looters. Although the wealth is mostly gone, the trap that protects the room remains intact. The 10 weapons on the wall—six longswords and four axes—are animated and fly from their mounts to attack any creature other than Afanasi entering the chamber.

## FLYING WEAPON (10)

*Small construct, unaligned*

**AC:** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 17 (5d6)

**Speed:** 0 ft., fly 50 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)	5 (-3)	1 (-5)

---

**Saving Throws:** Dex +4

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

**Condition Immunities:** blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

**Senses:** blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 7

**Languages:** –

**Challenge:** 1/4 (50 XP)

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**Antimagic Susceptibility:** The weapon is incapacitated while in the area of an *antimagic field*. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the weapon must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

**False Appearance:** While the weapon remains motionless and isn't flying, it is indistinguishable from a normal weapon.

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### ACTIONS

**Weapon Strike:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage.

The few tomes remaining are mundane texts on military subjects, old ledgers of the Steelwyrms' campaigns, and similar materials.

The bed is of fine craftsmanship and worth 500 gp, but it is cumbersome and weighs 300 pounds. There is a secret compartment in the floor beneath the bed. The concealed cover is noticed with a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check (DC is reduced to 15 if the bed is moved). Beneath the fake brick cover is a small space containing a rack holding four *potions of greater healing* (as those in area 2-15) and a +1 *dagger*.

## AREA 2-17—TRAPPED DOORS

*A pair of narrow double doors blocks the end of the corridor. Embossed on the face of the doors is a coiled, millipede-like monstrosity covered in armored plating and bearing swords as legs. The creature is fashioned from beaten and cut armor nailed to the doors. A narrow seam runs down the center of the image, allowing the doors to open.*

These doors bear a magical trap. Close inspection of the millipede-like creature (a representation of Dhzh) accompanied by either a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check notices tiny magical symbols inscribed into the image. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as *detect magic*, reveals an aura of evocation magic on the doors. Any individual not bearing the symbol of Dhzh (see area 2-15) who opens the door causes a trio of *eldritch blast* beams to strike at 1d3 creatures at the front of the party inflicting 5 (1d10) force damage each. The beams are distributed among the determined targets. One target is hit three times; the beams hit one target once and another twice if there are two victims; or each target is struck once if there are three victims. The blasts hit automatically. The trap resets each time the door is closed. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 14) cast on the doors destroys the trap.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the walls and floor around the door are unusually worn and cracked, a hint of the trap's presence.

## AREA 2-18—THE TEMPORARY TOMB

*The walls of this dark chamber bear old weapons and shields, all of which are battered and bloodstained. Towards the eastern end of the room is an open, casket-shaped iron box resting atop a brick bier. Broken sword blades are riveted to the exterior of the coffin, turning its open top into a toothy maw discolored with rust and old blood. Positioned directly above the casket box is a strange object. Resembling an upside-down minaret, the object is fashioned from yellowing bones and what seems to be rotted flesh. The tip of the object points directly at the casket, while the top of the curious thing appears connected to the ceiling by artery-like cords or tubes.*

The odd device is part of a mystical contraption connected to the heart in area 2-19. Designed as a means to resurrect Afanasi in the event of his death, his lifeless corpse was placed within the open casket. Over time, his life would be restored by the vitality seeping through the connection to the *Odium Heart* and down through the spire-shaped point above the casket. It was a long pro-

cess, taking years to achieve, but required no special skills or magic. Even his non-spellcasting captains could prepare his corpse. Only their deaths kept him from being released from the device at the proper time, leaving the War-lock imprisoned in the casket until the gnolls arrived, sustained by his leaking life force.

The spire-shaped device is made from preserved human body parts, many in a state of arrested decay. The device radiates strong necromantic magic if detected for. The iron casket is sized for a Medium creature and contains several metal restraints to secure a corpse in the proper place to benefit from the device. As the object is currently connected to the *Oidium Heart* and Afanasi's life energy, no other creature can benefit from the device's power. Recalibrating the resurrection machine is likely beyond the ability of anyone but the War-lock.

The weapons and shields on the walls are nonmagical items, symbols and trophies of the War-lock's victories to keep him company as his body is restored to life. There are 13 longswords, six spears, five axes, two maces, and 20 shields in total.

## AREA 2-19—CHAMBER OF THE HEART

*The door opens, revealing a dark chamber. The verges of the room are cluttered with the ornaments of war: old suits of armor, bloodstained banners, disassembled artillery pieces, stacked shields, and so on. A low, three-step dais of dark brick rests in the middle of the room. A red-hued plinth sits atop the dais, glowing with a soft pink light. Resting on the plinth is an iron box the size of a great helm. Artery-like cords rise from the box, connecting it to the ceiling.*

The box contains the *Oidium Heart* and it is protected by three **shadow demons** conjured up and bound to it by Afanasi's infernal patron. When the party enters the room, they are hidden amongst the plunder lining the walls of the room and attempt to attack with surprise.

### SHADOW DEMON (3)

*Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points:** 66 (12d8 + 12)

**Speed:** 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws:** Dex +5, Cha +4

**Skills:** Stealth +7

**Damage Vulnerabilities:** radiant

**Damage Resistances:** acid, fire, necrotic, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities:** cold, lightning, poison

**Condition Immunities:** exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

**Senses:** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages:** Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge:** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Incorporeal Movement:** The demon can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

**Light Sensitivity:** While in bright light, the demon has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Shadow Stealth:** While in dim light or darkness, the demon can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

### ACTIONS

**Claws:** Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) psychic damage or, if the demon had advantage on the attack roll, 17 (4d6 +3) psychic damage.

The dais is protected by a magical safeguard. Anyone stepping onto the 15-foot-diameter platform triggers an *Evard's black tentacles* spell centered on the dais. The spell acts as normal, making reaching the plinth at the dais' center a difficult task. Treat the *tentacles* as having a spell save DC of 15. The tentacles last for 1 minute, then the spell resets, triggering again if the dais is stepped upon.

The cords attached to the iron box run up to the ceiling, vanishing into small cracks in the brickwork. These artery-like wires connect to the device in area 2-18, allowing it to draw upon the *Oidium Heart's* stored vitality. The cords are easily severed with a bladed weapon, producing a crackling of black-green energy but no other effect.

The box is locked (DC 15 Dexterity check to open) and contains a warm, human-sized heart fashioned from blood-red iron. This is the *Oidium Heart*. If the *Heart* is

## PART FOUR: CONFRONTING THE WAR-LOCK

The PCs will eventually confront Afanasi, for until he is destroyed he remains a threat to the realms beyond the Sere. This showdown can occur in one or two (or both) locations: the War-lock's camp or the Swordhold. If the PCs enter his camp, either brazenly or clandestinely, they'll eventually encounter the War-lock. Unfortunately for them, Afanasi will not only possess his full power but have a cadre of loyal soldiers at his beck and call. Unless the party has powerful magical items and luck on their side, the PCs must likely flee or perish as a result.

A party that infiltrates the Swordhold and destroys the *Odium Heart* gains two advantages when facing off against the War-lock. Firstly, Afanasi's power is reduced (see stat block below), weakening but not utterly removing the threat he possesses. Secondly, the War-lock senses the relic's destruction and immediately hastens to the Swordhold to discover who is responsible and to enact his revenge on the interlopers. To do so, he must leave most of his troops behind at the camp and the party will face a more evenly-sided battle.

Following the destruction of the *Odium Heart*, the **War-lock** uses one of his *teleport snap-sticks* (see appendix A) to instantly travel to the secret dale along with two **war-born human soldiers**. The soldiers take up position outside the entrance to the Swordhold, awaiting the party to exit to attack them by surprise. The War-lock consumes one of his *potions of flying*, then enacts his armor's *water breathing* ability to hide just beneath the surface of the pond in area 2-1.

When the party leaves, the soldiers rush in to attack the party. The War-lock rises from the waters, using his magical flight to remain aloft and out of range of melee as he unleashes his magic on the party. He only deigns to descend to fight once he is out of spell slots or it becomes obvious that his troops will fall without additional support. Although normally a cunning strategist, the War-lock is infuriated by the destruction of the *Odium Heart* and allows his anger to overcome his calculating mind.

If the party chooses to take a long or short rest, the War-lock and his men may enter the Swordhold and engage them inside, hoping to catch them by surprise.



destroyed, the War-lock can be killed permanently. Treat the *Heart* as AC 15 with 20 hit points. It is immune to all nonmagical damage and has damage resistance against cold, lightning, and fire damage.

Destroying the *Odium Heart* triggers a blast of power that resounds around its location, blasting anyone within 10 feet of the *Heart* prone but otherwise doing no harm. A DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check determines the connection between the *Heart* and Afanasi is severed and that the War-lock is undoubtedly aware of its destruction.

The plunder along the edges of the room is mostly trophies taken from fallen foes and has little intrinsic value. The weapons are old and ill-kept, the banners moth-eaten, the shields rusting and fragile. However, a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check uncovers a suit of +1 *chain mail*, a +1 *longsword*, and a pair of *gauntlets of ogre power* mixed in among the mundane trophies.



## AFANASI WYRMBURN, THE WAR-LOCK

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 19 (elven-made +1 plate)

**Hit Points:** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed:** 30: ft., fly 60 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

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**Saving Throws:** Con +5, Wis +4, Cha +6

**Skills:** Athletics +6, History +3, Perception +4

**Damage Resistances:** cold, fire, poison

**Senses:** passive Perception 14

**Languages:** Common, telepathy 30 ft. (Awakened Mind warlock ability)

**Challenge:** 5 (1,800 XP) / 9 (5,000) if *Odium Heart* remains intact

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**Special Equipment:** Afanasi carries a spell component pouch, an iron circular medallion depicting Dhzh in a spiral coil, 180 gp, two *teleport snap-sticks* (see appendix A), two *potions of flying*, and a Dhzh-brewed *potion of greater healing* (see area 2-15 above). The War-lock wears silver dragon plate, a suit of +1 plate of elven manufacture. The plate provides protection as normal, but also grants resistance against cold, fire, and poison damage to the wearer. The armor can also cast *water breathing* upon the wearer once per day.

**Devil's Sight (Eldritch Invocation):** The War-lock can see normally in darkness, both magical and nonmagical, to a distance of 120 feet.

**Eldritch Spear (Eldritch Invocation):** The range of the War-lock's *eldritch blast* cantrip is increased to 300 feet.

**Intrinsic Heal:** The War-lock immediately receives the benefits of a *heal* spell as a reaction if reduced to 0 hit points. This ability is lost if the *Odium Heart* is destroyed.

**Spellcasting:** The War-lock is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following spells:

- Cantrips (at will): blade ward, eldritch blast, true

strike<sup>C</sup>

- 1st level: armor of Agathys, hellish rebuke, hex<sup>C</sup>
- 2nd level: cloud of daggers<sup>C</sup>, shatter
- 3rd level: dispel magic

<sup>C</sup> indicates a spell requiring concentration

The War-lock has two 3rd-level spell slots available to him as a 5th-level warlock.

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### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** Afanasi attacks twice with his longsword when taking the Attack action due to the *thirsting blade* eldritch invocation.

**+1 Longsword (Pact weapon):** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Freezing Glare (Recharge 5-6):** The War-lock fires a freezing beam of cold from his right eye as a bonus action. The beam affects one target within 60 feet who must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

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### REACTIONS

**Parry:** The War-lock adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, the War-lock must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

*Afanasi Wyrmburn is a gaunt, pale human male in his late 30s. His face bears two distinct features: a jagged scar running from his chin to his right eye and a cold silver cataract across the same eye. The cataract is a gift from Dhzh; it allows him to utilize his freezing glare. Afanasi is typically encountered dressed in his dragon-styled elven plate armor. The War-lock seldom speaks, preferring to use his telepathy to issue commands and warnings.*

### WARBORN HUMAN SOLDIER (2)

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 67 (9d8 + 27)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

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<b>STR</b>	<b>DEX</b>	<b>CON</b>	<b>INT</b>	<b>WIS</b>	<b>CHA</b>
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

---

**Saving Throws:** Str +5, Dex +4, Wis +2

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Reckless:** At the start of its turn, the soldier can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

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## ACTIONS

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**Multiattack:** The soldier makes two melee attacks.

**Longsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

The PCs may decide to keep the *Odium Heart* intact, intending to use it as a bargaining chip or threatening the War-lock with its destruction unless he capitulates to their demands. Unfortunately, this does not work as destroying the *Heart* does not immediately slay Afanasi and he can always craft another. He'd much rather destroy those impertinent enough to attempt to command him and address the consequences later.

## ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The death of the War-lock ends the threat of a humanoid army streaming out of the Sere...for now. Lacking a leader to rally around, the army collapses and the War-lock's assembled troops quickly disband, fleeing back into the caves and valleys scattered across the Sere. The party has ended Afanasi's campaign and ensured the realms outside the Sere remain untroubled by marauding, conquest-seeking troops.

However, as the forces flee the War-lock's camp, some of them realize the potential of *Temper's Cauldron* and haul the magical item away, cutting down all who oppose their ownership. The *Cauldron* is dragged back to the new owners' lair where it will eventually be used to create elite members of the group. Who the new owners of the *Cauldron* are is left to the GM. Perhaps the gnolls dream of a ravenous horde streaming out of the badlands or maybe the human bandits plan to use it in their schemes and dreams of avarice? If the GM desires, the *Cauldron* and its owners may still have a role to play in the campaign and the PCs might be called upon to stop them.



# APPENDIX A: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

## TELEPORT SNAP-STICK

*Wondrous item, rare*

When you snap it in half, this 6-inch-long rune-inscribed stick *teleports* you and up to two additional Medium creatures touching you to a single location attuned to the stick during its creation. Each *snap-stick* is linked to a single location and is expended when used. *Teleport snap-sticks* are often given to non-spellcasting servants to return to their masters after assignments are completed or as a means to escape danger. The *teleport snap-sticks* in Afanasi's possession are keyed to the secret vale outside the Swordhold (area 2-1).

## TEMPER'S CAULDRON

*Wondrous item, very rare*

This 8-foot-diameter iron cauldron is embossed with arcane symbols and filled with a silvery liquid streaked with blood-red veins. Once per day, a Medium or smaller creature can be immersed in the liquid, permanently granting them the warborn template. The *Cauldron* never spills its contents, even if turned upside down. It weighs 400 pounds.

## WARBORN TEMPLATE

Any Medium or smaller humanoid, giant, or monstrosity can become warborn. When a creature becomes warborn, it retains all its statistics except as noted below.

**Resistances.** The warborn gains resistance to nonmagical piercing damage.

**Immunities.** The warborn gains immunity to the frightened condition.

**New Ability: Death before Dishonor.** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in

2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**New Ability: Dedicated Loyalty.** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

## WAND OF CHAINS

*Wand, rare*

This wand has 7 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d4 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the wand's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand crumbles into ashes and is destroyed.

**Melee Attack.** While holding the wand, you can use an action to expend 1 charge, causing the wand to create a magical trio of 10-foot-long spiked chains that lash enemies. The chains function similar to whips and have both the finesse and reach properties. You are considered proficient in the chains regardless of class. The chains attack three times as an action inflicting 1d6 slashing damage on each successful hit. The chains can target multiple opponents if within 5 feet of each other.

**Entangle.** While holding the wand, you can use an action to expend 2 charges, causing the wand to create a magical trio of 10-foot-long spiked chains that entangle an opponent. They act as a *rope of entanglement* with a 10-foot range for this purpose. This power remains in effect until the entangled creature is freed or escapes.

The badlands known as the Sere is a large expanse of

# APPENDIX B: NEW ARCANESPELLS

## BRAND-HAND

*1st-level evocation*

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Self

**Components:** V

**Duration:** 1 hour

Your off-hand is set alight, producing a flame equivalent

to a torch. This magical fire does not damage you or your possessions. When an object is held in the flaming hand, the fire ceases to produce heat, allowing the caster to hold books, ropes, scrolls, and other flammable objects without setting them ablaze. When the caster's hand is empty, the fire produces normal heat. Striking an enemy with an empty hand inflicts an additional 1 hit point of fire damage. The caster can be dismissed as an action. Otherwise it lasts for 1 hour.

# APPENDIX C: THE SERE GAZETTEER

rocky hills, stony gullies, arid soil, and seemingly constant winds. These breezes and the grit borne upon them have carved the native stone outcrops into weird, fantastical shapes, creating a land seemed designed less by Nature than by the feverish mind of a maniacal artist. The Sere's poor soil means little grows in the badlands, and farmers and herdsman cannot make their livings within its borders. The strange shapes and whistling winds of the Sere give the land an eerie ambience, and many legends of restless ghosts, ferocious monsters, and bloodthirsty killers surround the region. Some of these stories are more than just tall tales, however, and a number of dangerous beasts—both two- and four-legged—lair in the Sere.

## BARROW-HAUNTS' HIDEOUT

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An old dwarven barrow, one plundered long ago by adventurers, extended into a cliff face at this site. The barrow was once the lair of a group of bandits calling themselves "The Barrow-Haunts," but the gang fell in with the War-lock. In the event of that would-be warlord's death, the surviving bandits might return to their former lair—especially if they escape the chaos with *Temper's Cauldron*. More details on this location are presented in appendix D.

## THE BROODING WOODS

---

A trickling stream emerges from a rare spring in this arrowhead-shaped valley. Thanks to this small oasis, a small forest of dusky-leaved trees grows here providing shade and nourishment. The dark leaves and boles of the trees lend the entire forest a gloomy aspect, and the deepest of the shady glens are said to be prowled by shadows and specters, drawn to the woods by an extraplanar connection to some dark plane of existence. If this is true, their presence doesn't appear to worry the gray-haired deer that browse the forest's undergrowth. These rare "twilight deer" are protected by Jaume the Druid (see Event One), and slaying one of these beautiful beasts incurs the druid's wrath.

## DRAKE GRAVE GNOLL DEN

---

A wide bowl surrounded on three sides by steep cliff exists at this location. Littering the floor of the bowl are the bones of a great dragon slain here more than a century ago by errant knights. The dragon's titanic skull covers the entrance to a series of natural caves claimed by a gnoll tribe in the days before their allegiance to the War-lord. After his death, many of the gnolls return to this lair to begin anew, scheming newly inspired dreams of an existence beyond mere scavenging and raiding. Details on the Drake Grave lair are presented in appendix D.

## THE FELL ROOSTS

---

A 60-foot-tall rocky outcrop overlooks the surrounding hills at this point. Ancient springs and the Sere's winds have carved a half-dozen cavities in the stone, each connected by winding tunnels that climb the outcrop's interior. The open cave mouths piercing the promontory's side are known as the Fell Roosts, a twisting network of caves and ledges occupied by flights of monsters and other creatures that live amongst them. A clutch of wyverns reside in the highest cave, with giant vultures and a trio of harpies living in the lower caves. A tribe of stealthy kobolds occupies a den in the Fell Roosts, slipping in and out unnoticed by those creatures living above them.

## SLAUGHTER'S END

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This box canyon is unremarkable to casual observation, but a search of the area uncovers rusting armor and the bones of both horses and men. Unknown to all, it was here that the War-lock's captains perished while luring their commander's pursuers away from the Swordhold. With them died the secret of the War-lock's resurrection place and what truly became of his body. This canyon is safe during the day, but after dark is haunted by the specters of the fallen captains.

## THE TOPPLED TOWER

---

Shattered stone blocks and the sunken foundation of an ancient spire crown a low hill at this location. The remains of a prehistoric road fashioned from once-glittering marble, but now scoured dull by the ages, wind up the hillside. Amongst the fallen stones are concealed entrances to a literal snakes' nest of caves situated beneath the hill. These sinuous tunnels are the lair of a debased society of snakefolk, the forsaken descendants of a once magnificent culture that emerged in these lands. These snakefolk, unlike their tropical cousins, are duller in coloration, tending towards yellows, tans, and dark browns common in arid climate serpents. The snakefolk will never reclaim their former level of civilization, but scheme to establish a new snaky kingdom in the Sere.

## TROLL ARENA

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A natural amphitheater is situated here amongst weird wind-carved outcroppings resembling crouching giants. Skulls and battered weapons and armor are arrayed about the space on pikes, and the rocky ground is stained with old blood. Ruling over this crude arena is a massive, two-headed troll. The creature is the self-proclaimed "Champion of the Wastes" and it lives for battle. To ensure it receives a steady stream of challengers for it to defeat, the troll has spread a rumor that it knows the location of a vast hidden treasure hoard and will reveal the wealth's hiding place to whoever defeats it in single combat. So far, no one has succeeded. Whether the troll actually knows of the treasure it claims is left to the GM to determine.

## UTH-BEZ

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A cluster of squat buildings surrounded by a breached wall stand in the center of a broad dell amongst the hills. The buildings' razor-straight edges and ponderous buttresses, pillars, and columns lend credence to legends that this abandoned settlement was constructed by a clan of hill dwarves in the days when the Sere flourished. Some forgotten catastrophe decimated the clan, and now their former town is home to fell creatures dwelling in the aboveground ruins and in the network of subterranean excavation located beneath Uth-Bez.

## RANDOM ENCOUNTERS FOR THE SERE

The following eight encounters can be used to spice up an otherwise uneventful journey through the Sere. These can be added to a Random Encounter table of the GM's own devising or used whenever the game master decides to liven up travel through the badlands.

### 1) HEARTLESS

---

An aged stone outcropping rises from the rocky ground, its exterior shaped into a humanoid form by some primitive tribe. A gaping, fist-sized hole pierces the crude statue's chest, allowing the ceaseless wind of the Sere to whistle through it. Dried, old blood stains the stony soil around the statue. This site is used by some of the savage tribes as an offering place. Living victims are tied here and feasted upon by a group of perytons that roost in the mountains overlooking the wastes. Anyone investigating the statue attracts three **peryton**s, who believe new offerings have arrived.



## 2) DECORATIVE DEATH

---

A shallow depression lies at the base of a 15-foot cliff. Nearly filling the pit below are more than six score weatherworn statues, fountain basins, decorative stone planters, and other architectural accoutrements of great age. Some of the discarded decorations appear intact, but many are shattered as if dropped from the cliff above. Metal glitters amongst the broken decorations. This statuary midden was created by the gargoyles who once inhabited Uth-Bez (see *The Sere Gazetteer*). They plundered the ruin of its decorations and brought them here. The monsters now lurk amongst the inanimate statuary and surprise anyone investigating the decorative debris. There are three **gargoyles**. The glittering metal is either worthless steel objects shined to a high polish by the gargoyles or 51 sp in treasure (GM's choice).

## 3) NIGHT LIGHTS

---

Several dim lanterns appear on a rocky ridge overlooking the party's campsite as they rest for the night. Faint whisps accompany the lanterns, occasionally rising slightly in volume as if in disagreement. The lights vanish as soon as the PCs call out or move to investigate. A crumbling trail leads to the ridgetop, but climbing the unstable trail triggers a rockslide. Anyone on the trail must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage and become pinned by the rocks. The lights then return in their true guise: two hungry **will-o'-wisps** that consume the life of the trapped rockslide victims. Pinned PCs can escape with a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check.

## 4) BONY BRIDGE

---

A steep gulley bars the party's passage further into the Sere. Luckily, a crumbling stone bridge crosses the 20-foot-deep dried creek. The gleam of white bones stands out starkly amongst the drab soil lining the creek bed. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check identifies the bones as mostly animal with humanoid remains mixed in. The bones of a great snake appear coiled amongst the remains. PCs crossing the bridge cause the snake bones to reveal they are actually a **bone naga**. The creature attempts to kill the party and steal any arcane lore or objects they possess, bringing the booty back to the Toppled Tower (see *The Sere Gazetteer*).

## 5) JACKAL DEBACLE

---

A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check by the party detects the sound of rattling stones and the stink of dirty fur on the breeze. Three **jackalweres** leading a pack of ten **jackals** are tracking the party. The jackalweres spend a day spying on the party, evaluating their strength and weaknesses, and determining how to best deceive them. The next day one of the jackalweres assumes human form and approaches the party, appearing to require their aid. If it manages to get amongst the party, the remaining jackalweres and the pack attacks while the first jackalwere uses its sleep gaze to incapacitate as many PCs as possible.

## 6) ROCK MUSIC

---

The sound of beautiful, yet haunting, piping accompanied by castanet-like clacking rides the winds. The noise comes from a craggy hill up ahead. PCs scaling the hill discover a number of piled stones, each bearing hollows the wind whistles through, creating the piping. Several smaller stones rock back and forth in rhythm, clacking together like cymbals. A large boulder-shaped creature sits at the apex of the hill, surrounded by these stone instruments and humming happily. The creature is a **galeb duhr**, an ancient resident of the Sere. It is initially indifferent to the PCs if they approach cautiously, but any action that damages the galeb duhr's natural instruments or insults his music makes it hostile. If made friendly, the galeb duhr happily reveals what it knows of the Sere—which, given its centuries of residency, is considerable.

## 7) GIANT DAM

---

The rare noise of trickling water rings in the air. Around the next bend in the trail, the party discovers a 30-foot-wide, 10-foot-deep pool of clear water. The pond is situated behind a broad dam of rough stones piled together with great skill. A trickling stream flows over the lip of the dam. Two **stone giants** are present at the pool. One, a female, is bathing in the pond, while her mate is filling two massive waterskins made from giant goat hides. If the party is noticed, the male becomes angry, suspecting them of spying upon his mate in her unclad state. Unless the party can defuse the situation with some eloquent social interaction, he attacks. The female isn't initially hostile but will rush to her mate's defense if a fight occurs.

## 8) ETTIN MARRIAGE

A cacophony of voices is heard accompanied by the sound of large footsteps crunching gravel underfoot. Coming around the edge of a stony slope are two **ettins**; a female is dragging a male ettin by the hair of both his heads and he is yelling in agony. The female ettin's two heads growl at the male, complementing him on his brutish beauty and attempting to convince him he'll make a suitable husband. The female is enraged at interlopers daring to interrupt her ettinish courtship of her husband-to-be, and both heads agree to smash the party into flinders. The male, rather than being grateful for being rescued, gleefully joins the fray, cursing the PCs for spoiling his wedding day as he batters them.



## APPENDIX D: BONUS LAIR ENCOUNTERS

The following two lairs can be used to either further expand the range of encounters in the Sere or as a coda to the events of *War-lock*.

### LAIR #1: BARROW-HAUNTS' HIDEOUT

#### GENERAL FEATURES

**Construction.** The rooms of the barrow have 10-foot-high ceilings. The floors and walls are made from carved stone decorated with dwarven runes and murals of fallen dwarven heroes. Most have been defaced.

**Light.** All the rooms except areas 1-2 and 1-3 have bright light. Area 1-2 has dim light and area 1-3 is in darkness when the door to it is closed or in dim light when the door is open.

### AREA 1-1—COMMON CHAMBER

*A haze of wood smoke fills the air, obscuring the six defaced statues of dwarven heroes placed about the chamber. A small burning fire is tended by rough-looking men. Several exits are visible in the north, east, and south walls.*

Six **bandits**, two **warborn human soldiers**, and a **bandit captain** are present in this chamber. If attacked, one of the bandits rushes to the door to area 1-3 and throws it open, unleashing the pack of **hyenas** who are 75% likely to attack the PCs only and 25% likely to attack indiscriminately.



## BANDIT (6)

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 12 (leather armor)

**Hit Points:** 11 (2d8 + 2)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

**Senses:** passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 1/8 (25 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Shortsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

## WARBORN HUMAN SOLDIER (2)

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 67 (9d8 + 27)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Saving Throws:** Str +5, Dex +4, Wis +2

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that

removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Reckless:** At the start of its turn, the soldier can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The soldier makes two melee attacks.

**Longsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage. The bandits have 20 cp and 10 sp each; the warborn soldiers carry 20 sp and 5 gp, and the captain owns 30 sp, 10 gp, and a gem worth 50 gp.

## BANDIT CAPTAIN

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 15 (studded leather)

**Hit Points:** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws:** Str +4, Dex +5, Wis +2

**Skills:** Athletics +4, Deception +4

**Senses:** passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Common, Giant

**Challenge:** 2 (450 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The captain makes three melee attacks: two with his shortsword and one with his dagger. Or the captain makes two ranged attacks with his daggers.

**Shortsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

**Dagger:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

---

### REACTIONS

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**Parry:** The captain adds 2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, the captain must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check uncovers a rusty lever set in the north wall and hidden behind the defaced statue in the northeast corner. This lever is connected to a concealed door trap (see area 1-4). The lever can be disabled with a DC 15 Dexterity check and thieves' tools.

### AREA 1-2—STORAGE

*The door to this chamber appears to have been broken down and carted away. Inside the small room are hanging sides of smoked goat, sacks, spare armor and weapons, and coils of rope. A pair of manacles dangle from the south wall.*

This storage room holds foodstuffs for 30 men for one month, six bows with quivers of 20 arrows, 10 spears, three suits of leather armor, rope, empty sacks, shovels, and similar everyday tools. The manacles are used when the bandits occasionally take a prisoner to hold for ransom. At this time, the bandits have no prisoners (unless the GM decides otherwise).

### AREA 1-3—HYENA DEN

*A pack of snarling, spotted dog-like creatures dwells in this filthy stone chamber. Bones and gnawed meat litter the scuffed flagstone floor.*

The bandits have half-trained a pack of Sere **hyenas**, using them as guards and diversionary tactics during raids. There are six of the beasts present.

### HYENA (6)

*Medium beast, unaligned*

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**AC:** 11

**Hit Points:** 5 (1d8 + 1)

**Speed:** 50 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

---

**Skills:** Perception +3

**Senses:** passive Perception 13

**Languages:** —

**Challenge:** 0 (10 XP)

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**Pack Tactics:** The hyena has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the hyena's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

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### ACTIONS

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**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

The room contains nothing of value.

### AREA 1-4—SLEEPING QUARTERS

*Ancient stone biers stand amongst sleeping furs in this tomb turned dormitory. The carvings of dwarven warriors that once decorated the wall are vandalized, crude graffiti disfiguring their proud visages.*

There are 1d6 + 6 bandits here at any given time, but half their number are sleeping. Those who are awake rush to defend area 1-1 if a fight breaks out. The sleeping bandits have a 50% chance of waking each round and will join the combat 2 rounds after awakening.

## BANDIT (7-12)

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

**AC:** 12 (leather armor)

**Hit Points:** 11 (2d8 + 2)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

**Senses:** passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 1/8 (25 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Shortsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

The room holds sleeping furs, personal possessions (small knives, spare clothes, pipes, smoking tobacco, etc.). In addition, there is 210 cp, 79 sp, 10 gp, and 1 gem (50 gp) present.

**Trap: Stone Block.** A sliding stone block hangs concealed in the entranceway to this chamber. If the triggering level in area 1-1 isn't discovered, any bandit captain can throw this lever with an action, dropping the 1-ton block to seal the room. Throwing the lever again causes the block to rise, taking 1 round to do so. If the party is engaged in combat with the occupants of this chamber and one or more of the bandit captains in areas 1-1 or 1-5 still lives, they drop the block, sealing the party inside (they aren't concerned with the fate of their comrades). Captured PCs might be held for ransom or left to starve depending on how well they negotiate their release with their greedy captors.

## AREA 1-5—LEADERS' QUARTERS

*Two simple beds apparently made from planks pried from old wagons stand against the walls of this chamber. Three chests of varying sizes rest near the beds. A dark tunnel hewn through the carved stone wall in the southeast corner exits the room. Several bandits rush to meet you, weapons flashing in the torch light.*

If the GM is using this lair as an epilogue to *War-lock* and the bandits have *Temper's Cauldron*, add the following:

*A massive cauldron embossed with arcane symbols stands near the southern wall, its interior filled with silvery liquid streaked with red.*

Two **bandit captains** live here, ruling the band in delicate cooperation until one can overthrow the other without causing the gang to fragment. At the time of the party's intrusion, there are two **warborn soldiers** present as well, recounting the events of the War-lock's defeat.

## BANDIT CAPTAIN (2)

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

**AC:** 15 (studded leather)

**Hit Points:** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws:** Str +4, Dex +5, Wis +2

**Skills:** Athletics +4, Deception +4

**Senses:** passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Common, Giant

**Challenge:** 2 (450 XP)

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The captain makes three melee attacks: two with his shortsword and one with his dagger. Or the captain makes two ranged attacks with his daggers.

**Shortsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

**Dagger:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

### REACTIONS

**Parry:** The captain adds 2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, the captain must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

## WARBORN HUMAN SOLDIER (2)

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 67 (9d8 + 27)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

**Saving Throws:** Str +5, Dex +4, Wis +2

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Common

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Reckless:** At the start of its turn, the soldier can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The soldier makes two melee attacks.

**Longsword:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Shortbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Two of the chests hold the captains' personal belongings.

The third is locked (DC 20 Dexterity check to pick) but both captains have keys. The chest holds the gang's compiled loot: 1,710 cp, 791 sp, 30 gp, and 1 gem (50 gp value).

The tunnel at the rear of the cave was dug by the bandits and winds 40 feet up to the top of the cliff above the hideout. The captains have no qualms about abandoning their gang if it becomes obvious they are outmatched. They take all the treasure from the chest and depart while the PCs are occupied. They can also use the tunnel to outflank the party if it appears that would tip the fight in the bandits' favor. The captains descend the cliff and attack the PCs from behind while occupied in battle.

## LAIR #2: DRAKE GRAVE GNOLL DEN

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Construction.** The caves are natural caverns with rough floors and irregular ceilings. Ceiling height varies between 10 and 20 feet. Stalagmites and stalactites are present, and the sound of dripping water echoes throughout.

**Light.** Areas 2-1, 2-4, and 2-5 are considered in bright light. Area 2-3 is in dim light, and area 2-2 is in darkness.



## AREA 2-1—ENTRANCE

*The bleached skull of a long-ago slain dragon covers the mouth of a dark, rocky tunnel descending into a stony outcrop. Hewn logs keep the skull's mouth propped open, allowing easy entrance and egress.*

A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) roll notices numerous gnoll tracks coming and going from the skull and tunnel beyond. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check discerns the tracks all avoid a certain spot of ground. A tripwire connected to a weighted spike trap lies in that area.

**Trap: Weighted Spikes.** DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot; DC 15 Intelligence check to disarm or simply step over the tripwire. If triggered, three 5-foot-long poles with weighted spikes at the ends swing down from above and attack up to three characters in the party's front rank (melee attack +4; 11 (2d10) piercing damage).

## AREA 2-2—SCRAP CAVE

*The floor of this cave is a depressed cavity filled with broken armor, splintered shields, and rusting weaponry. A clear walkway circles the pit to either side, each path leading to an exit from this cave. Screams cry out from the tunnel to the west.*

Six **gnoll** sentries watch from the shadows of the tunnels leading to areas 2-3 and 2-4. In addition to their weapons, each carries a lariat. The gnolls attempt to lasso intruders and yank them into the hazardous scrap heap. Those successfully lassoes must make an opposed Strength check or fall into the pit. A character falling into the mass of rusty metal is prone and suffers 3 (1d6) piercing and 3 (1d6) slashing damage. A DC 10 Constitution

save is also required; failing it results in the character suffering an additional 3 (1d6) poison damage from blood poisoning.

### GNOLL (6)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 15 (hide armor, shield)

**Hit Points:** 22 (5d8)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

---

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Lasso:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 10/30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 0 (0) damage but target must make an opposed Strength check against the gnoll or be pulled into the scrap pile.

**Longbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

## AREA 2-3—WARRIORS' CAVE & HUNTING SHRINE

*This cave is dominated by a crude rock carving depicting a two-headed gnoll bearing a spear and flail in a triumphant manner. Flies buzz around the bloody shanks of meat and animal pelts piled at the statue's base. Gnolls in piecemeal armor surround a gnoll with fur splattered with dried blood, apparently receiving some benediction.*

The best warriors dwell here with the band's hunting

chief, a gnoll fang. All the warriors are warborn, survivors of the collapse of the War-lock's army. There are four **warborn gnolls** and one **gnoll fang** present.

## WARBORN GNOLL (4)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

---

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

---

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

---

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit,

reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

## GNOLL FANG

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 14 (hide armor)

**Hit Points:** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

---

**Saving Throws:** Con +4, Wis +2, Cha +3

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Abyssal, Gnoll

**Challenge:** 4 (1,100 XP)

---

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

---

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Claw:** *Melee Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Each of the gnolls has 25 sp and the gnoll fang owns 30 sp and 15 gp. Amongst the bloody offerings are also trinkets—mostly minor jewelry and small gems—stolen from raids worth a total of 200 gp.

## AREA 2-4—COMMON DEN

The sound of screams echo through this flame-lit cavern. A large fire spanned by an iron spit demands your attention. Lashed to the spit is a human male, his skin rapidly charring as a snickering gnoll rotates the spit over the fire. A number of other gnolls watch hungrily.

This cave houses seven **gnolls**, three **warborn gnolls**, and a half dozen gnoll whelps (non-combatants). One of the warborn gnolls mans the spit, slowly roasting a living human for supper.

### GNOLL (7)

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

**AC:** 15 (hide armor, shield)

**Hit Points:** 22 (5d8)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

---

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

#### ACTIONS

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Longbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

## WARBORN GNOLL (3)

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

---

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.



**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

The victim being cooked is a human bandit and he has only just been placed over the fire. He currently has 21 hit points and automatically suffers 3 (1d6) fire damage each round he remains over the fire. The spit can be knocked free with a successful DC 20 Strength check. A roll of 15-19 indicates the spit is knocked loose, but it and the bandit land in the fire for an additional 7 (2d6) fire damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage every subsequent round.

If the bandit is rescued, he is genuinely grateful, but has no desire to stay in the caves. A DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces him to remain and help the party, but he requires healing and equipment. Treat him as a **thug** (see MM p. 350).

The warborn gnolls have 25 sp each; the other gnolls carry no treasure. The cavern contains sleeping furs for 30 gnolls, food scraps, 12 spears, six swords, three suits of rusty chain mail, and other useless, shoddy weaponry obviously looted in old raids.

## AREA 2-5—PACK LORD'S DEN

*Burning brands shoved into cracks in the walls illuminate this room. The flickering flames throw hulking shadows of a massive gnoll flanked by brutish, giant hyenas. A number of smaller gnolls stand nearby, pointing at small stones and wooden markers arrayed on the cave floor.*

If the GM is using this lair as an epilogue to *War-lock* and the gnolls have *Temper's Cauldron*, add the following:

*A massive cauldron embossed with arcane symbols stands against the eastern wall, its interior filled with silvery liquid streaked with red.*

The **gnoll pack leader** lairs here accompanied by a trio of **giant hyenas**. He is currently planning the future of the pack with three **warborn gnolls**. The warborn and the giant hyenas fight to the death; the gnoll pack leader flees down the tunnel if grievously injured and the fight looks hopeless.

## GNOLL PACK LEADER

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 15 (chain shirt)

**Hit Points:** 49 (9d8 + 9)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

---

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 2 (450 XP)

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: either its glaive or its longbow, and uses its Incite Rampage if it can.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Glaive:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

**Longbow:** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Incite Rampage (Recharge 5-6):** One creature the gnoll can see with 30 feet of it can use its reaction to make a melee attack if it can hear the gnoll and has the Rampage trait.

## WARBORN GNOLL (3)

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**AC:** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points:** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

---

**Skills:** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances:** piercing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities:** frightened

**Senses:** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages:** Gnoll

**Challenge:** 3 (700 XP)

---

**Death before Dishonor:** A warborn creature's body creates a lethal poison, killing the creature in 2 rounds, if the warborn is captured by enemies. Captured is considered having the paralyzed or restrained condition with no mobile allies nearby and battle having ended. The poison creation is an unconscious response of the warborn and cannot be prevented. Using magic that removes the poisoned condition before the 2-round time limit elapses permanently negates this effect. The magic must be applied after the effect is triggered, however.

**Dedicated Loyalty:** Warborn creatures have advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

**Rampage:** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

---

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The gnoll makes two attacks: one with either its spear or battleaxe, and one with its bite.

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Spear:** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

**Battleaxe:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

## GIANT HYENA (3)

*Large beast, unaligned*

---

**AC:** 12

**Hit Points:** 45 (6d10 + 12)

**Speed:** 50 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)

---

**Skills:** Perception +3

**Senses:** passive Perception 13

**Languages:** —

**Challenge:** 1 (200 XP)

---

**Rampage:** When the hyena reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the hyena can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

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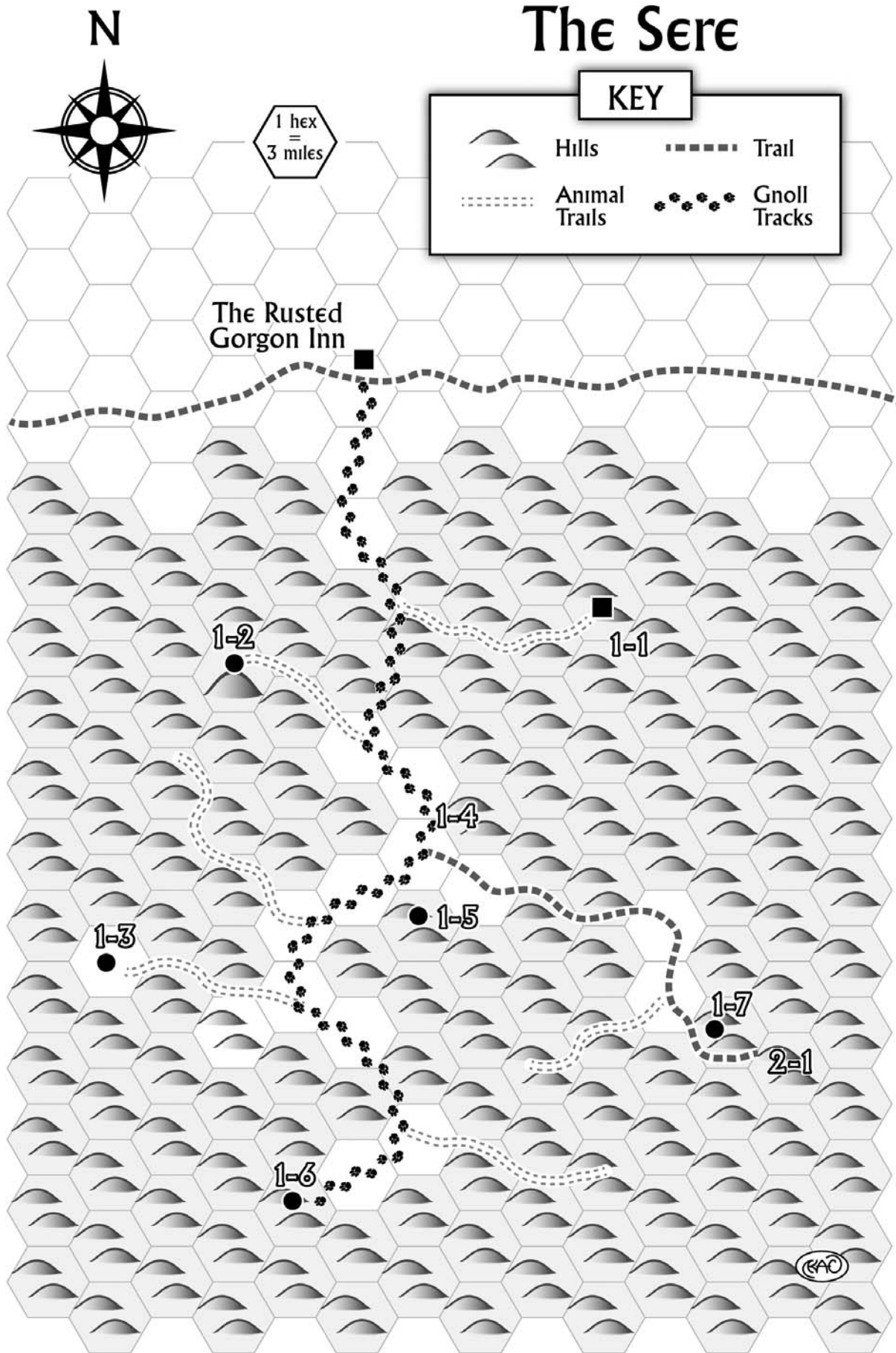
#### ACTIONS

**Bite:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

A number of stalagmites obscure an alcove. In the torchlight, anyone without darkvision must make a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the cavity. The space contains a number of woven and hide sacks holding the pack's wealth. This hoard consists of 2,599 cp, 1,395 sp, 55 gp, and 3 gems worth 50 gp each.

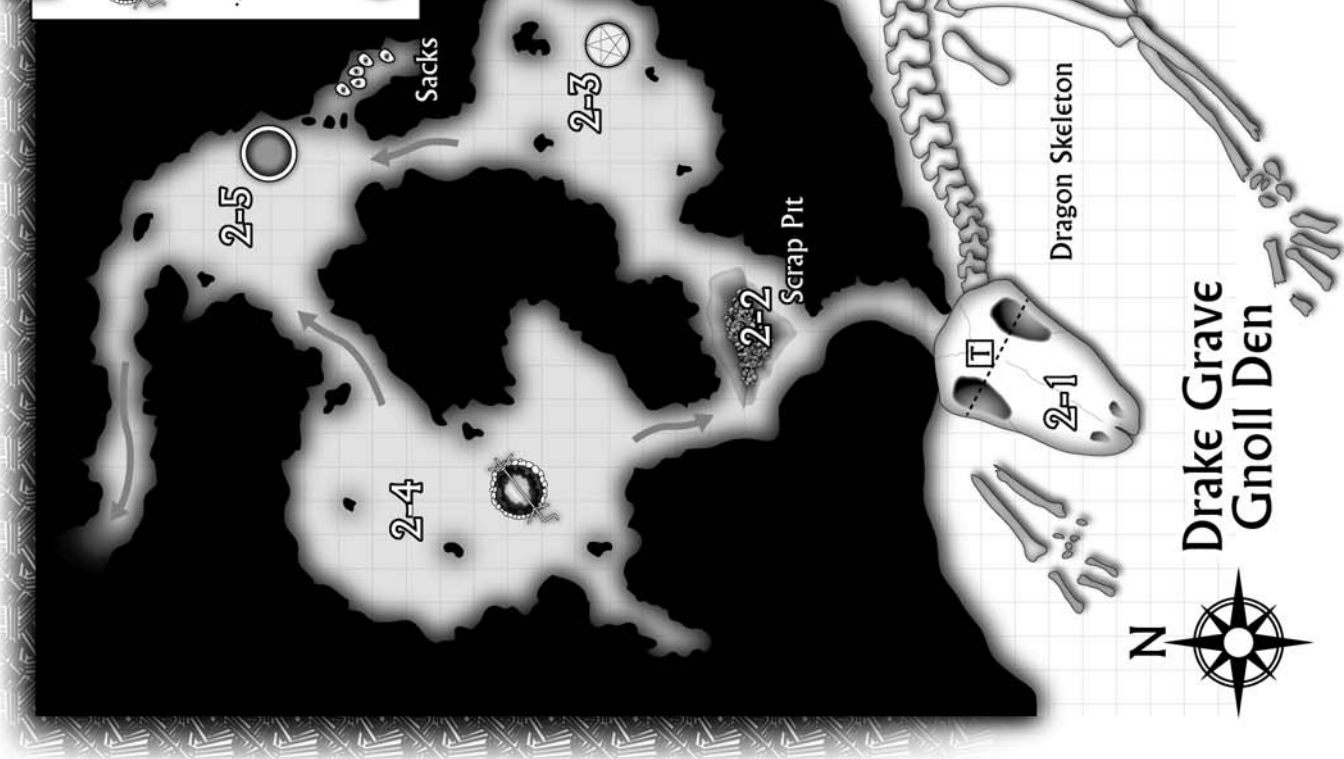
The tunnel at the back of the cave leads to deeper caverns underneath the Sere. What these dark grottos hold is left to the GM to further detail should the party wish to delve deeper into the cave network.

# The Sere



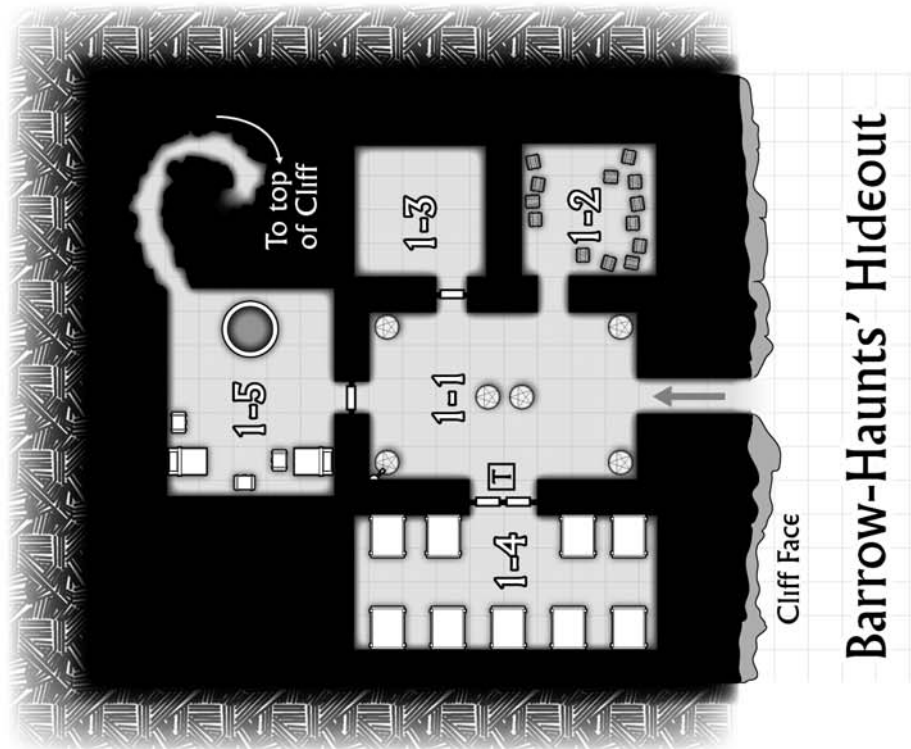
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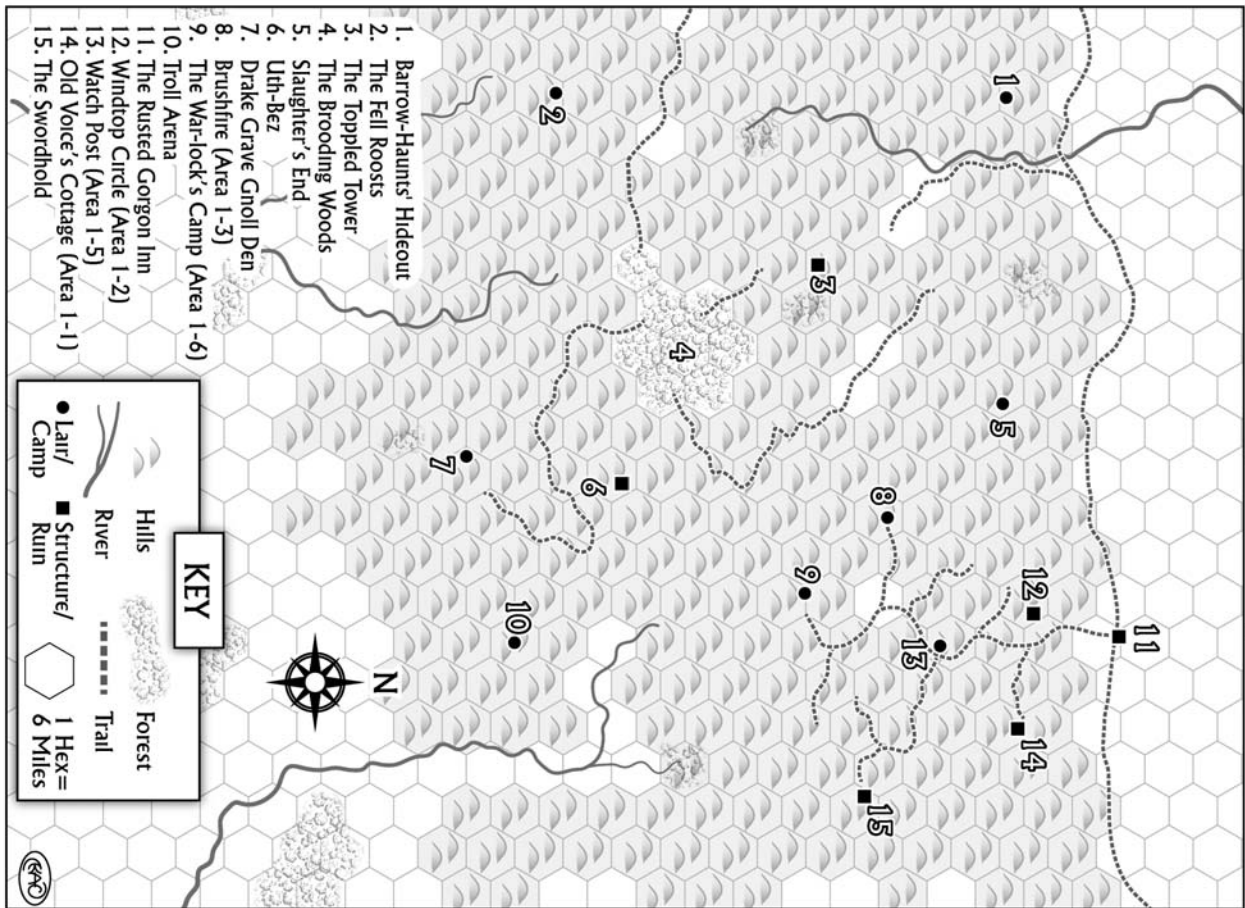
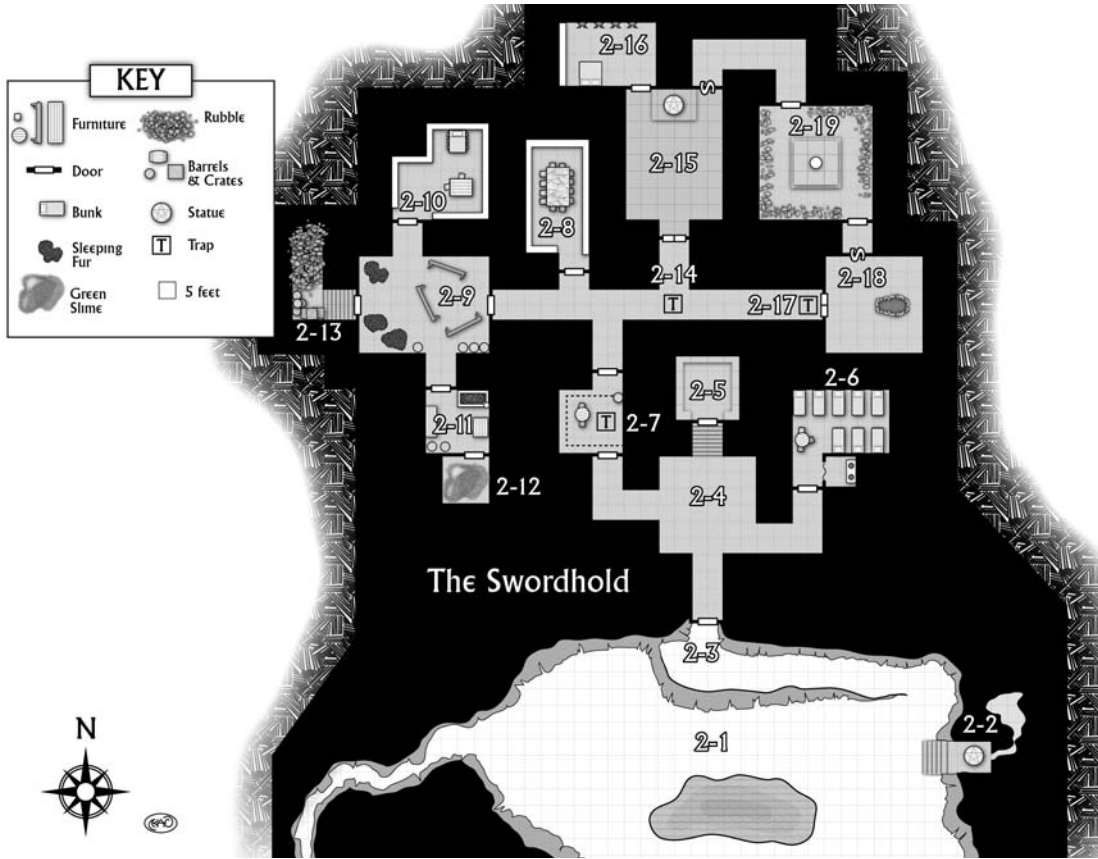
- Cook Fire
- Statue
- Trip Wire
- 5 Feet
- Cauldron (if present)



**KEY**

- Bed
- Chest
- Bier
- 5 Feet
- Trap
- Supplies
- Ramp Up
- Door
- Statue
- Cauldron (if present)
- Lever





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